



University of  
**Sheffield**

**Hegel, Schelling,  
and the Problem of Individuality**

Leonard Weiss

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Sheffield  
Faculty of Arts and Humanities  
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## Abstract

It is easy to show that the image of Hegel as a philosopher neglecting the reality of individuals is a cliché. However, it is not an easy thing to also show *why*. This thesis takes up this challenge while also taking seriously the suspicion that there is indeed something wrong with Hegel's metaphysics of the individual. In this spirit, the thesis 1) shows that Hegel has developed an ambitious way of integrating individuality into his metaphysics of the concept, and 2) explores how Schelling (in his later, post 1846, period) criticises this project. As such, the thesis both sheds fresh light on the perennial problem of individuality, and demonstrates how this problem is also at the heart of the parting of ways between two major figures of the German idealist tradition, namely Hegel and Schelling.

The Introduction specifies the broad issue of individuality in terms of three specific problems concerning the *unity*, *numerical diversity*, and *uniqueness* of individual substances. Against this background, it is shown how Hegel develops innovative solutions for the first two of these problems. However, Hegel's answer to the third problem concerning uniqueness is shown to be insufficient (Chapters 1–6). In the second part of the thesis (Chapters 7–10) Schelling enters the discussion. While many of his attacks on Hegel are ultimately unsuccessful, it turns out that his argument from individuality poses a serious challenge to Hegel. As Schelling shows in dialogue with Aristotle, even Hegel's unconventional theory of universals is not enough in order to account for the fact that individuals have a unique identity and are non-substitutable by others. We thus come to recognise both the value and the limitations of Hegel's metaphysics, and we also come to understand better why Schelling saw the need to make a radical move away from it.

## Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means ([www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means)). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

Leonard Weiss

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## Notes on Abbreviations, Editions, and Translations

Abbreviations are normally followed by the page number of the relevant English translation and the volume and page number of the corresponding German edition (as indicated below), for instance: “SL 530/12.32”. Throughout, I have modified translations where appropriate. Where I have provided my own translations, abbreviations are followed directly by the volume and/or page number of the relevant German edition, for instance: “TWA 20.385” or “PRP 320”. Where a paragraph numbering is customary, abbreviations are followed by paragraph numbers and (in the case of Hegel’s *Encyclopaedia*) by R (*Remark*) or A (*Addition*). In the rare cases of a mismatch between the paragraph numbering in German and English editions, I have indicated this. The works of Plato, Aristotle, and Kant are referenced in the usual way. Quotations from secondary sources published in a language other than English have been translated throughout.

### Hegel

EL = *Encyclopaedia, Science of Logic* (transl. Brinkmann, Dahlstrom)

EN = *Encyclopaedia, Philosophy of Nature* (transl. Miller)

GW = *Gesammelte Werke*

PR = *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* (transl. Knox)

PS = *Phenomenology of Spirit* (transl. Miller)/GW 9

SL = *The Science of Logic* (transl. di Giovanni)/GW 11, 12, 21

TWA = *Werke in zwanzig Bänden* = ‘*Theorie Werkausgabe*’

### Leibniz

NE = *New Essays on Human Understanding* (transl. Remnant, Bennett)

### Schelling<sup>1</sup>

GPP = *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy* (transl. Matthews)/SW XIII 1–174

HMP = *On the History of Modern Philosophy* (transl. Bowie)/SW X.4–200

PRP = *Presentation of the Purely Rational Philosophy* [=SW XI.253–572]

SET = *On the Source of Eternal Truths* (transl. Beach)/SW XI.573–590

SW = *Sämtliche Werke* ed. by K.F.A. Schelling

### Collected Editions:

Aristotle. 1984. *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volumes 1 and 2: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. By

J. Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hegel, G.W.F. 1968–. *Gesammelte Werke* [=GW], in Verbindung mit dem Forschungszentrum für

klassische deutsche Philosophie/Hegel-Archiv herausgegeben von Walter Jaeschke.

Hamburg: Meiner.

—. 1970–. *Werke in zwanzig Bänden/‘Theorie Werkausgabe’* [=TWA], auf der Grundlage der *Werke*

von 1832-1845 neu edierte Ausgabe, Redaktion Eva Moldenhauer und Karl Markus Michel.

Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

Kant, Immanuel. 1900–. *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften*. Herausgegeben von der königlich preussischen

Akademie der Wissenschaften [=AA]. Berlin: Reimer.

Schelling, F.W.J. 1856–61. *Sämtliche Werke* [=SW] herausgegeben von K. F. A. Schelling. Stuttgart:

Cotta.

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<sup>1</sup> Other works of Schelling, to which I refer less frequently, are indicated using the author/year system followed by volume and page number according to the SW. The SW are structured in two parts [*Hauptabteilungen*]. Part one comprises volumes I–X, while volumes XI–XIV make up part two. It has become customary to number all volumes consecutively (I–XIV). However, one will occasionally also find an alternative numbering in the literature which presents the volumes e.g. of part two as II/1, II/2 and so on. A further difficulty consists in the fact that the editions normally available at libraries are modified reprints of the original SW. These reprints follow a different organisation into volumes as compared to the original while preserving its pagination.

## 0 Introduction

### 0.1 Motivation and Topic

When I arrived at Sheffield, I surprised a local philosopher by introducing myself as a new post-graduate student working on “Hegel’s metaphysics of individuality”. My interlocutor, a metaphysician himself, was obviously caught off guard by the seemingly oxymoronic combination of “Hegel” and “individuality”: “Doesn’t Hegel believe that there is just one thing?” I assume that what stood behind this reaction was Russell’s verdict that Hegel proposed “the unreality of separateness”, that the “apparent self-subsistence of finite things appeared to him to be an illusion”, and that for Hegel “nothing [...] is ultimately and completely real except the whole” (Russell 1961, 701–2).

The suspicion that there is a neglect of the individual in Hegel’s metaphysics can take several forms. The concern addressed by Russell is a worry about Hegel’s emphasis on *wholes*. It is the worry that what we normally take to be a world of many, distinct objects, will turn out by the lights of Hegel’s metaphysics as artificial distinctions within what actually is one single, all-encompassing reality. Another way in which the unease with Hegel’s treatment of individuals can manifest itself is less concerned with his holism but rather with his emphasis on the *universal*: in this vein, Adorno states that “in the construction of Hegelian philosophy the universal, the substantial, as opposed to the frailty and weakness of the individual [...] are most strongly accentuated” (Adorno 1993, 45). Similarly, Andrew Seth (another British critic of Hegel) maintains that while Hegel was “not denying the individual character of existence, he yet adroitly contrives to insinuate that, because it is indefinable, the individual is therefore a valueless abstraction” (Seth 1887, 128–9). Here the point is that for Hegel, true actuality pertains only to the universal while the individual enjoys only an impoverished version of this actuality, much like the shadows in Plato’s cave.

The commonality of both accounts is that they certainly present us with a distorted picture of Hegel who had a profound interest in understanding rather than eliminating the reality

of finite individuals and who demanded a fundamental revision of the notion of universality precisely in order to avoid one-sided opposition to the individual. But while it is easy to reject the distorted image, it is not an easy thing to explain how Hegel accounts for the reality of the individual and how precisely he deploys his unconventional theory of universals to this end.

This thesis is in part a contribution towards establishing such understanding. At the same time however, I wish to show that there is also some truth to the suspicion that there is something wrong with Hegel's metaphysics of the individual. To this end, I will enter a dialogue with one of Hegel's earliest critics, namely F.W.J. Schelling. As I hope to show, Schelling (in his later period) detects what is indeed an unresolved problem in Hegel's account, namely how there can be individuals that are not only unified wholes and countably distinct from one another but also have a unique identity as the very individuals they are. By bringing Schelling into the discussion I hope to contribute towards both, a further clarification of the philosophical problems at hand, and also a better understanding of a crucial transition in the history of classical German philosophy, namely Schelling's departure from Hegel.

The topic I have chosen for my encounter with Hegel and Schelling, namely the *problem of individuality*, is a perennial one. Variations of it appear in the thinking not only of Hegel and Schelling, but also in that of Parmenides and Democritus, Plato and Aristotle, Aquinas and Duns Scotus, Spinoza and Leibniz, as well as in contemporary metaphysics. At the same time, it is perennially unclear what exactly is the philosophical problem to be solved regarding individuality. Therefore, the first task I will attend to (section 0.1) is to clarify which philosophical problems I will discuss throughout this thesis. Once this has been done, I will explain its outline chapter by chapter (section 0.2).

## 0.2 Problems

This section outlines three problems in relation to the notion of an individual substance. These problems concern 1) *what gives unity to an individual substance*, 2) *what makes it numerically different from others*, and 3) *what makes it the very individual it is*. To begin with it is important to clarify the notoriously unclear notion of individuation. I will do so by distinguishing *singling-out vs. definitory approaches* on the one hand and *metaphysical vs. non-metaphysical approaches* on the other. After defending a metaphysical singling-out approach to individuation I will first discuss the notion of an individual substance, and then introduce the three problems which I consider relevant in this context. Finally, I will relate these problems to Hegel's philosophy in order to show that they are indeed of concern to him and that failure to solve any one of them gives ground to legitimate criticism of Hegel's metaphysics of the concept: the kind of criticism that I ultimately hope to show is at work in Schelling's *Spätphilosophie*.

Now, to really grasp what Hegel calls *the concept* "we generally have to take leave of seeing and hearing" (EL §160A). At this point however, we have not even entered the stormy ocean of Hegelian metaphysics, so I hope some pictorial representation is excusable, if not indeed helpful in order to grasp the philosophical problems that will guide the further investigation. I will therefore be using the example of two concrete individuals to introduce these problems, first without any import from the German idealist tradition, then in relation to Hegel, who took a profound interest in them.



*Figure 1: Two individuals: Napoleon and his horse Marengo, painting by Ernest Meissonier (1863)*

### 0.2.1 *The Many Meanings of “Individuation”*

Looking at Meissonier’s painting, I take it that literally every recipient will agree that its foreground shows two individuals, namely Napoleon and his horse Marengo. But this commonsensical (“I know it when I see it”) sort of agreement implies by no means that we have any grip on what is involved conceptually when we speak of or point at individuals. Philosophers often summarise the relevant issues under the term “problem of individuation”. There are, however, many meanings of the expression “individuation”. To clarify which questions I will discuss in this thesis, I begin by providing a list of quotations that address philosophical questions that have been associated with the so-called problem of individuation. I will then suggest two dichotomies that cut through this list. The first dichotomy divides between *definitory* and *singling out* approaches. The other dichotomy divides between *metaphysical* and *non-metaphysical* accounts. Consider the following statements concerned with the topic of individuation broadly conceived:

[1] [W]hat ‘individuates’ an object, [...] is whatever it is that makes it the single object that it is – whatever it is that makes it *one* object, distinct from others, and the very object that it is as opposed to any other thing. (Lowe 2005, 75)

[2] Suppose we have two red, round spots that share all their pure properties in common. Let us call them Aristotle and Plato. The problem of individuation is the problem of offering an ontological assay of the situation so as to specify what it is that makes the two spots, two particular, individual entities instead of one. (Moreland 2008, 99)

[3] [W]hen a speaker makes an identifying reference to a particular, and his hearer does, on the strength of it, identify the particular referred to, then, I shall say, the speaker not only makes an identifying reference to, but also *identifies*, that particular. (Strawson 1990, 16)

[4] “[R]abbit” is a term of divided reference. As such it cannot be mastered without mastering its principle of individuation: where one rabbit leaves off and another begins. And this cannot be mastered by pure ostension, however persistent. [...] If you take the total scattered portion of the spatio-temporal world that is made up of rabbits, and that which is made up of undetached rabbit parts, and that which is made up of rabbit stages, you come out with the same scattered portion of the world each of the three times. The only difference is in how you slice it. (Quine 2008, 572)

[5] Substance, in the truest and primary and most definite sense of the word, is that which is neither predicable of a subject nor present in a subject; for instance, the individual man or horse. (Aristotle, Cat. 2a10)



[6] Socrates [...] cannot become instantiated in the way “human being” can. It is, then, noninstantiability that provides us with a precise understanding of individuality, since it is both a necessary and sufficient condition of it. Individuals cannot be instantiated, as universals can. They are instances of instantiables and noninstantiable themselves. (Gracia 1988, 45)

[7] *Nous-A* and *Nous-B* are two individuals. Each one is an individual. Even if the other disappeared, *each* one is an individual, a possessor of properties, whether qualities or not, and itself not a property. Thus, if we are not to take the individuality of *Nous-A* and *Nous-B* as primitive, then we have the ontological problem of providing an account of their individuality. That is, we must describe that ingredient or structure in *Nous-A* that makes *Nous-A* an individual, i.e. constitutes the individuality of *Nous-A*. Similarly for *Nous-B*. (Castañeda 1975, 132)

### ***Singling out vs. Definitory Approaches***

Let us begin by dividing the list above according to the distinction between singling out and definitory approaches to individuation. [1], [2], [3], and [4] are examples for what I call a *singling out approach* (approach-S). To discuss individuation from this angle is to ask what is required in order to isolate an individual as one single thing among all other things. Most philosophers approach individuation roughly in this way. Although it is somewhat difficult to express this in entirely neutral terms, I want to leave open at the moment whether “singling out” concerns ontological facts about things themselves or rather facts about epistemic (or linguistic) activities of subjects. (We shall discuss this in due course.)

For now, I want to contrast the singling out approach with another one which I call the *definitory approach* (approach-D). [5], [6], and [7] are examples of steps one has to take in order to execute approach-D. Proponents of this approach argue that the first task is to define what it is to be an individual at all. [5] is, or at least can be interpreted, as providing such a definition, according to which to be an individual (substance) is to be “neither predicable of a subject nor present in a subject”. Another example for such a definition is [6], namely Jorge J. E. Gracia’s suggestion that to be an individual is to be a non-instantiable instance of an instantiable universal: the universal man can be instantiated in Adam and Eve but neither Adam nor Eve can have instances; that’s what makes them individuals in Gracia’s sense. [7] also suggests (a rather minimal) definition of what an individual is, namely “a possessor of properties [...] and itself not

a property”, and then outlines the task of identifying “that ingredient or structure” that determines that something satisfies the definition.

From an approach-D perspective, the first, definitory step deals with individuality as such, while the second, metaphysical step seeks to explain what determines that something is or becomes an individual. *Individuation*, on this view, then is the process of becoming an individual and the *principle of individuation* is whatever determines that something fulfils the necessary and sufficient conditions for being an individual; for instance that which determines that X is a noninstantiable instance [6] or that X is “neither predicable of a subject nor present in a subject” [5].

Now, a difficulty for anyone approaching the topic of individuality in philosophy is that the two approaches I mentioned so far are at odds with one another. Note for instance that none of the quotes [5] to [7] even mentions the issues of difference, distinction, or being this one and no other that appear to be central for approach-S. Indeed, proponents of approach-D have reacted to proponents of approach-S with some frustration. As the former see things, approach-S runs together two distinct problems, namely the “genuine” problem of individuation and what Hector Castañeda calls the problem of “individual differentiation”:

[What] creates a problem [the “genuine” one] about individuality is the contrast between individuals and non-individuals, and it has nothing to do with a plurality of individuals. [...] [T]o formulate the problem of individuation as that of accounting for the numerical diversity between individuals [...] is to conflate or leave unseparated the genuine problem of individuation and the problem of individual differentiation. But we must insist on the separation of the problems. (Castañeda 1975, 132–3)

Thus, according to approach-D, we get things wrong when we think of individuation in terms of what makes an individual numerically distinct from others. This is to ask for difference among individuals while it still remains unclear what sets apart individuals from non-individuals, which is treated as the more fundamental problem on approach-D.

Now an easy way to reconcile the two conflicting approaches would be to fill approach-D’s criterion for individuality with the very idea of being a single thing, numerically distinct from all others. However, the trouble is that numerical difference does not uniquely apply to

individuals. (cf. Gracia 1988, 34–5) Most notably, universals are also numerically distinct from one another while they are arguably not individuals. Consider for instance two Platonic Forms, *horse* and *man*. These Forms are two, numerically distinct beings, just as two individual horses and two human beings are. Numerical difference from other things thus seems to be something that individuals have in common with (putative) non-individuals such as Platonic Forms. Therefore, numerical distinction, it is argued, fails to constitute a sufficient criterion for being an individual.

Nonetheless, it could still be a necessary one. Some, like Gracia (1988, 35–6), however, deny this too: individuals, they argue, can be utterly lonely and therefore distinction from other entities cannot even be a necessary condition for being an individual. Consider an imaginary world with exactly two individuals. What happens if one of them ceases to exist? Does this cancel the individuality of the other one? Plausibly not and therefore, it is argued, difference cannot be a condition for individuality at all, not even a necessary one.

However, this is where I think the proponents of approach-D go too far. For the argument from the loneliness of individuals cannot rule out the fact that even an utterly lonely individual is distinct from the world in which it is imagined. If it was not, it would fail to be anything at all, leaving the world as the only truly lonely entity. This implies that empty worlds don't qualify as individuals, but that's a consequence I am happy to live with. Another counter argument is that an individual even if *actually* lonely could possibly be accompanied by further individuals which then need to be numerically distinct from it. Gracia rejects this argument by appeal to the idea that there could be individuals that are necessarily the *only* instances of their kind. However, the assumption here is that there may be kinds that necessarily have one and only one instance. But that seems to be an arbitrary and unwarranted assumption about the nature of kinds. Why should there be a kind or indeed any universal that can be instantiated but not twice? Both the distinction between individuals and their world as well as the argument from possible plurality are, in my estimation, convincing counter arguments against Gracia's claim that numerical difference from other entities cannot be a necessary condition for individuality.

Furthermore, there can be doubts about the idea that criteria like, for instance, noninstantiability are in fact sufficient conditions for being an individual. To treat noninstantiability in this way has some seriously counter-intuitive consequences: for instance, there can be a concept like that of a Lewisian *trout-turkey* and the compound of the upper half of a trout and the lower half of a turkey is a noninstantiable instance of this concept. But is it therefore an individual? Unless we count random, gerrymandered collections of things as individuals it does not seem to be possible to use noninstantiability as a *sufficient* criterion for being an individual – or else the world gets populated with an absurd plethora of things beyond what can plausibly count as individual entities.

In light of this, I think that the singling out approach can still help us to understand what it is to be an individual, although it does not necessarily provide a full definition of individuality. Instead, it deals with something that is plausibly a necessary condition for being an individual, namely with the idea of being numerically distinct from other things. That said, I think that the issue of numerical difference is only one aspect of a set of problems connected to the basic idea of singleness or of having a being that belongs to one thing and no other. As I will show below, this perspective on singling out involves that an individual (1) exhibits *unity* among the items in terms of which it is complex, that it is (2) *numerically distinct* from all others but also (3) *individually distinct* from them as this one, and no other.

By taking this perspective, I hope to provide a vantage point on the metaphysics of individuality that is useful in order to articulate the philosophical concerns that I believe to lie at the heart of the disagreement between Hegel and Schelling. That being said, the criticisms I referred to above show that we should not be overly optimistic that an explanation of individuality in terms of singling out exhausts what it is to be an individual. This, however, doesn't make questions of *unity*, *numerical difference*, and *unique distinction* obsolete. It only shows that there may be further questions to be asked that go beyond the ones I shall raise in this thesis. Most notably I will leave open what would be a definitory i.e. necessary and sufficient (set of)

condition(s) for individuality. As interesting as this question may be, I am sceptical about the prospects of reconstructing an answer to it in the works of my two dead interlocutors, Hegel and Schelling. Even if such a project could be conducted, it is not my project. For the purpose of this thesis I will thus approach the metaphysics of individuality from a perspective that can count as a version of the singling out approach. I will say more about how exactly I proceed and define three problems related to the issue of being a single individual substance. Before that, however, I still want to discuss the second dichotomy promised at the beginning of this chapter, the one between metaphysical and non-metaphysical approaches.

### *Metaphysical vs. Non-Metaphysical Approaches*

Since I have decided to follow the singling out approach I will apply the metaphysical vs. non-metaphysical distinction only to this approach viz. to samples [1] to [4]:

[1] [W]hat ‘individuates’ an object, [...] is whatever it is that makes it the single object that it is – whatever it is that makes it *one* object, distinct from others, and the very object that it is as opposed to any other thing. (Lowe 2005, 75)

[2] Suppose we have two red, round spots that share all their pure properties in common. Let us call them Aristotle and Plato. The problem of individuation is the problem of offering an ontological assay of the situation so as to specify what it is that makes the two spots, two particular, individual entities instead of one. (Moreland 2008, 99)

[3] [W]hen a speaker makes an identifying reference to a particular, and his hearer does, on the strength of it, identify the particular referred to, then, I shall say, the speaker not only makes an identifying reference to, but also *identifies*, that particular. (Strawson 1990, 16)

[4] “[R]abbit” is a term of divided reference. As such it cannot be mastered without mastering its principle of individuation: where one rabbit leaves off and another begins. And this cannot be mastered by pure ostension, however persistent. [...] If you take the total scattered portion of the spatio-temporal world that is made up of rabbits, and that which is made up of undetached rabbit parts, and that which is made up of rabbit stages, you come out with the same scattered portion of the world each of the three times. The only difference is in how you slice it. (Quine 2008, 572)

[1] and [2] are examples of metaphysical approaches, while [3] and [4] convey non-metaphysical (epistemic and linguistic) considerations about individuation as singling out. E.J. Lowe (to whom we also owe sample [1]) helpfully contrasts both accounts:

The term ‘individuation’ has both a metaphysical and an epistemic or cognitive sense, although these two senses are closely related. In the epistemic sense, individuation is a cognitive activity – something that we, or intelligent beings in general, can *do*. For someone

to *individuate* an object, in this sense, is for that person to ‘single out’ that object as a distinct object of perception, thought, or linguistic reference. (Lowe 2005, 75)

According to Lowe, individuation can refer to activities performed by subjects and by which they identify individuals. In our list both [3] and [4] address linguistic expressions. According to [4] the reference of “rabbit”, for instance, is determined by what principle of individuation a speaker applies for its use. What therefore matters is not so much how the world is independently from how you or I approach it, but instead how we use words to refer to individual objects; what matters is “how *you* slice [my emphasis]” the world into units. Similarly, [3] discusses how subjects use linguistic utterances in order to “identify” particular things. This way of speaking about individuation addresses how *we* come to know something as an individual.

However, as as Lowe continues (cf. [1] above), this sense of individuation presupposes that there actually are individual things to be known in this way, at least if we assume that our identification of them is more than the identification of an imaginary island in a cloud:

One can only ‘single out’ objects which are there to be singled out, that is, parts of reality which constitute single objects. Individuation in the metaphysical sense is an ontological relationship between entities: what ‘individuates’ an object, in this sense, is whatever it is that makes it the single object that it is – whatever it is that makes it *one* object, distinct from others, and the very object that it is as opposed to any other thing. (Lowe 2005, 75)

Lowe’s distinction between metaphysical and non-metaphysical (or “epistemic”) accounts is very helpful for my project. For what I want to address in relation to Hegel and Schelling concerns the metaphysical use of individuation, i.e. the ontological facts about things in themselves that determine that they are single things. The principle of individuation in Lowe’s metaphysical sense then is “whatever it is that makes” an object “the single object that it is – whatever it is that makes it *one* object, distinct from others, and the very object that it is as opposed to any other thing” (Lowe 2005, 75). That is indeed a good starting point for what I will have to say vis à vis the metaphysics of individuality in Hegel and Schelling.

However, I also think that we should keep apart different dimensions of what Lowe addresses. In fact, I think there are several distinct problems summarised within his account of a metaphysical singling out approach to individuation. For being *one* (as opposed to many) and

being *numerically distinct* from others is not always the same. For instance, if the principle of unity is a universal, then it collectively applies to all things that are unified by it. It then becomes challenging to explain how it could still constitute difference among these things, given that they all collectively partake in it. Similarly, being numerically distinct from others does not necessarily also deliver individuality in the sense of being *this* one, and no other: for some accounts of being numerically distinct from others fail to account for what makes each distinct element within a plurality uniquely the one it is. I will say more about the three corresponding problems (and how they relate to Hegel and Schelling) in due course. Before doing that, I want to point out another issue that arises from the dispute between proponents of approach-D and approach-S which we have discussed above.

One of the lessons to be learned from the dispute is that someone who speaks of “singling out” should have at least some idea of the sort of thing that is singled out by virtue of certain ontological ingredients or structures. Since approach-S doesn’t necessarily deliver a definition of what is to be an individual substance, it could in principle apply to entities that are not what we mean by individual substances, such as, for instance, to properties or events. Therefore, if one follows approach-S, as I will, one is well advised to explain at least in a descriptive way what sort of thing it is the singling out of which is under consideration. In the following I will therefore give an account of what can plausibly count as an individual substance, and then proceed to defining more precisely what needs accounting for if we ask about its individuation in the sense of what makes it a single thing.

### 0.2.2 *What is an Individual Substance?*

As we have seen, then, the singling out approach does not aim to provide a definition of individuality but instead aims to explain a necessary condition of being an individual, namely to be a single thing. This approach is thus required to explain in more detail what it means for an individual to be singled out. It also requires giving at least some idea of what sort of entity it is

that is singled out, even though this characterisation won't amount to a definition of individuality. In other words, we need some idea of what we mean by the word "individual substance".

In a first approximation we can point out examples of individual substances, such as Napoleon Bonaparte or his horse Marengo. An individual substance like Marengo then is normally assumed to have a character that can be analysed in terms of adjectival properties. For instance, Marengo is *white* of colour. While Marengo has properties, he himself is not a property; nothing 'is *Marengo*' in the same sense in which Marengo is *white*.

Further to this, Marengo is not just *white*, *strong*, and *well-trained* but he also is a *horse*. That is to say that Marengo belongs to a certain kind of beings, namely horses. While he could well be brown instead of white, Marengo could not also be a rose instead of a horse. The kind to which an individual substance belongs is essential for it being what it is in the first place. If we were (even though we are not) able to strip Marengo of his being a horse, there would be no Marengo at all. Nothing that is not a horse can be Marengo. For instance, Marengo's skeleton which is on display in the National Army Museum in London, is not a horse. It resembles a horse in approximate shape but it doesn't gallop or whinny. Whatever this thing is, it is not an individual substance belonging to the kind of horses. Therefore the skeleton cannot be Marengo, because it is not a horse and being a horse is essential to being Marengo. The same applies if we consider higher levels of kinds, such as *animal*. Marengo is an animal and without him being an animal there would be no Marengo at all.

Like in the case of properties, it is also true that while Marengo belongs to the kind of horses, nothing belongs to Marengo in the same sense. Marengo's legs are parts of his body, but they are neither 'smaller Marengos' nor horses. If you break an individual substance, such as a horse, into its parts you don't get more substances of the same kind but things that belong to a *different* kind. By contrast, when Marengo mates with another horse and his offspring are born, there are new horses, but they aren't 'new Marengos' so that it remains true that nothing 'is Marengo' in the same sense in which Marengo and all other horses belong to their kind.



This initial characterisation of individual substances involves that they *have properties* and *belong to a kind* while *neither themselves being a property nor a kind*. Further to this, it is normally assumed that individual substances *persist through changes* in terms of their qualities (or material parts) and that they *come into existence* at one point and *can cease to exist* if they die or are destroyed (*substantial change*).<sup>2</sup> The issue of change will become important in this thesis in certain ways, but the key concern is with the fact that individual substances are *single* things which I will now explain in relation to three distinct issues.

### 0.2.3 Three Problems

Let us therefore try to unfold in more detail what it means for an individual substance to be a single thing or to be singled out. Among other things, this means that, as Marmodoro and Mayr helpfully point out,

[i]ndividual substances are not just *any arbitrary* compounds or collections of things. [...] Instead, individual substances have a principle of unity that holds them together, and allows us to distinguish them from their surroundings and to say what “belongs to” a particular substance and what doesn’t. Mere heaps of objects lack such a unity [...] (Marmodoro and Mayr 2019, 16)

Note that the quote mentions how *we* distinguish substances from one another. The key point however is the metaphysical issue of individual substances providing an ontological basis for any such epistemic acts. The issue raised is thus that substances, in order to be single individuals, need to have unity despite being complex.

Unfortunately, there are several ways to address unity and complexity, and especially in contemporary philosophy they are the subject of considerable controversy about the correct analysis of individual substances. For an individual substance can be analysed both in terms of its qualities and in terms of its material parts. In the contemporary literature it is often highlighted

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<sup>2</sup> Perhaps there also are individuals wholly unaffected by change. However, the individual substances that I want to talk about in this thesis are the ones that come in to being, cease to exist and go through changes of their properties or parts. What I mean by individual substance is thus what Aristotle would say exists in the *sublunary sphere* of the cosmos, where being is always dynamic and subject to generation and corruption.

that these two types of analysis imply distinct conceptions of unity. Unity among qualities,<sup>3</sup> for instance, can involve that the *same* item occurs several times in one thing (cf. Varzi 2019, section 1): for instance, if the quality of whiteness is a universal, it may figure multiple times as a component of Marengo, as many times as his white fur has hairs. However, if analysed in terms of material parts, each hair (if it is a part) occurs only *once* in the whole of material parts that jointly make up Marengo.<sup>4</sup> Such differences granted, the commonality between both types of analysis is that one can ask what determines that many items belong together in a non-arbitrary way. It is in this broad sense that I am speaking here of unity, leaving open what exactly are the items involved in it.

For instance, Marengo, the horse, has legs, a head, and a tail. These things belong together in such a way as to jointly make up one thing. Alternatively, Marengo is white of colour but he is also strong, and well-trained, while these properties too cohere in one thing rather than being the properties of distinct things. Thus, when Napoleon sits on Marengo's back, and both are individual substances, we don't get a further substance from their compound. Napoleon on a horseback makes *two* individual substances not one. To account for an individual substance being a single thing thus requires a solution to what I call the *problem of unity: what determines that the items in terms of which an individual substance is complex are unified into one entity?*

At this point I shall leave open what determines that Marengo's body parts or properties exhibit a unity that yokes them into one, unified thing. However, I do want to show that accounting for the unity of an individual substance is not always enough in order to also account for it being numerically distinct from other things. This becomes evident when we consider that

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<sup>3</sup> For a helpful characterisation of “unity of qualities problem” see Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2002, 31).

<sup>4</sup> The notion of matter involved in these disputes, I take it, is that of physical matter: the heavy, impenetrable stuff that can be touched, measured, and put together table- or chairwise. I'll have to leave this question unanswered here but it may be worth considering if the differences between an analysis in terms of properties vs. one in terms of material parts would be less pronounced if one was to start from a less physical conception of matter as *potential*.

only some but not all solutions to the problem of unity allow for an explanation of numerical difference among individuals of the same kind.

Some philosophers (who analyse individual substances in terms of their properties) have argued that there must be an ingredient in an individual substance that is itself not a property and accounts for the fact that all of the substance's properties cohere. For those there may be a route towards explaining the unity of an individual substance like Marengo and its numerical distinction from other things in one blow. For they typically argue that *each* individual has its own token of the unifying ingredient so that the same thing that accounts for Marengo's unity also accounts for his distinction from other things. This I call a *buy one get two free* solution: by explaining what makes an individual substance *one*, unified thing you also get what makes it numerically distinct from another so that they are *two* individuals instead of one.

An alternative is to explain unity not by appeal to one of the items that constitute (or make up) the individual but instead by a structural principle holding among these items. For instance, one can argue that what makes Marengo's legs, head, and tail parts of *one* thing is the way they are arranged, put together, or organised. Let's refrain from spelling this out in greater detail for the time being. Instead I want to draw attention to the fact that if an *arrangement* accounts for unity, we do not automatically also get an explanation for what accounts for numerical difference from other things: many things can have their parts arranged in exactly the *same* way so that it is not clear – or at least not immediately so – how something like an arrangement could account for distinction among them. Therefore, not all accounts of unity are *buy one get two free* solutions.

Suppose, for instance, Marengo meets Wellington's war horse named Copenhagen at the Battle of Waterloo. Now, what we want to explain is why Marengo and Copenhagen are two distinct things. In each of them the arrangement of their parts may account for their unity. In this respect, however, both individuals are *similar*, for their respective parts are both arranged such as to make up a horse or horsewise. This may be enough to explain why Napoleon and Marengo are

two instead of one single thing, because here the type of arrangement differs: Napoleon's head is arranged *manwise* with his other body parts while Marengo's parts are arranged *horsewise*. To differentiate Marengo from Copenhagen, however, appeal to the way in which their parts are organised is *not* enough. Arrangement as such does not constitute numerical nor indeed *any* form of difference between individual substances of the same kind.

As I said above, it is not my aim to evaluate different accounts of individuation at this stage. All I want to show is that there can be accounts of unity that do not, at least not in any obvious way, also deliver an account of what makes two individuals two things. For this reason, it is important to keep apart the *problem of unity* from what I call the *problem of numerical difference*: *what determines that two individuals are numerically distinct from one another?*

So far we have spelled out two problems that need to be solved in order to account for the singling out of an individual substance. Do these, the problems of unity and numerical difference, exhaust what needs to be accounted for in order to account for the fact that an individual is singled out? I think not. The idea of singling out is to determine an individual as the very one it is. That requires it to be one unified thing and numerically distinct from all others. However, even if we have established that (and in virtue of what) each individual is distinct from all others, we still haven't explained what makes each individual the very individual it is. To account for numerical difference is not necessarily to also account for (what I call) *unique distinction*, that is, for being not just one of many others but indeed for being *this* one and no other.

For instance, Aristotle suggests at one point (cf. Met. VII.8, 1034a5–10) that it is *matter* that accounts for numerical difference among individual substances such as Marengo and Copenhagen. Both have the same form (they are both horses) but different parcels of matter, and that's what (arguably) explains that they are two, distinct horses. Leaving aside how convincing this proposal is as an account of numerical difference among individual substances, we can also

ask to what extent this account delivers not just difference but also *unique distinction*. Does Marengo's matter make Marengo the very individual he is?

What speaks against an affirmative answer to this question is the fact that many things that are not Marengo could be made out of what is in fact his matter. For instance, after Marengo dies, his body may decompose into things that are *not* Marengo, or not even anything like Marengo since they no longer make up a horse. It might be possible that the same matter that once made up Marengo comes to be reorganised as to make up a horse once again, but we wouldn't say that Marengo is reborn in this entity. Rather, the correct thing to say is that there is an individual substance different from Marengo which happens to be composed of the same materials. These materials therefore don't seem to be what makes Marengo the very individual he is, for apparently they can become the matter of things other than Marengo.

Other solutions to the problem of numerical difference, by contrast, may deliver an account of unique distinction too. For instance, Leibniz (cf. Mates 1986, 251) claims that each individual is characterised by an infinite series of predicates which is unique to that very individual (its *complete individual concept*). Assuming one uses this series as a principle of numerical difference (whether or not it is Leibniz's view), it will then single out Marengo or Copenhagen as the very individuals they are and no other. For their *complete individual concepts* are each unique and shared by no other thing, they are what makes Marengo Marengo and what makes Copenhagen Copenhagen.

As before, I do not want to discuss at this point whether these accounts are valid. Instead, I mentioned them to distinguish aspects of what needs to be accounted for when we speak of singling out in the context of individual substances. In light of what I said above, I think it is best to distinguish two versions of what might initially appear as just one problem of difference: the first targets *numerical* difference the latter *unique distinction*, i.e. what makes an individual the very one it is and no other. Let's call this the *problem of unique distinction: what determines that an individual is*

*the very individual it is and no other?* With this I have formulated three problems in relation to what makes an individual substance a single thing:

1. *Problem of Unity*: what determines that the items in terms of which an individual substance is complex are unified into one entity?
2. *Problem of Numerical Difference*: what determines that two individuals are numerically distinct from one another?
3. *Problem of Unique Distinction*: what determines that an individual is the very individual it is and no other?

The question I will discuss throughout the rest of this thesis is to what extent Hegel provides convincing solutions to these problems. As I will show, Hegel's metaphysics provides resources for solving problem 1 and 2 but not problem 3. This fact, that Hegel fails to adequately explain unique distinction in the sense defined above, constitutes the philosophical basis for Schelling's disagreement with Hegel, or so I hope to show.

#### 0.2.4 *Hegel's Problems?*

So far I have outlined a perspective on the metaphysics of individuality in a more or less ahistorical fashion. In order to make this perspective work for my engagement with Hegel it is important to show that the three problems defined above are indeed of concern for his thinking. I will now make the case that they are. As the reader will surely note, this presupposes that Hegel has an interest in metaphysical questions and not all readers of Hegel would agree to that. At this stage I will simply assume that Hegel does indeed have such interests. However, I will vindicate this claim later on, in Chapter 1 (*Hegel and Metaphysics*).

To begin with, for Hegel, an individual is what it is by virtue of its concept and this fact is to explain also what makes it single. It thus depends on what is meant by "concept" how an adequate approach to the singleness or singularity of individual substances might look for Hegel. He holds a peculiar theory of concepts, very much unlike what philosophers like Kant or Frege would agree to. The main difference is that for Hegel a concept is not an empty, or unsaturated

form, but indeed a system or interrelation of what he calls *universality*, *particularity*, and *singularity*.<sup>5</sup> That is, a concept never is just a universal that requires filling or saturation by particular content, and it is also not something that is merely common to many single things, but indeed is that which determines them as single in the first place.

These notions (*universality*, *particularity*, and *singularity*) have a complex dynamic within the dialectical unfolding of Hegel's thinking, but it is fair to say that in one important sense universality can be identified with the kind to which an individual belongs, and particularity with the adjectival properties characterising the individual. The point is that the concept's three components or "moments" are supposed to stand in a relation of mutual requirement. That is, in order to understand what singularity is, we will have to mention the other two moments and their interrelation as well.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Hegel and the Problem of Unity***

Hegel sometimes provides descriptions of singularity that look somewhat like definitions, but it is difficult to make them work in this way. For instance, he writes that "*singularity* is the concept reflecting itself out of difference into absolute negativity" (SL 530/12.32) or that "self-referring determinateness is *singularity*. [...] this singularity is [...] the absolute turning back of the concept into itself, and at the same time as the posited loss of itself" (540/12.43). Such descriptions of the notion of singularity, however, are not very useful on their own. Rather, they have to be seen in context and that means within a processual unfolding of the relationship of singularity to other key notions of Hegel such as universality and particularity.

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<sup>5</sup> In older translations of Hegel (and in many publications on Hegel) the German words "Einzelheit" and "einzeln" are translated into "individuality" and "individual". However, I follow di Giovanni (2010, lxx) in using the terms "singularity" and "single" in place of the German "Einzelheit"/"einzeln". In my estimation this translation does a better job at capturing the distinction between an individual substance which for Hegel always comprises *all three moments* (universality, particularity, and singularity) and *one* aspect of such an entity, namely its being a single thing. Cf. for instance EL §179 where Hegel claims that the singleness of things [their being an *einzelne Wirklichkeit*] is always accompanied by universality (as kind-membership) as well as by a particular qualitative makeup for each thing.

<sup>6</sup> The point I am making is that because the relation among the moments is one of metaphysical interdependence, we need to understand them in terms of each other. What I do not thereby wish to insinuate is that the relation among them is merely epistemic i.e. a matter of how *we* understand or explain something. For Hegel, the relation between the moments of the concept tells us something about how reality itself is structured, not just how *we* grasp it.

However, as Hegel's account evolves, it becomes possible to pin down certain requirements for what it means to be singular. For instance, when Hegel has developed his theory of the concept far enough to allow for a determination of the singular "as such" he suggests the following: on this level the universal must be differentiated into manifold properties that account for the particularity of the individual. That is, we are not thinking here in terms of the bare notion of, for instance, a horse *in general* but instead in terms of the manifold ways in which it can receive determination in white or brown, strong or weak horses, Arabians, and Thoroughbreds, and so on. In Hegel's terminology, these manifold options for determination are what gives particularity to a universal such as the genus term *horse*. At the same time however, in order to be not *just* particular but also singular, these manifold determinations must be summoned together in one so that there can be what Hegel calls a "*coalescing* of manifold properties and concrete existences" in which the universal "has collected itself together into a unity through the connection of different terms" (SL 568/12.71). This passage shows that for Hegel, universality and particularity can jointly account for the singularity of an individual only if they account for unity within the complexity of individual objects.

The background of this thinking is transparently Kantian. For Kant, the problem of unity arises in an empirical context where objects are formed by introducing unity into the manifold impressions a subject receives through the senses. The crucial point is that according to this account of the object, unity is the *conditio sine qua non* for there to be an object at all:

An object however, is that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is united. Now, however, all unification of representations requires unity of consciousness in the synthesis of them. Consequently the unity of consciousness is that which alone constitutes the relation of representations to an object [...]. (B 137)

While thus tying the notion of an object to the idea of unity, Kant's specific version of such unity involves a form of mind-dependence. The "concept" Kant identifies as the source of the object's unity is located strictly in consciousness and not in mind-independent reality.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For Kant it is therefore "clear" that an object independent of our minds' unifying activity (a "transcendental object") "is nothing for us" and that therefore "the unity that the object makes necessary can be nothing other than



Hegel, as we shall see later on, rejects the subjectivist leaning of Kant's thinking about unity, but he translates aspects of it into a more realist and metaphysical context. He also does not endorse what Kant seems to presuppose, namely the view that the manifold is an empirical given (and as such primitive). Instead, Hegel would argue that manifoldness (just as its contraction into unity) is explicable in terms of the inner dynamics he ascribes to concepts. What he does take from Kant though, is the idea that in order for something to have the character of a single object, there must be a source of unity that reduces complexity into unity. Otherwise, there would be no object to be determined as a single individual at all. This is why Hegel (just like Kant) ascribes great importance to solving what I, above, have called the *problem of unity*.

### ***Hegel and the Problem of Numerical Difference***

As we have seen, for Hegel, being a singular individual means to be not many things but one, or to surmount manifoldness within the individual. However, according to Hegel, it is not possible to think an individual substance's unity without also thinking how it engenders plurality and difference from other things.<sup>8</sup> Being one, single entity in this sense (of being unified) therefore does not exhaust what Hegel comprises in the notion of singularity. On this view, to be one, unified thing goes hand in hand with bringing about distinction from other things; with generating externally the plurality or manifoldness that is excluded from the individual internally. This is also why Hegel would find the suggestion of lonely individuals grotesque. For him, to be an individual, partly *is* to create distinction from others which by this very act turn out as distinct

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the formal unity of the consciousness in the synthesis of the manifold of the representations. Hence we say that we cognize the object if we have effected synthetic unity in the manifold of intuition" (A 105).

<sup>8</sup> I am presenting Hegel's thinking about unity and difference here in a somewhat simplified way in as much as I emphasise that unity pertains to the inner realm of the individual and difference to its relation to other individuals. This simplification is beneficial in terms of vindicating the relevance of the problems of unity and numerical difference for Hegel. At the same time, however, one should not forget that for Hegel the unity of individual substances is not tantamount to a complete exclusion of internal differences. For instance, organisms (arguably Hegel's paradigmatic examples for individuals) have a rich internal structure in terms of distinct organic parts. Among other things, this idea of internal structure is very important for Hegel's organological theory of the state. According to the latter a state is an individual similar to a biological organism and therefore one, unified object. This, however, is precisely not to say that it lacks internal complexity. By contrast, Hegel thinks that the very principle that equips such a being with unity also determines internal complexity; it "creates differences and yet at the same time holds them together in unity" (PR §271A).

beings. In this context, Hegel often uses a technical term, “repulsion”, by which he denotes the activity of generating plurality and difference among individual substances. In as much as an individual is a singular, it therefore is

the repulsion of itself *from itself* by virtue of which many *other* ones are presupposed; *second*, it is now a negative reference with respect to these presupposed *others*, and to this extent the singular is *exclusive*. (SL 548–9/12.51)

It would be premature to attempt an interpretation of the precise philosophical function Hegel attributes to the notions mentioned in this passage. What is, however, important for the purpose of this introduction is the fact Hegel does not treat numerical distinction among individual substances as primitive, but rather as something that needs to be explained and accounted for. To merely state the fact of plurality, for instance by saying that “everything is different from everything else” therefore amounts to “an altogether superfluous proposition, for in the plural of things there is already implied a multitude and totally indeterminate diversity” (366/11.270). What Hegel aims to do is to explain what determines that two individual substances are in fact two, rather than treating this fact as primitive. This shows that what I called the *problem of numerical difference* is indeed of concern for his metaphysics of individuals.

### ***Hegel and the Problem of Unique Distinction***

Hegel sometimes sounds as if for him an individual was simply what is distinct from other things. But this is not the fully developed account of individuality that Hegel will present on the more advanced levels of his metaphysics (especially the Doctrine of the Concept). At an earlier, less developed stage, the “individual refers to itself by setting limits to every other; but these limits are therefore also the limits of its self; they are references to the other”; as a consequence, the individual lacks any genuine selfhood, even “the individual’s existence is not in the individual” (SL 87/21.101). Here Hegel describes a perspective on individual substances where their relation to others exhausts what they themselves are as individuals: here, to be one among many others just *is* to be a single individual.

On a more advanced perspective, however, we will indeed find out that “the individual is more than just restrictions on all sides; but this more belongs to another sphere, that of the concept” (SL 87/21.101). On this advanced level, to be singular is not something that has to do only with being one of many other individuals, but also with an affirmative self-relation constituting the individual as the very individual it is. As a singular it is distinct from others and “yet [it] is, precisely in its separation, a positive connection” (SL 549/12.52). The concept is thus said to not only establish difference in the sense of being numerically distinct from other things, but further to this it is said to establish “a negation or determinateness that refers to itself and as such the concept is the *singular*” (SL 513/12.16).

These remarks about singularity show that Hegel indeed aims to account for an individual being more than just a distinct element within a plurality of things. This “more” has to do with the individual’s self, with it being this one and no other, and as such with difference in the sense I labelled *unique distinction* above.

The question that I will raise in relation to Schelling’s critique of Hegel concerns precisely this last mentioned issue. Does Hegel succeed in explaining what determines something ultimately unique to each individual or not? As I understand Schelling’s objection, he rejects that this can be achieved while at the same time holding fast to the idea that the individual’s singularity can be fully accounted for without appeal to a radically non-conceptual aspect of the individual’s existence. Hegel’s aim to do entirely without such a non-conceptual facet of things is driven especially by his opposition to unknowable substrates such as, for instance, Kantian things in themselves. As we shall see in due course, there are good reasons for Hegel’s standpoint but it also remains important to engage this view with well-argued challenges, such as Schelling’s.

Schelling, on his part, also does not have a lot of sympathy for the Kantian idea that mind-independent reality ultimately rests on the assumption of unknowable transcendental objects, at least if by that one means a realm of things beyond, behind, or underneath those that we encounter in the world. However, compared to Hegel, Schelling retained more scepticism

regarding the possibility of making reality fully transparent to knowledge. Consequentially he was more hesitant than Hegel to exclude the assumption of an “incomprehensible base of reality in things” to which he referred as the “indivisible remainder, that which with the greatest exertion cannot be resolved in understanding” (Schelling 2006, 29/VII.359–60). The question then is what warrants such an assumption. In Chapter 9 (esp. 9.3 *Individuality and Preconceptual Being*), I will show that the problem of unique distinction provides Schelling with a challenging argument against the Hegelian claim that reality is in principle fully transparent to thought. As I hope, presenting this objection will help to see more clearly where precisely Schelling differs philosophically from Hegel, independently, that is, of the polemics he levelled against him.

However, before any of this can be addressed in a meaningful way the most important thing is to provide a convincing account of what Hegel himself has to say. For this is precisely what most of the existing Schelling vs. Hegel literature neglects, namely to take seriously both sides of the dispute. In my project this means that Schelling will enter the discussion only after a careful and detailed examination of Hegel. This also means that Schelling plays mainly the role of a critic rather than a philosopher with positive contributions. That being said, I hope that engaging with his objection will be like taking a glimpse through a key hole that can help to recognize Schelling as an important background for developments in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy such as Kierkegaard’s, Heidegger’s or Sartre’s appeal to individuality and the fact of existence. Since it is yet a long way to go before we reach this point, it is well in order to take along a road map that provides orientation. In the next section of this introduction I will therefore explain step by step the outline of the subsequent chapters.

### 0.3 Outline of Thesis

Paving the ground for further engagement with Hegel’s ontological claims, I will begin by discussing how Hegel’s philosophy, in particular his *Logic*, can be understood as a form of metaphysics (Chapter 1: *Hegel and Metaphysics*). After mapping the contemporary debate (1.1) on this issue I discuss Hegel’s relation to pre-Kantian metaphysics (1.2) and Kant (1.4). I conclude

that Hegel's project combines traits of Aristotle's metaphysics with a Kantian interest in systematicity (1.5).

Against this background I introduce Hegel's account of *Concept, Judgment, and Syllogism* (Chapter 2) in terms of an ontology of individual objects. After introducing the *Concept and its Moments* (2.1) as Hegel's basic ontological categories, I show (2.2) how successively more advanced accounts of their interrelation lead to an account of the object which is modelled after the structure of syllogistic inference. In contrast to earlier stages in terms of a metaphysical interpretation of judgments, this account delivers a better understanding of how individuals relate to their manifold properties by introducing the idea of *kinds* as their immanent and substantial basis (2.3).

Chapter 3 is dedicated to explaining why Hegel, after presenting the above described model of the object, sees the need to introduce major modifications of the ontological framework used so far. In particular, I draw attention to the fact that Hegel, when reaching the so-called Objectivity chapter, begins to use hylomorphic language. After reviewing existing views on the transition (3.1) and describing the innovations over the previously used ontological framework (3.2), I explain how and why Hegel introduces a hylomorphic account of the object (3.2–5). This also allows me to shed new light on a notoriously difficult passage where Hegel associates the transition to the Objectivity chapter with the traditional ontological proof (3.6). A key claim I develop throughout Chapter 3 is that the Objectivity chapter is not merely an application of a previously developed ontology. By contrast, I aim to show that Hegel makes important modifications to the ontological framework at work in the preceding chapters of the *Logic*.

While Chapters 1-3 have thus lead us to Hegel's use of a hylomorphic account of the object, I then turn to explaining how he approaches the problems of individuality within this framework and defends it against rival accounts. Chapter 4 (*Mechanism and the Problem of Unity*) presents Hegel's critique of a mechanistic ontology in light of the problem of unity. I argue that

Hegel targets especially the mechanistic rejection of final causation and shows that it undermines convincing explanations of what unifies the parts of an object into a whole (4.1–2). However, Hegel’s dialectical approach also allows him to point out how we can arrive at an approximation of unity within the mechanistic approach (4.3).

Chapter 5 then explains how Hegel arrives at a paradigmatic understanding of unity. For Hegel, there are different types of objects that demand different ways of describing their ontological structure. Importantly, Hegel aims to show that there is a hierarchy between these types of objects and that unity is only fully present in those things the ontological structure of which involves final causation i.e. purposiveness. I thus begin by explaining the *Conceptual Framework of Purposiveness* (5.1) used by Hegel. Against this background I then (5.2) explain why, on Hegel’s view, objects that involve merely external purposiveness (e.g. artefacts), depend on other things for their unity. As a consequence, their unity is neither autonomous nor explicable without either launching a regress or allowing for a more advanced category of objects which are marked by immanent purposiveness. Section 5.3 (*Unity and Immanent Purposiveness*) then draws on Hegel’s concept of life in order to explain the ontological structure of those objects which have an immanent principle of unity. A common objection to the idea that only some objects, namely living beings with an immanent goal structure, enjoy unity proper is that this approach unduly ignores objects in other categories, such as artefacts and natural aggregates. However, in section 5.4, I argue that Hegel’s paradigm approach allows him to treat unity as something that comes in degrees. This allows him to circumvent the now popular but counterintuitive view that artefacts and natural aggregates are no unified objects at all.

By then it should have become clear how Hegel explains what makes an object a unified whole, and in *this* sense an individual. However, I have argued above that there are further requirements of individuality, namely *numerical difference* and *unique distinction*. After some introductory remarks on the nature of these problems (6.1) I proceed to a discussion of how Hegel explains what makes individuals numerically distinct from one another. I begin by

discussing the widely held view that Hegel appeals to a version of the identity of indiscernibles in order to explain what makes individuals numerically distinct. While I agree that Leibniz is an important background for Hegel, I reject the view that he appeals to the identity of indiscernibles (6.2). Instead I argue (6.3) that Hegel appropriates Leibniz's idea that monads are causally independent. However, while Leibniz treats the (monadic) individual as causally isolated, Hegel's account operates with what I call causal sovereignty, namely the idea that individuals generate their differentiation from one another by actively shaping the causal impact of their environment. As shown in section 6.4, this account is operative in Hegel's discussion of the Idea of Life which I show to provide a *Logic of Self-Differentiation*. What warrants to count something as a further individual, is the fact that it has the capacity to create a realm of causal independence and to thereby actively limit itself off from an environment.

In face of Hegel's solution to the problem of numerical difference I then (6.5) raise the question if his account can also offer a convincing solution to the remaining issue of unique distinction. In particular I discuss to what extent the notions used in Hegel's account of life could account for an individual's being the very individual it is. However, I conclude to the negative result that Hegel only succeeds in offering characteristics of individuals that can be had by many, so that it ultimately remains unclear what equips them with a unique self.

This negative result regarding the problem of unique distinction then motivates the consideration of Hegel's earliest and still underestimated critic, namely Schelling. I argue that Schelling's departure from Hegel can be elucidated in light of their distinct treatment of the problem of unique distinction. However, the fact that Schelling's philosophy is comparatively less familiar even to readers otherwise well acquainted with the German idealist tradition makes it necessary to introduce his approach. Chapter 7 thus makes an attempt at approaching this difficult thinker from an Hegelian perspective. After an introduction into Schelling's later period (7.1), I discuss what I take to be legitimate concerns with Schelling's philosophical method (7.2). However, I also show that Schelling makes renewed efforts to demonstrate central claims by

argument during his final writing period beginning in 1846. As I show, it is here that Schelling develops an interesting justification for his equally central as also controversial claim that the world we encounter as in principle open to knowledge rests on a pre-conceptual foundation preceding the intelligible structure of reality which a priori metaphysics reveals.

In Chapter 8, I explain *Fundamentals of Schelling's Ontology*, in particular his methods (8.1) and doctrine of “potencies” (8.2–3). The latter constitutes an account of fundamental ontological categories which are meant to answer the traditional Aristotelian question “What is being?”. It is essential to Schelling’s account that it remains to be shown whether or not this question can be sufficiently answered by the contents we encounter within a metaphysics of pure thought. As an important result of this endeavour, Schelling shows that the ontological structure of being as revealed by the potencies, lacks a principle that would unify the potencies so that they could jointly constitute the being of anything in particular.

Chapter 9 then explores the consequences of this outcome and relates the discussion back to the problem of individuality. Schelling explores possible candidates for a unifying principle that could remedy the lack of unity among the potencies. As he explains via the Aristotelian notions of *soul* (9.1) and of *substance* (9.2), such a principle constitutes the indispensable foundation which actualises the potencies that thereby enables their role as principles of being in the first place. The decisive question then is if this actualiser can be disclosed within thought as something graspable in terms of a concept.

As I show in section 9.3, Schelling’s reading of *Metaphysics VII* ultimately leads him to the conclusion that the actualiser or “cause of being” for an individual cannot be a universal. Schelling thereby casts doubt on Hegel’s claim that the substantial form of an individual is a universal. Schelling’s key point is that a sharable entity cannot figure as the ground of a unique identity of the individual because it is always – at least possibly – common to many things. As I show in some detail, this point holds even if one grants that Hegel does not reduce universality to mere commonality. Within Schelling’s system, this argument supports the claim that ultimately,



things are grounded in a being which is no longer conceptual but rather, as he calls it, “unprethinkable” and a “That” rather than a “What”. Importantly, this reason is largely independent from Schelling’s theological convictions as well as from his earlier point that the contingent existence of finite objects warrants the assumption of such a pre-conceptual basis of reality.

Chapter 10 discusses Schelling’s radical conclusion. Sections 10.1 and 10.2 consider Schelling’s appeal to an unknowable aspect of reality and its suitability for the ontological role of individuating things. In section 10.3 I raise the question to what extent Schelling’s appeal to the priority of pre-conceptual being makes him a nominalist. Finally, in section 10.4 I develop an account of how we could engage with the arguably unknowable being which according to Schelling makes us the very individuals we are. While conceding that this engagement cannot involve conceptual cognition I suggest that we may come to encounter pre-conceptual being practically, in particular in exercising our creativity.

## 1 Hegel and Metaphysics

“Any interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy must begin with his metaphysics” (Beiser 2005, 53); this is especially true for an interpretation that aims to reconstruct Hegel’s solution to a classical metaphysical problem such as the problem of individuality. In the following I will therefore discuss currently influential interpretations of Hegel’s relation to metaphysics (section 1.1) and then make my own attempt at understanding this difficult topic. While my approach is broadly in line with the so-called conceptual realist readings of Hegel, I will put special emphasis on Hegel’s idea that the concept provides the ground of individual existents. Against the background of Hegel’s critique of pre-critical metaphysics (section 1.2) I will explain his view that conceptual structures are engraved into reality itself through a discussion of his double indebtedness to Kant (section 1.3) and Aristotle (section 1.4). While Hegel rejects Kant’s subjectivist tendencies, he also finds important inspirations for his theory of individuating concepts in Kant’s doctrine of the synthetic a priori. In Aristotle, Hegel sees a further forerunner of his speculative theory of the concept as self-determining. In addition to this, however, Aristotle entertains a realist account of the conceptual which Hegel finds missing in Kant. To preserve Kant’s important insights about the conceptual, Hegel therefore reads him through an Aristotelian lens and relocates the reality of concepts in things themselves. However, there is also a genuinely Kantian element in Hegel’s approach which he finds missing in Aristotle. This has to do with the demand that insight into the basic structure of thought must be approached in a holistic way in order to avoid falling back into the type of metaphysics which Hegel regards as untenable.

### 1.1 Hegel and Metaphysics: The Contemporary Debate

The *Gretchen-Frage* for a contemporary reader of Hegel concerns Hegel’s relation to metaphysics. The standard dichotomy is between a Kantian, non-metaphysical reading popularised by Robert Pippin on the one hand, and on the other hand, a more metaphysically inclined family of interpretations following authors like Charles Taylor, Frederick Beiser, Stephen Houlgate, Robert Stern, and James Kreines. Recently the lines between these camps have become somewhat

blurred as Pippin (2019) reformulated is position in a way that emphasises proximity to the metaphysical readings. That being said, I still find it helpful to draw the well-established lines once more in order to explain my own perspective.

Despite substantial differences among the mentioned interpreters, everyone agrees that Hegel aims to provide a theory of categories, i.e. an account of what are the fundamental forms of thought. It is also uncontroversial that in one sense, Hegel's project is meant to tell us how epistemic subjects approach reality through these forms and how they do so successfully. Disagreement arises, however, regarding the question as to what extent this endeavour should also be seen as a type of metaphysics i.e. a theory about the structure of reality itself – not just of the workings of our minds. Interpreters' choices regarding this issue are reflected in how they weigh the role of Hegel's philosophical interlocutors for his own views. In light of this I will now summarise and discuss the main strands of those interpretations that inform contemporary readers of Hegel.

Someone like Charles Taylor (1975), for instance, reads Hegel as amalgamating early modern conceptions of subjectivity with elements of Platonic, Aristotelian, Spinozist, and Christian origin and thus arrives at an overtly metaphysical, *onto-theological* reading. Taylor sees Hegel as reconciling ancient intuitions about cosmic order and meaning with a modern conception of subjectivity as self-defining and self-realising without external constraints. The synthesis of both is based on the claim that mind-independent reality is itself an instance of self-realising subjectivity and therefore akin and open to our minds' finite subjectivity (cf. 87). Taylor does not hesitate to put this idea in explicitly theological terms by attributing to Hegel the claim that the "universe" is the "embodiment of the totality of the 'life-functions' of God" and as such "an expression of God, that is, something posited by God in order to manifest what he is" (88). Since God's essence is furthermore identified with reason, the divine self-realisation account also offers a story of why the world is, as Hegel claims, "rational", namely *qua* self-manifestation of an essentially rational God.

The standard objection to this view is a pragmatic one, namely that highlighting Hegel's affinities to theological and Spinozist views comes at the price of reminding readers of the very traits of his thinking that gave it a bad name during the early days of analytic philosophy. While this may be the case, a more pressing worry is that the idea of God as an absolute subject is actually not very prominent in Hegel, at least not in his *Logic*.<sup>9</sup> While he certainly appeals to the idea that the world has inherent, intelligible structures, the move to personifying these structures in a divine subject is more germane to early Schellingian world-soul-metaphysics than to Hegel. That being said, the idea of reality being self-realising according to rational principles is an adequate rendition of Hegel's general views. However, it is not so clear whether Hegel also entertains the further claim that these principles form the essence of a divine subject. At the very least, one can say that many of the most interesting questions addressed by Hegel can be understood without making his notoriously difficult onto-theological commitments the core of one's interpretation. For instance, there is much to be learned from Hegel's theory of the fundamental forms of thought and this is entirely possible without picturing them as the thoughts of a divine subject.

An interesting alternative to the onto-theological reading has been proposed by Frederick Beiser (2005). Beiser rejects the idea of personifying the absolute in God as he fears this does not do justice to Hegel's anti-subjectivist inclinations and instead of exorcising it just scales up Kantian subjectivism to what Beiser calls "cosmic subjectivism or supersubjectivism" (70). He therefore opts for what is sometimes labelled *dynamised Spinozism*: like Spinoza, it is argued, Hegel proposes the idea that there is one all-encompassing substance – but *unlike* Spinoza himself, he

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<sup>9</sup> There are, of course, the notorious passage describing the *Logic* as "*the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and of a finite spirit*" (SL 29/21.34). But it is not obvious at all why "God" should be seen here as signifying anything more than *the intelligible structure of reality* (prior to its concrete manifestation in nature and spirit). There is, in my view, no indication that Hegel appeals to a personified, divine subject here such as the Platonic craftsman or the traditional Christian God. In addition to this, there are several mentions of the ontological proof of God in the *Logic*. However, while Hegel certainly claims to propose a version of the ontological argument, the philosophical function of this "ontological proof" is hard to discern. What it certainly does *not* do is to confirm a pre-given conception of God. As I will suggest (section 3.6) vis à vis the ontological argument in the Objectivity chapter, a promising way of dealing with these passages is to read them as elaborations on what Hegel thinks is the general structure of things – not just of the extravagant entity referred to as God in *metaphysica specialis*.

connects this idea with an appeal to final causation and an overall organic structure of this substance (cf. 94). This approach avoids the overly subjectivist interpretation of the absolute. It also makes an attempt to avoid the radical denial of individual existents associated with Spinozism. However, it still presents the individual very much as a by-product of the absolute. Thus, from the perspective of the issues that concern us in this thesis, what remains in the background too much is Hegel's interest in how individuals enact their own individuality rather than just receiving it from a superior being.

Another, quite different, reaction to the difficulties of the ontotheological reading is to deemphasise metaphysical interests in Hegel altogether and to consequentially read him as an ally not so much of Plato, Aristotle or Spinoza but instead of Kant. This is the approach of Robert Pippin's (1989) book *Hegel's Idealism*.<sup>10</sup> Pippin sees his approach as a middle ground between the onto-theological reading and an interpretation in terms of what is often referred to as *category theory*. The latter identifies Hegel's *Logic* with a fine-grained analysis of how rational subjects use concepts while bracketing questions about their metaphysical status. In Klaus Hartmann's (1976) words, such a reading is therefore "non-metaphysical" – which then prompts the question how Hegel, as he does, can still call his *Logic* a metaphysics. Dissatisfied with both the ontotheological and the non-metaphysical, categorical account, Pippin seeks to establish a "defensible view of Hegel's project that attributes to him less than the former but more than the latter" (Pippin 1989, 178).

The cornerstone of this reading is Hegel's appropriation of Kant's idea that the concepts by which we grasp the world are particular modes in which the understanding exercises its fundamental activity of bringing order to the sensuous manifold, the so-called "transcendental unity of apperception". And indeed, Hegel regards the idea that that thought is what brings about

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<sup>10</sup> As Redding (2020, 359) points out, the success of this reading is partly explicable in historical terms: Since early 20<sup>th</sup> century criticism of Hegel was largely focussed on what was perceived as extreme *metaphysical* views, a decidedly non-metaphysical reading promised to "divest Hegel of the bizarre metaphysical claims with which he had been popularly associated by portraying him as in the tradition of Kant. If Hegel was critical of all 'dogmatic' metaphysical commitments, then he obviously could not be accused of the weird ones with which he was so often associated".

unity within the manifold items making up an object as one of Kant's "profoundest and truest insights" (SL 515/12.17–8). But while Hegel thinks that this insight needs important qualifications in order to avoid what he calls "psychological idealism" (SL 520/12.22), Pippin attributes to him an orthodoxly Kantian standpoint according to which "human reason can attain nonempirical knowledge only *about itself*" (Pippin 1989, 8). What is thereby revealed are not mind-independent structures but "our 'conceptual scheme,'" where concepts are understood as "nonempirically based discriminatory capacities" (8) of subjects. The view put forward by Pippin therefore – pace his insistence to the contrary – very much resembles the non-metaphysical or categorical reading. The main problem with the latter is, however, that it is at odds with Hegel's commitment to reviving metaphysics after Kant and to the robust existence of conceptual structures which are, to use Hegel's own words, "not to be considered [...] as the act of the self-conscious understanding, not as subjective understanding" (SL 517/12.20).

A middle ground between these positions is the so-called *conceptual realist* account. Here the key idea is that the concept is not merely *our* way of making sense of things but indeed the intelligible structure of their very being. On this reading, Hegel's debt to thinkers like Spinoza (Houlgate) or Aristotle (Stern, Kreines) is emphasised once again; however, unlike onto-theological readers, conceptual realists tend to focus more on Hegel's continuity with these philosophers' *metaphysica generalis* as a general inquiry into the nature of being (as opposed to the *metaphysica specialis* i.e. the study of certain elevated beings, namely God, world, and soul). While Hegel is therefore seen as a metaphysician interested in the structure of being rather than just *our* conceptual scheme, claims about Hegel's endorsement of theistic positions remain more subdued when he is read through conceptual realist glasses.<sup>11</sup>

Houlgate (2005) puts much emphasis on the ideas that Hegel's theory of thought determinations is a) normative, b) covers a broader scope of categories than can be derived from

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<sup>11</sup> Conceptual realists also typically don't make much of Hegel's arguable commitment to a form of monism according to which "everything real has an unconditioned ground in the whole or totality of reality" (Kreines 2008). Kreines (2008, 2015), for one, explicitly argues against a monistic interpretation.

the functions of judgment, and has c) metaphysical significance. It is normative because “Hegel wants to find out how basic categories have to be understood, not just how they have in fact been understood” (24). The normativity of Hegel’s theory is important because, according to Houlgate, one of Hegel’s key insights is that a naïve use of categories “may leave us caught in a network of concepts that are in fact improperly formed and thereby distort our view of the world” (10). For this reason, Hegel is also seen as not accepting Kant’s approach to deriving the categories only from how we make judgments, for doing so carries along unstated assumptions about the nature of reality. Hegel’s more radically critical project is therefore understood to scrutinise also forms of thought that are prior and more primitive than those Kant deduced from the table of judgments.<sup>12</sup> Finally, Houlgate decidedly opts for a metaphysically loaded interpretation of Hegelian categories, placing him in the tradition of thinkers like Spinoza:

Hegel’s *Logic* provides an account of the basic structure of being, as well as of thought. Interpreted in this way, the *Logic* is not only a logic but also an ontology or metaphysics—Hegel’s alternative to, say, Spinoza’s *Ethics* (or at least part 1 thereof). (115)

The reference to the first part of Spinoza’s *Ethics* (which is entitled “On God”), however, isn’t meant here in the sense of a return of special metaphysics. Rather, Houlgate reads the *Logic* as an inquiry into the basic structures of being in general which unfold not as a manifestation of God but simply as the implicit content of the “utterly indeterminate awareness or thought of being as such” (123).

Robert Stern (1990, 2009c) and James Kreines (2015) also approach Hegel’s *Logic* from a conceptual realist perspective but in contrast to Houlgate their focus is more on those parts of the book where Hegel’s theory has evolved into forms that are explicit enough to provide an account of *objects*. Similar to, for instance, Rolf Peter Horstmann (1990, 41–58), these authors aim to reconstruct how Hegel arrives at an account of the object as both mind-independent and yet in

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<sup>12</sup> In particular, Houlgate (2005, 121) has in mind the idea that reality, or more precisely “being”, must not be assumed to have the character of “a separate realm of objectivity to which we stand in relation. Initially, all we may assume is the minimal idea that being is the sheer immediacy of which thought is immediately aware. Being may well – and, as we shall see [...], does – turn out to constitute a world of objects, but we should not presuppose that it does”; hence, Houlgate’s constant emphasis on the presuppositionless [*Voraussetzungslosigkeit*] and immanence of Hegel’s *Logic*.

principle knowable or explicable. Stern shows especially how Hegel's analysis of the ontological implications of judgments and syllogisms lead to a rejection of a Kantian account and recommend instead what Stern calls the "substance-kind model of the object" (cf. esp. Stern 1990, 73–6). On this account, the unity of the object is provided by a universal immanent to it, more specifically, the natural kind to which it belongs. This model then replaces the Kantian one where objects receive their unity through the activity of an epistemic subject, which, as Stern demonstrates, turns out as a version of the substratum view (cf. 22–29). Overall, Stern emphasises Aristotelian elements in Hegel, most especially his appeal to the immanence of universals and the fundamentality of those universals, namely kinds, that are not merely adjectival but substantial in as much as they ground the being of individual objects. Much of what I will have to say in the chapters that follow is closely aligned to this perspective on Hegel's theory of the object. In contrast to Stern, however, I think that Hegel's theory of the object receives an important update later on in the *Logic* and I also disagree regarding another issue, namely what role Hegel ascribes to qualities in the explanation of numerical distinctness among objects (cf. my Chapters 3 and 6).<sup>13</sup>

While on Stern's reading, Hegel's subsequent characterisation of objects in terms of mechanistic and teleological conceptions is treated as an application of the substance-kind model, Kreines makes these sections of the *Logic* the cornerstone of his interpretation. In dialogue with contemporary grounding metaphysics, he then shows how Hegel unfolds a "metaphysics of reason" providing "the explanatory reasons why things do what they do, or are as they are" (Kreines 2015, 3). Kreines reconstructs why a mechanistic account of the object would undermine the possibility of giving such reasons and how Hegel's concept of immanent purposiveness helps to understand the ideal of complete explanation or intelligibility in a decidedly anti-foundationalist and yet metaphysically committed way.

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<sup>13</sup> Stern's view that for Hegel the universal constitutes the substance of the individual is also important for understanding the crucial difference to Schelling. As we shall see in Chapter 9 (esp. section 9.3), Schelling opts for a different interpretation of Aristotle according to which no universal can be substantial.



What I hope to contribute beyond the established conceptual realist picture of Hegel is thus to emphasise especially Hegel's belief that the concept accounts not only for the general structure, unity, or intelligibility of things but also for their reality as individual existents – as uniquely distinct from all other things. Pre-existing research contains lots of helpful material for this inquiry, but for my own work the problem of individuality is not just one aspect but indeed the organising principle of my encounter with Hegel. As I hope to show, this will ultimately also help to present Schelling's final encounter with Hegelian thought in a fruitful light by demonstrating their disagreement regarding the problem of individuality.

In the next section, I will now provide my own take on Hegel's relation to metaphysics. At this stage, I will approach Hegel in a more general way but not without making clear how I think the interest in individuality is woven into his thought even on this general level. Against this backdrop, I will then proceed to elaborate on how Hegel approaches unity and difference in relation to individual entities.

## 1.2 Hegel and Pre-Kantian Metaphysics

Hegel saw his own philosophy as reviving metaphysics after Kant, who he regarded as mainly responsible for the “downfall of metaphysics” leading to the “singular spectacle [...] of *a cultivated people without metaphysics* – like a temple richly ornamented in other respects but without a holy of holies” (SL 8/21.6). Hegel's project in the *Logic* is thus to revive a metaphysics which, in the most basic terms, consists in “the science of *things* captured in *thoughts*” (EL §24). In Hegel's eyes, this science has been pursued by metaphysicians all along and he sees himself as taking it up once again after the disruption caused by Kant's *Critique*. In one respect, getting Hegel's project right thus means acknowledging his sense of indebtedness to pre-Kantian metaphysics.

In this context, *capturing things in thoughts* is not to be confused with the projection of a conceptual scheme onto a world of things indifferent to this scheme. By contrast, the point of metaphysics is to think according to concepts which are immanent to things themselves and thus

constitute the “fact that there is rhyme and reason to the world” (EL §24R). Hegel therefore writes:

[T]his much should be clear in a preliminary way, insofar as thought tries to come up with a *concept* of things, this concept (and with that also its most immediate forms such as judgment and syllogism) cannot be made up of determinations and relationships which are alien and external to those things. (EL §24R)

Hegel thus claims that metaphysics uncovers a truth, namely what things “truly” or actually are, as opposed to how we merely imagine them or how they appear to us through the senses. The vehicle for accessing this truth is thought or *thinking things over*. Pre-Kantian metaphysics has contributed towards this project in as much as it “contains the *belief* that through *thinking things over* [*Nachdenken*] the *truth comes to be known* and that what the objects truly are is brought before consciousness” (EL §26).

At the same time, Hegel does not unambiguously endorse a pre-Kantian stance on metaphysics. For pre-Kantian metaphysicians, as Hegel sees them, are guilty of a naïve use of concepts. More specifically, Hegel has two main objections against pre-Kantian metaphysics,<sup>14</sup> which I will label 1) the objection of *concept shopping*, and 2) the objection of *substrate thinking*:

1. *concept shopping*: Metaphysics imports key concepts such as God, soul, or world from pre-existing sources like common sense or religion instead of developing them through its own intellectual devices (cf. EL § 30).
2. *substrate thinking*: Metaphysics uses these concepts as determinations for in themselves undetermined or contentless substrates (cf. EL §§ 31, 85).

While the first point thus targets how concepts are *derived*, the second one criticises the way these concepts are *used*. In terms of the latter, Hegel has in mind especially a use of concepts according

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<sup>14</sup> When Hegel uses the word “metaphysics” in a pejorative sense he thinks of metaphysics before Kant, especially of Christian Wolff (cf. Bowman 2013, 6). This is neither to say that Kant himself cannot be charged with “metaphysical” thinking, nor that any pre-Kantian thinker is completely metaphysical in the pejorative sense (cf. Houlgate 2005, 120). What Hegel has in mind, is a tendency to think in certain, problematic, terms which is prevalent in but not exclusive to pre-Kantian rationalism.

to the operation of making *judgments*, where a subject figures as the initially indeterminate base for meaning that comes in only later with the predicate.<sup>15</sup>

What may look like two distinct charges, are actually aspects of one single problem Hegel detects vis à vis the pre-critical account of concepts. The key idea is that the import of pre-existing concepts is not an innocent move to make because it goes along with a distorting perspective on what it is to have a concept at all. If I get my concepts, so to speak, “second hand” from sources independent of my own intellectual capacities, say from common sense or religious belief, I have saved myself the effort of developing them. The concept shopper is very much like an actual consumer who tacitly assumes that “potatoes come from the supermarket” instead of being grown by farmers through hard work on the field. The point of this analogy is that concepts are treated like ready-made products without due consideration of the processes from which they result. What a concept-shopping metaphysician takes up is “ready-made” in the sense that it represents the *result* but not the *process* of conceptual determination.

To be sure, such a result can still be *applied* to reality, but the very notion of application implies that there is something prior to and passively awaiting conceptual determination (cf. Puntel 1981, 64–5). Since “applying” is a two-place predicate, one applies Y to X, where X has to be there prior to Y in order to figure as a subject of application. And since the “concept” is treated by metaphysics as the Y which *gets applied*, the X to which it *is applied* must figure as a foundation which is there already and *before* conceptual determination enters the scene: “a substratum that as such is indeterminate, relative to its predicate as the determinate and actual expression in thought” (EL §85).

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<sup>15</sup> This has to do with the fact that the subject of a sentence or judgment receives meaning only in the subsequent application of a predicate, while, at the same time, the intrinsic significance of the subject remains unaddressed. Of course Hegel doesn’t have anything against the notion of judgment in a linguistic sense; and of course Hegel writes his prose (with one notable exception cf. SL 59/21.68) in the form of ordinary German sentences. He does not entertain the (absurd) belief that we should stop using ordinary language and its grammar. But he does insist that we must not allow the grammar of ordinary language to bewitch our metaphysical thinking. For when we think of actual things exclusively in terms of subjects to which meaningful content has to be *applied*, we imagine them as an in itself meaning- and contentless substrate. This, Hegel thinks, happened when pre-Kantian metaphysicians attempted to determine the objects of special metaphysics in terms of propositions like “the soul is simple” or “God is eternal”.

Pre-Kantian metaphysicians may want to deny such a realm of indeterminate substrates, but according to Hegel's analysis they are bound to make this assumption because of their (above explained) account of concepts as merely *applied* to things. This, however, undermines the initial project of grasping things in thoughts as the substrates are, so to speak, 'hard wired' to resist this grasp in principle. Hegel will therefore suggest that we should regard the reality of things not as a passive substrate awaiting predication from without, but instead think of things as actively realising their very own conceptual structures. Grasping things in thought therefore cannot be anything like the activity of externally attributing features to an in itself empty substrate. "By contrast, true knowledge of an object must be of *the sort* that the object determines itself out of itself and does not receive its predicates from outside" (§ 28A).

One might object to this that judgments like "the soul is simple" or "God is infinite" have a subject which is *not* an indeterminate substratum but itself a richly endowed conception of certain objects, namely the human *soul* or *God*. But Hegel would not let this objection count on the grounds that then the alleged "concepts" are nothing but *names* for objects and only become meaningful once we attribute predicates to them. To put it simply, if we have no access to *what these objects are* other than by listing *what we take to be* their features, they appear to be literally what we (or common sense, or religion) make of them. In Hegel's words:

*God*, therefore, or *spirit*, *nature*, or what have you, is as the subject of a judgment only a name at first; what any such subject *is* in accordance with the concept, is first found only in the predicate. When we ask for the predicate that belongs to such subjects, the required judgment must be based on a concept that is presupposed; yet it is the predicate that first gives this *concept*. It is, therefore, the mere *representation* that in fact makes up the presupposed meaning, and this yields only a nominal definition whereby it is a mere accident, a historical fact, what is understood by a name. (SL 551/12.54)

We can therefore see how the import of ready-made concepts (*objection 1*) leads to belief in non-conceptual substrata which is precisely the target of *objection 2*. The assumption of non-conceptual substrata, however, is at odds with what metaphysics wants to achieve, namely to provide a conceptual determination for the being of things. For within the logic of application there always remains a presupposed realm of reality resisting conceptual determination altogether.

### 1.3 Hegel and Kant

Thus, in Hegel's estimation the lesson to be learned from the shortcomings of pre-Kantian metaphysics is that it matters substantially how exactly we go about the business of grasping things in thought, most importantly how exactly we derive and work with concepts. What is therefore required in order to escape the naïve metaphysics of the past is a critical evaluation of thought determinations themselves, a *critique of pure reason*. The recognition of this need is, according to Hegel, one of Kant's great achievements. Therefore, getting Hegel's own project right also means acknowledging his sense of indebtedness to Kant.

#### 1.3.1 Kant and the Critique of Categories

Hegel credits Kant with introducing the idea that philosophy requires a critique of categories. Still in 1831 (shortly before his death) Hegel commends Kant as an antidote against the "uncritical introduction of categories" (TWA 11.476) by highlighting

how regrettable it is that the study of Kant's Critique, due to a feeling of idleness, went out of fashion; what is to be learned from studying Kant is, for the very least, an educated method of thinking itself [...]. Without first having established such a method one should not go about any further philosophising, most especially no speculative philosophising. (TWA 11.476)

Kant's view that classical metaphysicians are guilty of a naïve use of thought determinations is something Hegel subscribes to wholeheartedly. However, he also thinks that Kant's own critique of categories is problematic in two respects, namely regarding its target and its scope.

In the first respect, it is *too weak* because it doesn't target the "truth" of categories but merely their relation to empirical content. Kant therefore blames classical metaphysics for extending the use of concepts beyond the realm of possible experience. Consequentially, he bans this "extravagant" [*überfliegend*] use of reason and restricts the legitimate use of categories to

(possible) appearance.<sup>16</sup> However, while thus restricting the scope of their applicability, Kant never subjected the categories themselves to a critique. Such a critique, Hegel argues, would have to question the *content* of given thought determinations and investigate to what extent they are suitable for expressing what things truly are without postulating indeterminate substrates. A principled restriction of categories to empirical content (as claimed by Kant), however, fails to contribute to this project.

In Hegel's judgment, a truly critical method would require a complete genetic exposition of the categories. While crediting Fichte (cf. TWA 2.9) for having understood this requirement, Hegel sees its fulfilment as the unique achievement of his own *Science of Logic* and its "presuppositionless" method.<sup>17</sup> For Hegel, the justification warranting the truth of any category is something that metaphysical thinking must not presuppose but indeed make its own, foremost task. Categories, far from being adequate expressions of reality immediately, "first need to receive their firm determination through thinking" (EL §31) itself. Hegel's own metaphysics therefore doesn't take any particular thought determination as a legitimate starting point. Instead, he derives the categories from an immanent development starting not with a determinate conception of things but instead with the highest possible level of abstraction, the thought of "[*b*]eing, pure being – without further determination" (SL 59/21.68).

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<sup>16</sup> For a comprehensive expression of this view see for instance the following passage from the *CpR*: "Thus all human cognition begins with intuitions, goes from there to concepts, and ends with ideas. Although in regard to all three elements it has sources of cognition *a priori* which seem at first glance to scorn the boundaries of all experience, a completed critique convinces us that reason in its speculative use can with these elements never get beyond the field of possible experience, and that the proper vocation of this supreme faculty of cognition is to employ all its methods and principles only in order to penetrate into the deepest inwardness of nature in accordance with all possible principles of unity, of which the unity of ends is the most prominent, but is never to fly across the boundaries of nature, outside which there is **for us** nothing but empty space" (B 730; Kant's emphasis throughout, cf. B 8–10; B 352; B 670–1).

<sup>17</sup> For an extensive discussion of Hegel's idea of presuppositionlessness cf. Houlgate (2005, 29–71; 2022a, 47–58). One of the things Houlgate highlights especially is that the further development of the initial thought of being receives determinations that are *entailed* but not analytically *contained* in it: "new concepts do arise that go beyond the mere thought of being as such" (45). Houlgate thus argues that the *Logic's* development is a "process of conceptual (self-)transformation" in which "the thought of being transforms itself [...] into the thought of becoming, infinity, and so on" (46). As I shall point out (cf. subsection 1.3.2) vis à vis Hegel's appropriation of the Kantian idea of the *synthetic a priori*, there is a similar idea of *growing-beyond-oneself* or *self-amplification* at work in Hegel's theory of the concept.

In Hegel's eyes, Kant's critique of the unwarranted use of categories therefore remains *too weak* in as much as it only restricts their applicability and leaves their content unscrutinised. At the same time, however, the restriction to the realm of possible experience also makes Kant's critique of metaphysics *too strong*. For it is due to this restriction that Kant has to treat concepts as *in principle* unable to express what things are in themselves. Kant's critique of metaphysics is thus too strong in as much as it denies that thought can ever provide a concept of things in themselves and so fails to provide a "science of *things* captured in *thoughts*" (EL §24) at all. Clearly distancing himself from Kant's project, Hegel therefore writes: "the Kantian philosophy did not consider the categories in and for themselves, but declared them to be finite determinations unfit to hold the truth" (SL 525/12.28).

To "hold the truth": what Hegel means by this is that categories are able to express what things are without leaving any aspect of their being outside the scope of what is accessible through these categories. Kant's transcendental idealism, as Hegel sees it, confronts us with an account of the concept of things that is in principle unable to provide truth in this sense. This is so because it claims that the concept of things leaves out their mind-independent reality which is granted only to a realm beyond the grasp of concepts, the realm of things in themselves. Hegel's point is that by stipulating this realm, Kant opts out of the traditional metaphysical project of grasping what things *truly* are. In Hegel's eyes, Kant's account undermines the very possibility of such a project because it rejects the relevant notion of truth:

*What is truth?*, he [Kant; cf. B 82] starts by *passing off* as a triviality the nominal definition that it is the agreement [*Übereinstimmung*] of cognition with its subject matter – a definition which is of great, indeed of supreme value. If we recall this definition together with the fundamental thesis of transcendental idealism, namely [...] that *reality* [things in themselves] lies *absolutely* outside *the concept*, it is then at once evident that such a *reason*, one which is incapable of *setting itself in agreement* with its subject matter, and the *things in themselves*, such as are not in agreement with the rational concept – a concept that does not agree with reality and a reality that does not agree with the concept – that these are *untrue conceptions*. (SL 523/12.26)

According to Hegel, Kant claimed that true concepts (concepts that do not leave the reality of things behind as an unknowable substratum) are impossible. However, due to the deficits of Kant's critique of categories, he is making this claim unwarrantedly. Kant, as Hegel might say,

never even tried to find the “true” concept of things and he is therefore in no position to declare this endeavour impossible.<sup>18</sup>

However, one might object to this analysis that Kant certainly provides an alternative to the metaphysical account of the object Hegel hopes to revive. For while we are indeed asked to do without knowledge of things in themselves, transcendental idealism offers an account of *empirical* objects as open to our conceptual grasp. Hegel recognises this, but he also points out that the empirical object as conceived by Kant is not only *open to* our conceptual activity but indeed *dependent on* it and hence not fully real.

For what the Kantian subject initially relates to is not an object with an intelligible structure but instead an unstructured plurality of sensual input.<sup>19</sup> The latter only turns into a world of well-defined objects once a subject enters the scene and unifies the sensuous manifold into coherent entities. What there is, independently of this subjective contribution, remains thoroughly unknown and unknowable. As a result, Hegel argues, Kant loses a grip on reality outside the realm of the mind. Hegel does not conceal his conviction that the Kantian view reduces the object to a construction of the mind and as such amounts to “psychological idealism” (SL 520/12.22). The resulting opposition of a mind-dependent world of empirical objects and the reality of unstructured material affecting our senses is, as Hegel leaves no doubt, a “view that must be given up as condition of philosophizing” (SL 518/12.21). For philosophy, as Hegel conceives it, must not let up prematurely in its effort to fully grasp what things are by thinking them over. Instead, the task is to develop our concepts towards more adequate expressions of reality and to thus “bring about the reconciliation of the reason that is conscious of itself with [...] actuality” (E §6).

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<sup>18</sup> For Hegel the failure of arriving at a conception of things as they are in themselves cannot count as critique accomplished; by contrast it evidences the failure of critique and, ironically, makes Kant guilty of the vice of pre-Kantian metaphysics, namely of substrate-thinking.

<sup>19</sup> This is not to say, of course, that Kantian subjects are *conscious* of this sensual plurality.



### 1.3.2 Kant's "Instinct" and Hegel's Appropriation

In face of this criticism, one may wonder what remains of Hegel's indebtedness to Kant other than granting him that he sparked interest in developing our use of categories. However, although Hegel thinks that officially Kant abandoned the project of grasping what things truly are, he also says that Kant preserved an "instinct" for speculative reason. This term, the "instinct of reason", denotes a tendency to bring about deep philosophical insights within a setting that is otherwise ill suited to grasp these ideas. An instinct of reason thus unwittingly brings about ideas that have the potential to grasp what things truly are. And it does so, even if this goes against the grain of what those acting out of such an instinct officially proclaim.

Hegel's position is that the point of metaphysics is to grasp what things are in thought – without seeking refuge in unknowable substrata. And this idea, he argues, guides all genuine philosophical endeavours – even if it happens tacitly, implicitly, or *instinctively*: the "instinct of thinking already points in this direction, namely that [...] truth, as it is known philosophically in the element of thought, has the form of universality" (TWA 20.474). In other words, the instinct of reason preserves the positively naïve metaphysics according to which what things truly or actually are is comprised in their concept.

Kant's official line is to deny this, as for him what things truly are – *in themselves* – is beyond the reach of concepts. But according to Hegel there is a Kant between the lines, one that has a strong "instinct" of reason and who unwittingly made very important contributions towards the goal of thinking things as fully determined by their concept. In this respect Hegel is especially impressed by two Kantian ideas: 1. *The unity of apperception* (cf. SL 515–6/12.17–19); and 2. *that there are synthetic judgments a priori* (cf. SL 519–20/12.22–3). According to Hegel, these Kantian insights pave the way for his own theory of the concept as accounting for the entire being of the object – without presupposing an unknowable realm of things in themselves.

The thought that Hegel finds appealing in the first idea of the unity of apperception, is that in order for there to be an object, there must be a source of unity within its manifold

determinations. The underlying problem is one of unity in the face of complexity which can be spelled out in various ways, as for instance in terms of unity among *many properties* or among *many material parts*. Kant had expressed the problem in an epistemic context by claiming that the ego, in order to have an object at all, must not simply take up manifold sensuous impressions, but must combine them according to universal rules. According to Hegel it is

one of the profoundest and truest insights to be found in the Critique of Reason that the *unity* which constitutes the *essence of the concept* is recognized as the *original synthetic unity of apperception*, the unity of the “*I think*,” or of self-consciousness. [...] *The object*, says Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* [...], is that, in the concept of which the *manifold* of a given intuition is *unified*. But every unification of representations requires a *unity of consciousness* in the *synthesis* of them. Consequently, this *unity of consciousness* is alone that which constitutes the reference of the representations to an object, hence their *objective validity*, and that on which even *the possibility of the understanding* rests. (SL 515/12.17–8)

The idea Hegel takes up from Kant is that the unity of the object depends on the presence of a concept, a universal rule according to which its complexity is organized into a whole.<sup>20</sup> Hegel also agrees that our minds do not find such unity in the sensuous appearance of things but instead have access to it through the act of *thinking*. Kant was therefore right to point out that thought in the form of the “*Ich denke*” is the correct way to understand unity as it emerges within consciousness. For with the transcendental unity of apperception

the nature of all consciousness has, to be sure, been correctly articulated. Human beings’ striving is directed generally at knowing the world, appropriating and submitting it to their will, and towards this end the reality of the world must, so to speak, be crushed, that is, idealized. (EL §42A)

However, Hegel firmly insists that the fact that we can grasp the world in this way is not rooted in finite subjectivity. According to him, our ego does not *create* the unity of the object but instead, in grasping the concept of an object, it *re-creates* a unity rooted in universal principles immanent to this thing itself. Conceptuality is for Hegel a feature of the world, not just of our minds. He

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<sup>20</sup> Here I am using the expressions “concept”, “thinking”, and “Ich denke” as expressions for the same idea of that which unifies manifold items into one object. This is in line with Kant’s account as for Kant, the concepts through which the subject provides unity to the sensuous manifold are nothing other than “particular determinations of yet higher laws, the highest of which (under which all others stand) come from the understanding itself” (A 126). The understanding, in turns, is identified by Kant with the “act of apperception, I think” (B 137) from which all unity emerges (cf. Haag 2015, 475). Concepts, in the plural of the word, are specific ways of carrying out this basic act of thinking.

therefore states: “[I]t needs to be noted that it is not the subjective activity of self-consciousness that introduces absolute unity into the manifoldness. This identity is rather, the absolute, the true itself” (EL §42A). Hegel can thus agree with Kant that the object derives its unity from something mind- or thought-like, while at the same time denying that it is dependent on the activity of *our* minds. In order to avoid the undesirable mind-dependence of the object, the source of its unity must be conceived of as a concept immanent to it.

The main reason for thus relocating the concept of the object in mind-independent reality is to avoid the fatal consequence of “subjective idealism” or the idea that what we encounter in reality is somehow our own creation. This idea has to be avoided not only because it turns our reality into a fiction; it also carries along the burden of an ultimately real but unknowable realm of things in themselves. As we have seen already, this (the postulation of unknowable substrata) is the cardinal vice of classical metaphysics which Kant tried but ultimately failed to exorcise.

The antidote to this line of thought is to show how we can think of the object as wholly constituted by the concept, that such an account does not have to concede anything that escapes the grasp of thought and remains behind as an unknowable substratum. At this point, I suggest, the problem of individuality becomes most pressing for Hegel. For if his strategy is to succeed, it turns out that it is necessary to not only explain the *unity* of the object in terms of its concept, but also its determination as an individual which has a particular way of being and is distinct from all other things. Unlike a more empirically inclined thinker, Hegel cannot leave individuality to some pre-given input that is added to universals or the empty forms of thought. Instead he aims to substantiate the claim that “*individuality and being-outside-of one-another*” are “thoughts and universals themselves. In the logic, it will be shown that thought and the universal are just this, namely to be itself as well as its other, that its reach extends over the other, and that nothing escapes from it” (EL §20R). Hegel has thus set for himself what the British philosopher Michael Foster once described as the “stupendous task of exhibiting Form as active in determining not merely specific differentiations, but the particular being of the separate instances of the species” (Foster 1931, 2).

In order for Hegel to succeed in demonstrating that there is no need for any non-conceptual basis of things, completing this task is very important. For if individual existence was to remain a non-conceptual remainder, protruding beyond the intelligible content of the object, then there would still be an intrinsically unknowable contribution inviting belief in an unknowable support of things.

For Hegel, it is therefore crucial to show that the concept of things also accounts for their reality as individual existents. This requires him to provide a theory of the concept that is not tantamount to what is merely common to many things (“abstract universality” in Hegel’s terminology) but instead capable of determining itself in particular ways and ultimately as a singular existent. The universality of the concept must therefore be shown to be *concrete* in the sense of being intrinsically tied to the further determinations or “moments” of *particularity* and *singularity*.<sup>21</sup>

Surprisingly, it is once more Kant who serves as an inspiration for Hegel regarding this theory of the concept. To be sure, the view Hegel regards as dominant in Kant is that concepts are applied to the empirical manifold while not having a source of further determination within themselves. On this view, there is a clear division of labour according to which concepts are empty forms which provide unity to an inherently diverse material delivered through the senses: when we apply the concept of *humanity* to an individual human being, this person’s particular character and individual distinctness are given independently from the in itself empty form of

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<sup>21</sup> Some readers may worry that attributing to Hegel an account of the universal that is productive of individual existents comes dangerously close to what Wilhelm Traugott Krug thought speculative philosophers (like Schelling and Hegel) are doing, namely to deduce the contingent reality and features of singular existents *a priori*: Krug (1801, esp. 74–5) famously pointed out the apparent impossibility of explaining *a priori* the concrete existence of even an ordinary object such as Krug’s writing pen as a counter-example to the perceived appeal to *a priori* deduction of singular existents in speculative philosophy. However, the objection (which was originally levelled at Schelling) does not apply to Hegel’s mature metaphysics of individuals. Hegel’s point is not that the concept necessitates the contingent features and existence of individual entities like Krug’s pen. He accepts that the latter exist contingently. What he does maintain is that, given the contingent existence of individuals, there must be something that explains what accounts for their separate existence. This something will ultimately turn out to be rooted in the concept of the individual, and more specifically in the universal immanent to the individual. While this strategy of explaining individuation by reference to the universal may be ambitious, it certainly is not trivially doomed to fail, as the witty Prof. Krug thought any idealist metaphysics of the individual was. For Hegel’s discussion of Krug’s objection see TWA 2.188–207 as well as the translation and introduction by di Giovanni and Harris (2000, 292–310). Furthermore, Henrich’s (1958) analysis of Hegel’s theory of contingency discusses “Krug’s pen” in some detail.

*humanity*. Both the internal complexity and the individual distinctness of the object thus remain outside of its concept. *This* Kantian view on concepts is deeply dissatisfying for Hegel's project of explaining the *entire* reality of the object in terms of its immanent conceptual structure.

At the same time, however, and this is the second crucial insight that Hegel detects between the Kantian lines, there are indicators for a competing account of the conceptual in Kant's notion of the *synthetic a priori*.<sup>22</sup> According to Hegel, the latter points towards an account of the universal that "contains difference within itself [*Idee von ... Allgemeinem, das an sich den Unterschied hat*]" (TWA 20.385). Hegel sees in this a precursor for his own theory of the concept which not only comprises universality but also the further determination of universality towards particularity and singularity. In this sense, a universal like *man* turns out not as an empty form, indifferent and externally applied to individuals and their particular way of being. Instead, universals such as *man* are considered to constitute the substantial basis on which there can be an individual human being with a particular way of being in the first place.

In Hegel's hands, Kant's appeal to an *a priori* determination of concepts turns out to be the idea that the universality of concepts is never just an empty form but always realized in the particular way of being of a separately existing individual. To treat the concept as an empty form would mean to isolate one of its moments, namely universality. But this, Hegel insists, is only an abstraction from how concepts determine the entire reality of things. "[O]ne cannot", Hegel therefore writes,

speak of the universal apart from determinateness which, to be more precise, is particularity and singularity. For [...] the determinateness is not being imported into the latter from outside. [...] the universal has determinateness in it above all as particularity; [...] [moreover it also] is *absolute determinateness*, that is, *singularity* and *concreteness*. (SL 532/12.35)

Admittedly, it is a long way from what Kant says about *synthetic judgments a priori* to what Hegel makes of it. Hegel's appropriation of Kant certainly is an unusual and creative one. However, it is true that the doctrine of *synthetic judgments a priori* appeals to a non-empirical determination of

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<sup>22</sup> There is surprisingly little discussion of Hegel's appropriation of Kant's notion of the synthetic a priori in the literature. Notable exceptions are Schulting (2005), Moss (2020, 346–8), and Houlgate (2022a, 44, 48).

concepts. Kant distinguishes synthetic judgments from analytic ones which “only break [...] up [a given concept] by means of analysis into its component concepts, which were already thought in it” (B 11). Synthetic judgments, by contrast, add new content to the initially given notion. This added content can be derived from experience (*a posteriori*) but – and this is crucial for Hegel – it can also arise “entirely *a priori* and from mere concepts” (B 13).

Hegel regards this as an attempt to articulate the view that concepts are not empty containers which have to be filled with empirical content but instead are productive sources of creativity that determine the reality of things all the way down to their individual existence. Kant himself, of course, never allowed such a use of the synthetic *a priori* and tied its legitimate application to the connection of *a priori* concepts with the equally *a priori* form of empirical intuition (cf. Wolff 2015, 2437; section 2.1). What is in Kant’s eyes an absolutely necessary restriction of how far the conceptual can grow beyond itself turns out for Hegel as a missed opportunity to explain how the concept of things can cover their whole being – *including their reality as individual existents*. In order to avoid the assumption of a non-conceptual remainder beyond the concept of the object, Hegel therefore insists, one has to further develop Kant’s original insight

that differentiation is an equally essential moment of the concept. Kant introduced this line of reflection with the very important thought that there are synthetic judgments *a priori*. His original synthesis of apperception is one of the most profound principles for speculative development; it contains the beginning of a true apprehension of the nature of the concept and is fully opposed to any empty identity or abstract universality which is not internally a synthesis. – The further development, however, did not live up to this beginning. (SL 519–20/12.22)<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Also cf. the following passages: “This is what is grand in this [Kant’s] philosophy. Kant demonstrates that thought is in itself concrete, that it contains synthetic judgments *a priori* which are not taken from experience. The idea contained in this is grand; its execution, however, remains tied to very ordinary, crude, and empirical views and therefore lacks all scientific character” (TWA 20.337). Hegel furthermore suggests that the idea of a synthesis *a priori* is at odds with Kant’s view that the conceptual is conditioned by the empirical given: “Here accordingly we have again the supposition that apart from the manifoldness of intuition the concept is *without content, empty*, despite the fact that the concept is said to be a synthesis *a priori*; as such, it surely contains determinateness and differentiation within itself. And because this determinateness is the determinateness of the concept, and hence the *absolute determinateness, singularity*, the concept is the ground and the source of all finite determinateness and manifoldness” (SL 520/12.23).

Hegel's project can thus be legitimately described as the attempt to explain how the individuality of things, including their differentiation from everything else, can be explained in terms of their concept. Despite his criticism and partly harsh polemics against Kant, Hegel sees himself as radicalizing originally Kantian insights; insights which remain dormant in Kant's official account and which can only be brought to life if they are freed from what Hegel calls Kant's "psychological idealism" (SL 520/12.22).

#### 1.4 Kant Through an Aristotelian Lens – and *Vice Versa*

In what follows I will shed some more light on the peculiar transformation of Kantian ideas in Hegel by making explicit Hegel's relation to Aristotle. On the one hand, Hegel finds his account of the concept prefigured in Aristotle and his appropriation of Kant is guided by this Aristotelian background. On the other hand, Hegel also applies the originally Kantian idea of a critique of categories to elements of Aristotle's philosophy. That way, Hegel can be seen as importing realism about the conceptual into his appropriation of Kant while at the same time he also applies Kant's appeal to a systematic evaluation of categories to his reading of Aristotle. As I hope to show, explaining this double commitment brings to light how Hegel's theory of the concept is embedded within the holistic approach of his metaphysics.

##### 1.4.1 *Kant Through an Aristotelian Lens*

In Hegel's hands, Kant's ideas get transformed into an idealism that is no longer subjective but *objective* in the sense that reality is treated not as mind-dependent but instead as mind-like. The underlying idea guiding this transformation is Hegel's belief that concepts are not forms applied to the world by a subject but instead the heart and soul of reality itself. This idea is so radically opposed to Kant's own philosophical intuitions that it requires a very specific perspective on transcendental idealism in order to turn it into a metaphysics based on Hegel's stern realism about the concept. This metamorphosis of the Kantian caterpillar into the Hegelian butterfly is possible only because Hegel reads Kant through an Aristotelian lens. And unless the peculiar refraction of this lens is made explicit, Hegel's standpoint will always remain strange and

wondrous. It is therefore important to disclose some of the Aristotelian background conceptions that inform Hegel's thinking.

For one thing, Hegel praises Aristotle for proceeding in accordance with what he himself takes to be the correct account of the conceptual. This is evident for instance in Aristotle's philosophy of nature and most of all in his metaphysics of purposiveness. Hegel finds in the latter a profound articulation of the basic idea that the universality pertinent to the concept is not passive i.e. an empty form applied to the world by us, but instead its own active principle of generation.<sup>24</sup> To be sure, Kant looms large in this context too. But the ideas presented in the *Third Critique* can only emerge as a contribution to Hegel's appropriation of Kant because he purges them of their subjective character and reads them in thoroughly Aristotelian terms.

The issue of purposiveness nicely illustrates the character of the "unusual marriage between Kant and Aristotle in Hegel" (Pippin 2019, 300 fn. 2). Hegel rejects the idea that cases of tool-like purposiveness where a subject turns something other than itself into a means for its own, subjective ends are paradigmatic. Instead, he believes that such tool-like or "external" purposiveness is derivative from immanent purposiveness where the goal to be achieved is situated within the means working towards the realization of the purpose. Kant gets the accolades for reviving this idea of immanent purposiveness after it had been put aside by early modern, mechanistic thinkers. However, Hegel leaves no doubt that, in doing so, Kant only reminds us of something Aristotle had established already:

With regard to the purpose, one should not immediately or should not merely think of the form in which it is in consciousness, as a determination on hand in the representation. Through the concept of inner purposiveness, Kant re-awakened the idea in general and that of life in particular. Aristotle's determination of life already contains the inner purposiveness and thus stands infinitely far beyond the concept of modern teleology which has only the finite, the external purposiveness in view. (EL §204R)

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<sup>24</sup> As Hegel points out, the conception of purpose which is operative in Aristotle "contrast[s] with the understanding's abstract-universal that relates itself to the particular (which it does not have in itself) only *by way of subsuming it*" (EL §204R).



Hegel thus sees Kant as bringing ideas back to the agenda that have an Aristotelian root. What is more, in developing his own account of purposiveness, Hegel reads Aristotle's committed realism about the concept back into and against the letter of Kant's philosophy. For without such an Aristotelian reframing, Kant remains too entangled with the "concept of modern teleology"<sup>25</sup> in as much as he treats purposiveness merely as a helpful epistemic principle and not as an account of the intelligible structure of mind-independent reality:<sup>26</sup>

[T]he connection of purpose is not a *reflective judgment* that considers external objects only according to a unity, *as though* an intelligence had given them to us *for the convenience of our faculty of cognition*; on the contrary, it is the truth that exists in and for itself and judges *objectively*, determining the external objectivity absolutely. (SL 656/12.159)

While Hegel acknowledges Kant's appeal to immanent purposiveness, he rejects Kant's subjectivist interpretation thereof. Instead he sides with Aristotle for whom "that for the sake of which a thing is, is its principle" (Met. IX.8, 1050a), not just a principle of *our* power of judgment.

My point is that here – and in general – Hegel remodels Kantian ideas within an overall realist account of the conceptual according to which the intelligible structure of things is not imposed onto them by knowers but dwells within them as their own principle. This vantage point is prefigured in Hegel's Aristotle interpretation, and it guides Hegel in his appropriation of Kant. The broader significance of Hegel's indebtedness to Aristotle thus concerns the latter's fundamental standpoint that the forms of thought are not just the *modus operandi* of our minds but at the same time forms of being.

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<sup>25</sup> Taylor (1975, 9–10) helpfully characterises the general attitude of this "modern view" by stating that from this vantage point "categories of meaning and purpose apply exclusively to the thought and actions of subjects, and cannot find a purchase in the world they think about and act on. To think of things in these terms is to project subjective categories".

<sup>26</sup> Kant writes for instance: "**inner natural perfection**, as is possessed by those things that are possible only as **natural ends** and hence as organized beings, is not thinkable and explicable in accordance with any analogy to any physical, i.e., natural capacity that is known to us; [...] The concept of a thing as in itself a natural end is therefore not a constitutive concept of the understanding or of reason, but it can still be a regulative concept for the reflecting power of judgment, for guiding research into objects of this kind" (AA 5:375).

For Hegel, it is thus the gravest possible mistake to read Aristotle's logical writings (e.g. the *Categories* and *Posterior Analytics*) as an analysis merely of how *we* use concepts. "The real philosophical value of Aristotle's logic", writes Hegel, is misunderstood if one assumes that

it was to express and contain just the activity of the understanding as consciousness; [that it was nothing but] a guide to thinking correctly, making it look like the movement of thought was something on its own [*etwas für sich*] and none of the business of what is being thought about, – laws of our understanding through which we derive insight but in the way of a mediation, a movement which is not the movement of things themselves. (TWA 19.238)

For on this view, the forms of thought remain "only subjective forms of the understanding against which the thing in itself remains as an other" (TWA 19.239). Aristotle, however, understood that the "[c]oncepts of the understanding or of reason are the essence of things" so that "for Aristotle too, the concepts of the understanding – the categories – are the essentialities of being" (TWA 19.240). These remarks about Aristotle's theory of categories are anything but a distanced historical analysis; they express instead a view to which Hegel is fully committed himself. For according to his own account, the concept is "not to be considered [...] as the act of the self-conscious understanding, not as subjective understanding, but as the concept in and for itself which constitutes a *stage of nature* as well as of *spirit*" (SL 517/12.20).<sup>27</sup>

Aristotle's view on the forms of thought being immanent to mind-independent reality thus conforms with Hegel's own account of metaphysics "as *expressing the essentialities of things*" (EL §24). In Aristotle, however, this commitment is not just valued in general but also specified in terms that Hegel, again, subscribes to. For according to Hegel's diagnosis, in Aristotle the realist attitude towards concepts coincides with the account of the concept as containing the further determination of the universal towards particular and ultimately singular ways of being. For instance, Hegel grants that Aristotle grasped the universal as a self-determining activity, as the

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Houlgate (2005, 116) who quotes this and further passages as evidence for the conceptual realist view. In the passage at hand, it is important to note that Hegel is not simply identifying the concept with either nature or spirit for the latter are to be seen as more concrete manifestations, 'downstream' so to speak, of the pure conceptual structure of reality. Thus, while the *Logic's* "universal determinations of thought" do inform the *Philosophy of Nature* as the "the diamond net into which everything is brought and thereby first made intelligible" (EN §246A), Hegel insists that this diamond net and its actuality can also be grasped in a pure form which is the proper task of logic as metaphysics.

“principle of livelihood, of subjectivity” (TWA 19.153), and he also recognises in him the view that “everything universal really exists [*ist ... reell*] as something particular and singular, as being for other” (TWA 19.204).

This view is indeed fundamental to Hegel’s own metaphysics and what allows him to articulate his claim that the forms of thought are not just “dead, ineffective, and indifferent receptacles of representations or thoughts” but instead “the living spirit of the actual” (EL §162R).

#### 1.4.2 *Aristotle Through a Kantian Lens*

However, emphasising Hegel’s debt to Aristotle to this degree then prompts the question: to what extent does Hegel’s metaphysics make an original contribution at all? Here my view is that while Hegel ultimately entertains positions that often are indeed very close to those of Aristotle, he rejects Aristotle’s method of arriving at them. In this respect, the picture of looking at Kant through an Aristotelian lens gets reversed – for the idea of a critique of thought determinations is an originally Kantian project which Hegel seeks to complete.

Hegel regards his most important, ancient interlocutor very much as a sort of *Wunderkind*, discovering philosophical insights by intuition rather than developing them in a self-consciously systematic way. Hegel’s judgment on *De Anima* expresses his general attitude towards Aristotle’s philosophy well: “it comprises a series of consecutive determinations which are not joined together into a whole according to necessity; each in its own sphere, however, is grasped both correctly and profoundly” (TWA 20.199).

The problem with Aristotle is not that he entertains one-sided or distorting conceptions, the problem is that he lacks a procedure of evaluating and justifying his conceptions. The demand for a critique of categories is something Hegel recognises as an original contribution of the philosophy of his own time, most especially of Kant. In *this* respect, Hegel looks at Aristotelian philosophy through a Kantian lens and raises the demand to give it what Kant called “a unity [...] in which, as in an organized body, every part exists for the sake of all the others as

all the others exist for its sake” (B xxiii). While Hegel would always insist that in Kant himself this project remains incomplete, he is also clear that Aristotle, despite his congenial insight into the nature of the concept, did not develop his ideas systematically:

Just like Aristotle’s philosophy in its entirety, so his logic [...] essentially needs to be molten down and to be shaped anew [*Umschmelzung*] so that the series of its determinations is turned into a necessary, systematic whole [...] so that it becomes a living whole in which each part has the significance of a part [of the whole] and only the whole as such contains the truth. (TWA 19.241–2)

This process of *melting down and shaping anew* is very much what happens in Hegel’s *Logic*. Although the forms of thought have been expressed by philosophers like Kant, Aristotle, and others, they cannot simply be collected but need to prove themselves within the *Logic*’s immanent process of evaluation – most of all by demonstrating that careful analysis of their implications does not reveal any appeal to what is intrinsically inexplicable such as unknowable substrata, brute facts, or infinite regresses.

Within this process, Hegel seeks to develop a conception of the object which covers its entire being including its individual existence.<sup>28</sup> Given Hegel’s holistic approach one cannot simply jump to just one stage of the dialectic and extract Hegel’s theory of individuality from it. Instead, one has to *follow* the development of thought to grasp where it is heading. At the same time, any analysis that seeks to not just re-narrate Hegel must also find a way to escape the pull of his extreme holism and identify a suitable point of entry. For my purpose of reconstructing Hegel’s solution to the problem of individuality, this entry point is the Doctrine of the Concept, more specifically, Hegel’s analysis of Judgment and Syllogism. On this level, Hegel has introduced the concept as what he takes to be – in principle – the correct view on the intelligible structure of reality. This means most of all that the concept comprises not just universality but finds an equally valid expression in the moments of particularity and singularity.

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<sup>28</sup> As pointed out above in my note on Krug’s pen (cf. fn. 21 in subsection 1.3.2) this does not mean that Hegel claims *a priori* knowledge of contingent existents and their features. Rather Hegel thinks that necessary conditions for anything to be an individual at all must be explicable within an *a priori* metaphysics of pure thought.

However, the basic account of the concept must undergo a development and prove itself in the course of it. Thus, even on this advanced level of the dialectic we will find that Hegel combines a critique of metaphysical positions with the development of views he positively endorses. The result of this process of evaluation and development thus turns out as what Hegel calls *the idea*. An adequate understanding of individual objects and of what makes them individuals is thus only achieved in the Idea chapter. At the same time, there is no way to grasp the content of this chapter other than by grasping the dialectic from which it arises. In the proceeding chapters we will thus examine step by step how Hegel develops his conception of the object throughout the dialectic leading towards the idea. The first rungs on the dialectical ladder to be examined now are Concept, Judgment, and Syllogism.

## 2 Concept, Judgment, and Syllogism

One of the things any reader of Hegel's *Logic* has to cope with is the intertwinement of critique and positive philosophical contribution that is characteristic for this work. In principle, this also applies to the *Logic*'s third part, the Doctrine of the Concept. However, in this part Hegel presents views that have the potential to make explicit the views he positively endorses. I use the expression potential, because even on this advanced level Hegel does not immediately present theories that he deems correct, or true in any direct sense. Rather, the ideas Hegel ultimately recommends are still presented in a processual way, a development, that makes certain ideas explicit through a dialectical engagement with partially adequate but still one-sided and thus partially deficient positions. The outline of the Doctrine of the Concept follows a tripartite structure comprising the major chapters [*Abschnitte*] Subjectivity, Objectivity, and The Idea. These major chapters are then structured in the following way:

### **Subjectivity**

1. The Concept
2. Judgment
3. Syllogism

### **Objectivity**

1. Mechanism
2. Chemism
3. Teleology

### **The Idea**

1. Life
2. The Idea of the Good
3. The Absolute Idea

In the first chapter, Subjectivity, Hegel discusses the moments of the concept, first in isolation, and then within a gradually evolving scheme of their interrelation. The first account of this interrelation follows the structure of judgments. The word “judgment” evokes the association of linguistic expressions, grammatical structures, and the like. For Hegel however, judgments are more than that, namely a manifestation (although a preliminary and ultimately insufficient one) of the shared structure of thought and being. Hence, by analysing the structure of judgment, Hegel means to elucidate one way of grasping thought or the concept as the structure of reality. More

specifically, that means that the moments of the concept are discussed in analogy to how subject and predicate are related in a judgment like, for instance: “Socrates is wise”. Hegel discusses various types of judgments which come to express the connection among the moments of the concept in ways more and more adequate to the goal of theorising the metaphysical structure of reality as fully transparent to thought.

However, there are principled limitations to the judgment model which have to do with its dyadic structure and the fact that the nature of the link between subject and predicate only gets a formal expression in terms of the copula “is”. It is due to this formality that in Judgment, the interrelation of singularity, particularity, and universality is only addressable in terms of an external connection and not in terms of a mutual requirement among these moments themselves. This structural limitation of the category of judgment is responsible for the fact that the corresponding accounts of objects do not allow the thinking of objects as fully transparent to conceptual thought. Instead these accounts either fail to explain important facts related to the constitution of the object, or the explanations they offer presuppose intrinsically unknowable entities such as bare substrata.

Hegel’s point is that these limitations are not absolute limitations of thinking as such but instead limitations that result from treating the structure of judgments as fundamental. Thus, instead of accepting any explanatory gaps or intrinsically unknowable substrata in relation to the constitution of the object, he advocates rethinking its structure in terms of a more advanced model which he finds exemplified in syllogistic inferences. The analysis of Syllogism then delivers a more refined account of relating the moments of the concept. The resulting model of the object offers a better understanding of how an individual substance can be a bearer of qualities.

However, as we shall see in due course, this does not complete Hegel’s theory of the object. Instead, when reaching the Objectivity chapter, we find ourselves confronted with what appears to be a major revision to the ontological framework used to analyse the structure of the object. The categories discussed in Objectivity (Mechanism, Chemism, Teleology and Life) are

reminiscent of the ones used in Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*. However, Hegel does not slip into an empirical analysis but instead continues his metaphysical project of demonstrating what we need to take into account in order to think objects as both mind-independent and fully transparent to conceptual thought. As I shall argue later on, the reason why this requires the surprising revision of his ontological framework has to do with the fact that he accepts becoming and change as fundamental features of reality.

The final level of the Doctrine of the Concept is entitled "The Idea" and comprises the sub-chapters Life, The Idea of the Good, and The Absolute Idea. It is especially the first sub-chapter, namely Life, which unfolds what Hegel thinks are the paradigmatic cases of objects as both mind-independent and yet fully transparent to conceptual thought. On this level, we will find one of the richest expressions of Hegel's theory of individuality and consequentially advanced solutions to the problems of unity and difference. It is key to Hegel's account, that these problems can be solved without any appeal to an intrinsically unknowable component or aspect of the reality of individuals. This project, if successful, must be achievable within pure thought i.e. without seeking refuge in a presupposed realm of empirical reality. In other words, for Hegel, individuality must be explicable as a consequence of the conceptual structure of reality, not in terms of a non-conceptual addition to it.

This, in very broad strokes, is the development of Hegel's account of the object within the Doctrine of the Concept. It is now important to fill in the details, to explain the moves Hegel makes on the way and to thus provide an interpretation of how Hegel ultimately tries to explain how objects can be and be conceived as individual entities by means of their concept.

In what follows I will not provide a reconstruction of all steps and chapters Hegel presents us with. This would be the task of a commentary and I have no intention of writing one. Instead I will do my best to find a red thread within Hegel's dialectic that makes transparent how he arrives at his conception of paradigmatic cases of individuals. In the course of this I will give a brief account of the concept and its moments (section 2.1) and then proceed to an analysis of the



chapters on judgment and syllogism (section 2.2). The latter provide a model of the object that makes some aspects of its individuality explicable (cf. summary in section 2.3).

However, a still more developed account of what Hegel regards as an individual will become transparent on the level of the idea of Life. This makes it necessary to also interpret the major revision Hegel's ontology undergoes at the transition to the Objectivity chapter. While I will have very little to say about the Chemism chapter,<sup>29</sup> I will then (in the chapters to follow) explain in detail the more fundamental opposition between Mechanism on the one hand and Teleology on the other, and especially the account of immanent purposiveness Hegel presents in Life. On this basis, I will then explain what I take to be his solutions to the problems of unity and difference.

## 2.1 The Concept and its Moments

What stands at the beginning of the dialectic of Judgment and Syllogism is the idea that deductive reasoning in terms of judgments and syllogisms is not just something subjects do but also betrays fundamental features of the ontological structure of mind-independent reality. Regarding its result, this train of thought builds on the fact that syllogisms address three basic elements: universal kinds such as "human being", particular properties such as "mortal", and single individuals such as "Socrates". These basic elements constitute what Hegel calls the "moments of the concept", that is:

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<sup>29</sup> Chemism (SL 645–50/12.148–53) is an intermediate category which is situated (textually and regarding its philosophical function) between Mechanism and Teleology. Hegel deals here with the ontological structure of entities that are explicable only in relation to a counterpart. This logic is said to apply, for instance, to certain chemical entities such as pairs of acid and base but also to pairs of lovers or friends. The peculiar idea that there is a common logic to such different realms of reality is probably inspired by Hegel's reading of Goethe's (1996) novel *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* where a group of intimately related friends seeks to explain changes in their relationships by analogy to chemical reactions. My purpose will be to exhibit why Hegel thinks that final causation is required in order to understand the paradigmatic sense of unity as it pertains to individual substances. Mechanism is important for understanding that without teleological principles the idea of unity cannot be articulated, while teleology (and life) demonstrate how this is indeed possible. Chemism could be seen as a further step on the way towards a paradigm of substantial unity. However, I think we can see the crucial contrast between mechanistic and purposive thinking more clearly if we avoid an excursus on this intermediate category of which Hegel himself says that "it can be taken together with mechanism" (SL 652/12.155) in as much as the distinctive contribution of final causation is of concern.

- *universality* (the kind to which an individual belongs),
- *particularity* (the particular qualities or properties of an individual), and
- *singularity* (the individual's being one thing, distinct from all others)

As Hegel argues, fully characterising the ontological structure of an individual substance requires consideration of all three moments. However, this threefold structure is not immediately present when Hegel begins his analysis by studying the ontological implications of judgments. Judgments, as opposed to syllogisms, have a two-place structure so that only two of the moments mentioned above can be addressed at a time. As a result, the fine-grained distinction between qualities (particularity) and kinds (universality) gets blurred in the beginning so that we start with a binary model of singular existents and property-universals. To see how Hegel reconstructs the more advanced structure of syllogisms from his study of judgments, we have to follow his analysis step by step.

## 2.2 From Judgment to Syllogism

### 2.2.1 *Judgments as a Model of the Object*

A judgment like “This rose is red” can be interpreted grammatically in terms of a predicate (P) that is said of a subject (S). On this account, “S is P” refers to the relation between words. At the same time, we use such expressions to say something about the world. Thus, unless one takes a radically sceptical stance, something in the world must correspond to such utterances in order to make them informative in the way we normally take them to be. Thus, while the grammatical analysis is perfectly valid, Hegel is more interested in the corresponding ontological implications.

In the example given above it is a *singular* existent (this rose) and a *universal* (here a *property-universal*: redness) that is attributed to the former. Hegel then suggests analysing this basic form of “S is P”-judgements in terms of a conjunction of singular existent and universal which serves as a first model of things. The result of his analysis is mostly negative because this model leaves it unclear how the singular existent and its properties hang together. Foreshadowing the more advanced, threefold model of the syllogism, Hegel says about one stage of his analysis of

judgments that “[s]ingularity and universality cannot yet be united into particularity” (SL 561/12.63). Within a hierarchy of more and more sophisticated judgments, this deficiency can then be partly remedied and ultimately cured on the level of the syllogism – or so Hegel hopes to show.

The problem he diagnoses with all models fashioned after the structure of judgments is that they do not adequately address the nature of the relation between singular existents on the one hand and the universals exemplified by them on the other. In fact, “S is P”-judgments represent this relation only in terms of the linking verb (or “copula”) “is”, so that while there is an element indicating a relation, its nature remains unclear. What one ought to do in order to remedy this lack is to equip the mysterious copula with a more precise meaning. In the course of his analysis of different types of judgments, Hegel explores ways to take a position on the so far under-theorised connection between singular existents and universals. Two of these accounts can be explained and evaluated in terms of what contemporary metaphysicians call *bundle* and *substratum* views of individual substances.<sup>30</sup> I will now explain both and show in what ways they are problematic. As I hope, this will help us to see that Hegel’s move to reject both models is indeed plausible.

### ***Judgment as Bundle Theory***

One natural reaction (to the initial model) might be to interpret the copula as expressing an identity-relation between S and P<sup>31</sup> so that, ontologically speaking, an individual thing really is nothing but its various properties. Hegel addresses a version of this account when he points out that certain judgments suggest that “*the singular is universal and vice versa*” (SL 562/12.64). He notes that in this relation the position of the subject is collapsed into that of the predicate. As a

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<sup>30</sup> While I will be focussing on the *Logic*, it should be noted that these positions are also critically discussed in the *Phenomenology’s* Perception chapter (§111–31/9.71–81). For a reconstruction of this material cf. Stern (1990, 35–41).

<sup>31</sup> In a remark early on in the *Logic*, Hegel writes that the “[j]udgment joins subject and object in a connection of *identity*” (SL 67/21.78).

consequence, this model does without any underlying entity that would “carry” or “hold” the properties:

The subject, the *immediate singular* at first, is in the judgment itself referred to its *other*, namely the universal; it is thereby posited as the *concrete* – according to the category of being, as a something of *many qualities*; or as the concrete of reflection, *a thing of manifold properties*, an *actual of manifold possibilities*, a *substance* of precisely such *accidents*. Because these manifolds here belong to the subject of the judgment, the something, the thing, etc., is in its qualities, properties, or accidents, reflected into itself, or *continues* across them, maintaining itself in them and them in itself. (SL 559/12.62)

Hegel uses here terminology stemming from different stages of the *Logic* (*a something of many qualities, a thing of manifold properties, ...*). The common theme however is that the role of the subject (*a something, a thing, a substance ...*) is collapsed into that of the predicate (*many qualities, properties, or accidents*). In terms of the idiom of things and their properties, this means that the thing just *is* its properties and that there is no delineable sense of an underlying subject “having” these properties.

In contemporary terms, this model is familiar as the “bundle theory”. According to it, things are bundles of contingently assembled property-universals (often referred to as “attributes”). The bundle theory gets the credit for parsimoniousness since only one type of constituents is postulated. As a result, the distinction between an individual thing and its properties vanishes and with it the distinction between universals and their instances:

Accordingly, [...] bundle theorists [...] deny that the distinction between attributes and the particulars [= individual substances, LW] that have them is an ontologically fundamental distinction. At the ontologically most basic level, there are only attributes; if it makes any appearance at all, the concept of a thing that has or exemplifies an attribute appears as a derived or constructed notion. Thus, bundle theorists [...] who are metaphysical realists about attributes will deny that the distinction between universals and particulars is an ultimate distinction. They will insist that at rock bottom there are only universals; and they will explain universality not by speaking of a property’s being exemplifiable by numerically different objects but in terms that make no reference to a subject for or exemplifier of a property. (Loux 2006b, 91)

However, despite its elegance, the bundle theory raises a number of questions concerning the problems (of unity and difference) I spelled out in the introduction of this thesis. Capturing individuals as unified wholes, for instance, is difficult on this account. What constitutes the bundle of an individual is, as bundle-theorists argue, the joint instantiation of its properties

typically referred to as their “compresence” (cf. Armstrong 1989, 70–1; Hoffman and Rosenkrantz 2002, 36). What proponents of the bundle-theory tend to agree on is that the compresence relation is metaphysically primitive. That way, they argue, the specific assembly of properties in an individual substance is contingent and cannot be further explained (cf. Loux 2006b, 91): while the bundle is supposed to be yoked together through the compresence of its properties, due to the primitiveness of compresence, nothing can give a further explanation of why these properties are so arranged.

A worry about this view is that it overplays the role of contingency for the constitution of objects. Properties do not simply “happen” to be instantiated jointly. There is, it may be felt, at least some structure to the constitution of bundles that does not surface within the theory of contingent compresence. For instance, while a tree could exemplify properties like “having leaves” or “being 2m high” there are some properties that could not possibly enter a tree-bundle such as “being wise” or “having legs”. At the same time it is hard to see how it could pass as mere contingency that the offspring of human parents has at least some characteristics that are typically instantiated in human beings. Compresence, it seems, is much too weak as an “ontological glue” (Loux’s expression) between properties in order to account for the amount of structure we find in individual substances.

The underlying issue with the idea of compresence is that it is usually introduced as an undefined relation, that is: the only thing we seem to know about it is that it turns collections of properties into unified individual substances. However, we do not get an answer as to how that works. As Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2002, 36–7) helpfully point out, attempts to provide a further explanation of compresence often involve appeal to a unifying principle other than the relation of compresence. Russell for instance illustrated the idea of compresence by analogy to the unity of “simultaneous parts of one experience”: “I am seeing certain things, hearing others, touching others, remembering others, and expecting yet others. All these percepts, recollections, and expectations are happening to me now; I shall say that they are mutually ‘compresent’”

(Russell 2009, 287–8). But in this example, it is not really compresence that turns many mental representations into one experience, but it is the mind or “I” that makes this experience.

However, if compresence is said to unify similar to the way in which a mind does, then the question remains: how does a mind unify many items into one? The suspicion arises that the very idea of compresence tacitly directs thought to something other than the relation itself that does the work of unification.

Another predicament arises regarding the problem of numerical difference. If things are nothing but their properties, the only way for them to be distinct from one another is to differ *qua* properties. But if things were really built that way, it would be impossible for two things to exemplify the same properties. Although it may be extremely improbable for two men or two trees to share all their properties it is not logically inconceivable.

Thus, as Stern (2009d, 347) points out, the bundle theory implies an “implausibly strong version of Leibniz’ principle of the identity of indiscernibles” (PII). This strong version of PII only permits what is called “pure” properties, that is, features that a thing exemplifies independently from its relations to other things. A more permissive version of the principle might allow for impure (or “relational”) properties such as “being identical with X” or “being 2m left of Y” as the ground of difference. That way, things with identical pure properties could still differ in virtue of their impure ones. (Imagine two exactly similar tourists, one of which standing 2m left and the other 3m right of Big Ben.) But under closer scrutiny it turns out that this line of defence is unavailable to bundle-theorists:

According to the bundle theory, an individual, such as Marengo, the horse, literally consists of its pure properties, such as, for instance, *whiteness*, *strength*, and so on. Marengo, as the white, strong individual that he is can then also have impure or relational properties such as *standing a mile away from* another horse such as Copenhagen. On this account, there is a chain of ontological dependence tying impure properties to individuals and individuals to pure properties. As a consequence, it is possible to explain one in terms of the other following the chain of

ontological dependence from pure properties to individuals, and from those to impure properties. But ontological dependence is a one way road (i.e. *asymmetrical*) so that this chain cannot be reversed: either impure properties depend on individuals or the other way round. However, if the former is the case, the route to an explanation of distinct individuals in terms of their impure properties is obliterated. Thus the bundle theorist must retreat to the strong version of PII according to which numerical difference among individuals demands distinct bundles of pure properties. As Van Cleve (2008, 122) puts it:

Impure properties, if such there be, are ontologically derivative from individuals; individuals, if the bundle theory is true, are ontologically derivative from [pure] properties. One cannot have it both ways. Hence, the bundle theory cannot admit impure properties, and is committed to the consequence that no two individuals can have all the same *pure* properties.

Another way of elucidating this objection is to point to the nature of relations such as *standing a mile away from*. This relation is instantiated if and only if two things, say M and C, do indeed stand a mile apart from one another. That, however, makes numerical distinctness among M and C a condition for there to be a relation such as *standing a mile away from*. Therefore, it is not possible to explain numerical distinctness among M and C by appeal to relations among them. Instead, on a bundle theoretic conception, for M and C to be two things, they must differ in terms of their pure or non-relational properties.

### ***Judgment as Substratum Theory***

In light of this outcome, one may seek refuge in a different interpretation of the “S is P”-relation, namely one according to which “the predicate [...] takes on the form of something that does not subsist on its own but has its foundation in the subject” (SL 557/12.60). According to the new model, “is” does not indicate identity but translates to “has” or “bears”. When we say “S has P” or “S bears P” we arrive at a different ontological construct. Here, things involve (besides their properties) an underlying substratum that bears the properties. The point is, that this substratum is supposed to be not a property itself, and, as it were, “bare”; hence, the canonical name of “bare substratum theory”.

Initially, it seems, this model performs exceedingly well on the problems of unity and difference: unity is accounted for because the properties of a thing are joined together by one single substratum. At the same time, if each thing has its *own* substratum, no two things could share one so that even if they are property-wise identical they remain distinct by virtue of their substrata. However, upon closer examination substratum theories run into a number of difficulties.

One argument against substratum-theory is, that, on second glance, it does not really solve the problem of difference: for if the substrata have no features at all, how exactly do they differ from one another? Bare substrata, it seems, merely shift the problem to a lower level. But then, on this level, the question of what generates difference, resurfaces. Most likely, substrata would have to generate their differentiation in some non-qualitative way while at the same time it is hard (if not impossible) to explain how that works. What is more, the substratum-view forces upon us the provocative idea of an ontological constituent that is unknowable and as such merely a postulate of philosophical theory. Some philosophers will react to this with an attitude of acquiescence, as Locke is often said to have done in his view on substance:

The idea then we have, to which we give the general name substance, being nothing but the supposed, but unknown, support of those qualities we find existing, which we imagine cannot subsist sine re substante, without something to support them, we call that support substantia; which, according to the true import of the word, is, in plain English, standing *under* or upholding. (Locke 1997, II.xxiii.2)

The idea here seems to be that the explanatory force of introducing the substance of things as an unknowable bearer of qualities outweighs the cost of postulating an intrinsically mysterious entity. But of course this sort of explanation resting on the utterly inexplicable is less than ideal and so provokes the search for alternatives. Hegel, on his part, set out to do away completely with this sort of metaphysics that appeals to unknowable entities (cf. Theunissen 1978, 52). Therefore, it is not surprising that, in his discussion of judgments, he turns against the assumption of an “empty indeterminate ground” or a “*thing without properties*” (SL 554/12.57) that the substratum theorist must make.



### 2.2.2 *Syllogisms as a Model of the Object*

So far, both interpretations of the judgment as an ontological model leave us wanting in the ways described above. The suspicion arises that there is something deeply wrong with this paradigm. Hegel's diagnosis is that judgments leave a crucial element under-theorised, namely the nature of the relation between the singular existents and their properties. But if attempts to save the judgment as a paradigm fail, as they do, it is natural to seek for a new paradigm. In fact, Hegel shows that the more sophisticated types of judgments implicitly point to this new paradigm. This becomes evident especially in the "judgment of necessity". The emerging new paradigm is formed in a two-step process that involves 1) a development on the level of *content* (to put it in more modern terms, a new ontological constituent) and 2) on the level of *form* which will lead to syllogisms as the new paradigm.

Let's have a closer look at 1): As is familiar from the discussion of judgments above, property-universals can function as predicates. But this, as Hegel is eager to show, is not the only sort of entity the predicate of a judgment can correspond to. Besides property-universals like "red" there are universals like "being a plant" or "being human". Hegel calls the latter type "concrete universals" and insists that they must be analysed differently from property universals. Hence,

to throw together into one class these judgments:

[a] The rose is red,

[b] The rose is a plant,

[...] and thus to take such an external property as the color of a flower as a predicate equal to its vegetable nature, is to overlook a difference which the dullest mind would not miss. (SL 576/12.87)

The difference is that the rose could well be yellow or pink or white instead of red, but if it were to be anything other than "a plant", it would cease to be a rose at all. Thus, unlike in a), in case b), the connection between the singular rose and its predicate is *necessary*. The important point for Hegel is that this necessity stems from the content: In a) what we are talking about is an "external property" whereas in b) we address the very "nature" of the so characterised thing. While things

may or may not have a certain feature, they could not be what they are independently from their inner essence. The new content that emerges on this level of Hegel's analysis consists in the inner nature or essence of things. More specifically, Hegel identifies these inner essences with the broadly Aristotelian idea of secondary substance, that is, the kind to which something belongs. Terminologically he distinguishes this type of entity from property-universals and, stressing their inner connectedness to concrete objects, calls them "concrete universals".

This type of universal forms the new logical content that was so far neglected on the level of judgments. The most important asset that goes along with introducing concrete universals is the inner and closely knit connection they have to their instances. Unlike property universals that individuals may or may not have, concrete universals (like "being a plant" or "being human") are substantial for each and every member of the kind: "Matters are the same if we say 'Caius is a human being'; in this way we declare that everything that he may otherwise be only has value and meaning insofar as it corresponds to this, his substantial nature, to be a human being" (EL §177A).

We are on the cusp of replacing the copula as a formal and contingent principle of connecting singular existents and universals by a principle that is rich in content and forms a necessary connection – something that ties the many features of a thing together without the sense of arbitrariness that we found so regretful in the bundle theory. At the same time there is no regression into the substratum-theorist's empty and featureless substance, because the new connecting-principle is not an "unknowable something": Gajus' "humanity" is perfectly open to rational inquiry while Gajus' alleged bare substratum is not. What has just been said gives us a first idea of Hegel's positive ontological claims about the structure of things. But to fully grasp the way concrete universals help us with the problem of individuality, we need to take into account the aforementioned second innovation, 2) the *formal* one.

So far we have seen how Hegel has broadened his ontological account by virtue of introducing a new constituent, so that besides singular existents and property-universals there are

concrete universals or kinds. The next question is how these three types of entities are related to each other. Here, the aim is to do away with the ungrounded S-P-relation represented by the copula and work towards the “fulfilled [*erfüllte*] unity of subject and predicate” (SL 556/12.59). Hegel claims that this can be achieved if we fashion our ontological model after syllogisms instead of judgments.

The problem on the previous level was that whenever we say “S is P”, one can ask: by virtue of what is it that “S is P”? Now, the judgment of necessity has shown that some predicates have an inner, and in fact, *necessary*, connection to the thing of which they are said. But, it may seem, pointing to the modal strength of the connection is yet an incomplete way of remedying its lack of grounding. Luckily, the introduction of the concrete universal does not only allow for broadening the roster of ontological constituents but also for expanding the *formal* structure of the model in question.

Roughly speaking, the Hegelian cure for the problem is to replace the two-place structure of the judgment-ontology with the threefold structure of syllogisms. The reason this will help is that whenever there is a relation between two constituents, there is a third one that can account for the grounding of their connection. This idea becomes clearer with an example. Here is a syllogism Hegel often refers to:

- (1) All humans are mortal.
- (2) Socrates is a human.
- (c) Socrates is mortal.

On a formal level, a syllogism like the one above, consists of three logically connected sentences. All of them have the form of a judgment. Again, the focus is not on the grammatical structures involved but on the corresponding ontological commitments. Now, the conclusion qualifies Socrates as mortal. But this time, if one asks *by virtue of what this is the case*, there is an answer. It is Socrates’ belonging to “all humans” which connects him with the property of “being mortal”. Socrates is mortal *qua* being human. As such, the connection is no longer empty, but filled with

content (“being human”, in this case). The syllogistic structure is more advanced because it *explains* the “unity of the extremes” (SL 589/12.91) rather than simply stipulating it, as an isolated judgment would.

When I say that there is an innovation on the level of *form* I do not mean the fact that in “formal” logic one can draw conclusions from premises. As I said above, Hegel has little interest in this aspect of the syllogism and criticises the related type of formal interpretation as empty and even “disgusting” (cf. SL 604/12.106). Taken as a means of drawing conclusions from premises, the structure of the syllogism “is nothing but a subjective form” (SL 593/12.95). By contrast, he has a strong interest in the way things are ontologically built when we take the form of the syllogism as a new ontological paradigm. This is what Hegel means when he, unconventionally, identifies syllogisms with “things” viz. the “nature of things” (SL 593/12.95).

According to this model, the syllogism points to three types of entities plus a way of connecting them. Socrates is a singular existent and “being mortal” is a property-universal. “Being human” is, as we know from our analysis of the judgment of necessity, not another property-universal but a *concrete universal* viz. a *kind*. Now, what sort of structure does the form syllogisms imply? “Socrates is mortal *qua* being human” suggests that we can see the kind as that which connects the *individual* human being (Socrates) to its *particular* qualities expressed by property *universals* (like being mortal). The point is that we now have the basic outline of a model that combines the advantages of bundle- and substratum-models while avoiding their shortcomings: Like the substratum-theory the new model includes an account of substance that ties the many properties of a thing together. At the same time, it does take the bundle-theorist’s abstention from unknowables seriously because the underlying substance is not unknowable but – as an Aristotelian kind – itself a universal.

Playing on the etymology of the German word “schließen”, Hegel thus points out that according to the new model we find that the connection between a singular existent and its properties is accounted for by the kind to which this individual essentially belongs: “The singular

is yoked together [*zusammengeschlossen*] with the particular through the *universal*” (TWA 4.151, §45). On this account, actual things are rightly understood only if we grasp this connection between their kind, their being as individuals together with their particular features: “*All things are a kind* (their determination and purpose) in one *singular actuality* with a *particular quality*” (EL §179).

In review, then: Hegel’s proposal for an ontological model of things builds on the introduction of kinds (concrete universals) and the idea that these can account for the connection between the singular existence of an individual thing and its qualities. While the former is an innovation on the level of logical content and can be traced back to certain, advanced forms of judgments, the full potential of Hegel’s theory only becomes explicit when taking into account the formal structure of syllogisms. I will now provide a concluding evaluation of the result of the Subjectivity chapter and then make an attempt to explain the notoriously difficult transition to Objectivity.

### 2.3 The Result of Subjectivity

The dialectic of Subjectivity (as presented in the preceding chapters) emerges as a critique of different models of the object. In Judgment we have seen that both a bundle theoretic account and the substratum theory are problematic. In both cases the way properties are connected to the individual that has them remains undertheorised in a way which is represented by the formality and emptiness of the copula. In Syllogism this lack is overcome by a new proposal, namely that the connection between the individual and its properties is not just formally represented by the copula but instead established by the kind to which the individual belongs. This makes it possible to think of individuals as having their properties in virtue of their kind. The latter thus figures as an immanent essence and it is *substantial* (a “substance-kind”) in as much as it determines that manifold properties are unified into a single object. The resulting substance-kind view of the object thus gives content to what is represented in “S is P”-judgments as a mere placeholder (the copula), namely the tie between an individual and its character. On the new model of the object,

it is the kind as immanent essence or substance-kind which binds manifold properties into a single whole so that they constitute one, unified thing.

On the one hand, Syllogism thus restores the tripartite structure of the concept which, in the dyadic judgment, remained in the background. On the other hand, Hegel wants to show that the concept's complexity in terms of its moments is not to be understood in terms of separate constituents. Their mutual mediation is therefore improperly understood (as merely "formal or subjective" SL 623/12.125) if it is seen as the joining of separate entities into a whole. Instead, mediation is to be seen as the articulation of aspects of a primary unity and each of these aspects turns out to be incomplete without the others. Consequentially, Hegel emphasises the idea that what mediates connections such as the one between the individual and its properties is not independent from what it connects: kinds do not exist independently of individuals and their particular character. Instead these entities are mutually requiring aspects ("moments") of a single reality (the concept) and the mediation which occurs between them is nothing like gluing together independent, pre-existing components. The syllogistic mediation between the conceptual moments thus is the articulation of complexity within primary unity, the unity of the concept.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, by the end of the dialectic of Syllogism we are meant to grasp that that "which is mediated is itself an essential moment of what mediates it" (SL 624/12.125). The dialectic of Syllogism thus turns out to be a further development of what Hegel had already foreshadowed in his account of the concept, namely that "one cannot speak of the universal apart from determinateness which, to be more precise, is particularity and singularity" (SL 532/12.35) and that likewise "individuals [and their particular qualities] would not be at all without this, their genus" (EL §175A).

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<sup>32</sup> I think that Hegel does not see the need to explain the unity of the concept in as much as explaining would mean to show how it comes about. The concept is one and therefore its moments cannot exist independently from one another. They can be distinguished and treated separately (as for instance in Judgment) but this is to be seen as an abstraction from their unity in the concept (and not *vice versa*). What does require an explanation, though, is how the manifold determinations of an object, its *many* properties or its *many* material parts, make up a whole. Here, unity cannot be treated as primitive.

Regarding the resulting account of the object, it is important to distinguish two levels of complexity. On the one hand the concept which articulates the structure of each thing is complex in terms of its moments. The dialectic of Concept, Judgment, and Syllogism then demonstrates how this complexity can be understood as an articulation of the concept's unity. Thus, there are not really separate constituents, as it were, 'put together' but, as I said, incomplete and mutually requiring moments that articulate a primary unity.

On the other hand, one of these moments, namely particularity, refers to another level of complexity, namely the manifold properties of the object. And this complexity needs to be reduced into a unity in order to make up one, single individual. This is precisely the role played by the universal viz. kind, namely to determine that the complexity of particularity is wound up into the unified being of an individual. Outlining this function of the kind within the mutual mediation of the moments of the concept is one of the most important functions of the dialectic of Concept, Judgment, and Syllogism. By its end we are meant to see how the concept gives structure to the object and accounts for the fact that it is not a mere plurality of items waiting to be joined by an epistemic subject, but indeed gives this unity to itself through the mediation of its concept. It is the fact that particularity is mediated through universality which explains that it can be the particularity of one, single individual.

As things stand, one might therefore be tempted to assume that by the end of Subjectivity, Hegel has completed his metaphysical outline of the object. This apparent success, however, cannot be the end of the story, for it is followed by a long and complex discussion of what Hegel calls "objectivity" and "life". Strangely, this discussion is marked by the use of a profoundly different terminology, which moves from talking in Subjectivity about the unity of objects in terms of how their properties relate to their kind, to talking in Objectivity (and Life) about this unity in *more material* terms which are in part more reminiscent of the *Philosophy of Nature* than the high level of abstraction of the *Logic*. The transition has therefore been the

subject of various interpretations. Before I explain my own view on the matter, I will discuss some of these accounts.



### 3 The Transition from Subjectivity to Objectivity

This chapter provides an interpretation of the transition Hegel makes from Subjectivity to Objectivity. To begin with, I provide a summary of existing views on the transition (section 3.1). Starting from the assumption that both chapters contribute to an ontological interpretation of objects, I raise the question why and how Hegel adopts a visibly different ontological framework in Objectivity. As an analysis of the notions used in both chapters reveals, in Objectivity Hegel makes use of terms largely absent in the previous chapter (section 3.2). Most notably, this concerns the notions of matter, efficient causation, form, and purpose. These notions represent the typical conceptual arsenal of hylomorphic ontologies, and my position is that Hegel indeed adopts a form of hylomorphism in Objectivity and Life (section 3.3). Against this backdrop, I draw a parallel to the introduction of hylomorphism in Aristotle's mature work and suggest that Hegel may also have pursued a similar goal by introducing a version of this framework (section 3.4). This goal is to account for the reality of change. Section 3.5 demonstrates why the non-hylomorphic framework of Subjectivity falls short of adequately explaining change, and I substantiate my claim that this is indeed Hegel's motive for adopting a new ontological framework in Objectivity and Life. In this context, I also provide an interpretation of Hegel's curious remark that the transition towards Objectivity is related to the ontological proof of God (section 3.6). Explaining these challenging and *prima facie* surprising moves at the heart of Hegel's *Logic* will help to subsequently (Chapters 4-5) provide an interpretation of Hegel's views on the unity of the object.

#### 3.1 Views on the Transition

The transition and the subsequently introduced categories of mechanism, chemism, and life have irritated interpreters like Vittorio Hösle who concludes that such notions “have no place in a fundamental philosophy construed as logic and ontology” (Hösle 1987, 247). And yet, Hegel apparently sees the need of addressing them and hence of developing his ontology further and in different ways as compared to the account of Subjectivity. This prompts the question of what

motivates the switch from a discourse about properties and kinds (in Subjectivity) to the “earthly sounding categories” (di Giovanni 2010, li) of Objectivity (namely mechanism, chemism and teleology). What exactly can be articulated within this latter framework that could not be explained within the former? The frequent reaction on the side of interpreters has been to deemphasise the transition and to present Objectivity as either continuing or applying what had been theorised in Subjectivity. There is, I will argue, more to Hegel’s position than this; but before I give my account of what it is, let’s have a look at what has been said so far. I start with a recent piece of scholarship, Robert Pippin’s *Hegel’s Realm of Shadows*.

According to Pippin, “Hegel proposes [in Objectivity] to investigate the concept [...] in its being the ground of the intelligibility of the object” (Pippin 2019, 278). This endeavour forms part of what Pippin calls “a metalogical or metaconceptual inquiry” (Pippin 2019, 252) gradually revealing what it means to understand anything at all. What Objectivity adds to previous stages within this development is a refinement of the standards of intelligibility in terms of “a more complex logical structure, ultimately a systematic structure” (Pippin 2019, 277). The move towards the discourse of Objectivity is thus said to deliver

a determinate characterization of the norm, [of] comprehensibility, as such. Such a norm or pure concept of genuine understanding will tell us what a thing is in terms of its relevant relational properties. As in what is presupposed and what follows about such relationality in designations like: Copper’s melting point is 1083 degrees Celsius.

That determinate norm of comprehensibility is what is introduced by the pure concept Mechanism – more broadly in the claim that true comprehensibility is and is only mechanistic, paradigmatically Newtonian mechanics. (Pippin 2019, 278)

The remaining stages (Chemism, Teleology) then expose the insufficiencies of the initial mechanistic model and lead us to the account of intelligibility pertinent to the idea.

This interpretation shows how Objectivity and Subjectivity contribute to an overarching project of determining what it means to grasp something conceptually. That being said, it is not quite clear (to me) what, according to Pippin, makes the standards of intelligibility discussed in Objectivity superior to the one available in Subjectivity. The suggestion that this has to do with “relational properties” doesn’t seem to cash this out in sufficient detail. One would like to know,

for instance, why relational properties could not be addressed within the account of Syllogism and why addressing them requires spelling out the relations among objects specifically in *causal* terms. The historical reference to Newton is certainly relevant here, but it alone cannot be burdened to explain the fundamental transformation of Hegel's ontological framework. To explain the surprising move from Subjectivity to Objectivity, we need something more closely related to Hegel's own philosophical desiderata.

Pippin's point that this has to do with the deepening of a standard of intelligibility is certainly not wrong; but it isn't very informative either, as he fails to spell out in sufficient detail what exactly it is that Objectivity adds by shifting attention to relations among objects. Why exactly, I would ask, is it better? Why does it involve a deeper level of understanding when we discuss how material things causally impact one another rather than contemplating how an individual's properties are related to its essence?

Another reading has been proposed by Robert Stern. Stern interprets the transition as being a matter of *applying* the structure established in Subjectivity. It is the substance-kind model of the object which Stern shows to be at the heart of Hegel's "analysis of the notion, judgment, and syllogism". According to his interpretation it "is designed to establish that in fact a substance universal forms the essential nature of the individual as a whole" (Stern 1990, 74). While this metaphysics is meant to apply to concrete particulars,

Hegel does not make his descent from the metaphysical abstractness of the Notion to the concrete realities of nature immediately, but rather provides a re-interpretation of the formal Notion in terms of the less formal categories of nature, while none the less remaining at the abstract level of the Logic. In this way, we can view the sections on the Object and the Idea as important transitional passages from the purely metaphysical categories of the subjective Notion to the objective categories that apply to the concrete reality of nature [...]. (Stern 1990, 79)

On Stern's view, Objectivity functions as a link between Hegel's metaphysics and his "Realphilosophie" by "re-interpreting" and thereby making "less formal" the previously developed account of the object.

While thus connecting the *Logic* to further parts of Hegel's system, this reading leaves little to be done by the remaining stages of the *Logic* itself. Hegel, however, points out that

Subjectivity is incomplete regarding a fundamental metaphysical desideratum, namely articulating the unity of thought and being viz. “*the connectedness of concept and existence*” (SL 626/12.127–8). This can hardly be only a matter of *applying* categories to empirical reality. It is a matter of dialectically developing categories that are, on the level reached so far, unable to express the idea that reality is itself conceptual and that the conceptual is itself fully real. There is thus *metaphysical* work left undone, and in as much as the account of Subjectivity represents a “still abstract reality” which “completes itself in *objectivity*” (SL 626/12.127–8), we have to find out more precisely what stands in the way of articulating the unity of being and thought that Hegel wishes to substantiate.

It therefore remains true that there is an awkward mismatch between the seemingly complete mediation of the concept at the end of Syllogism and the proclaimed need to go beyond it. In some way or other the achievement of Subjectivity, a completely mediated account of the interrelation of conceptual moments, must be insufficient. Charles Taylor is among the interpreters more attentive to this insufficiency when he remarks that “ontological reality shows a unity that can only be hinted at in the syllogism” (Taylor 1975, 313). A similar concern had been raised already by McTaggart who (pointing to a remnant aspect of contingency in the disjunctive syllogism) concludes that “[w]e require a further determination of objects which their inner nature, as we are able at this stage of the dialectic to understand it, cannot give us” (McTaggart 1910, 243–4). But although these last mentioned interpreters are attentive to the insufficiency of the Syllogism, they still don’t make clear what exactly is the problem with this account of the object’s inner nature and how Objectivity can provide a better one.

More recently, Dean Moyar (2020) has provided an interpretation of the transition highlighting that the interest in inferential relations among substance universals runs parallel to a second strand of Hegel’s thinking which appeals to *conditions*. In this sense, Moyar argues, the course of Objectivity “*repeats* [...] the transition from Substance to Subjectivity at the higher level of the concept” (Moyar 2020, 562). As can be seen from the outline of the *Logic*, these steps include discussions of various, broadly *causal* categories such as the ideas of efficient causality and

interaction. The transition from Subjectivity to Objectivity then appears as concerned with connecting the appeal to causal notions with the account of Syllogism (and its focus on universals). This problem becomes especially pressing with regards to how individuality can figure within Hegel's account of the concept: "[h]ow is it possible that we can, on the basis of a view according to which individuals are identified with substance universals [...] [= the account of Syllogism], achieve an understanding of the sufficient conditions for the existence of individuals" (Moyar 2020, 590).

I think that Moyar is right to point out that considerations about causes and conditions have moved to the background of the dialectic of Syllogism and that these have to resurface in order to fully articulate the unity of reality and the concept. However, I think we can and should further clarify how and why renewed attention to causal determinations helps to fulfil this goal. For one thing, it must be clarified how this relates to the other innovations in Objectivity such as Hegel's mentioning of the object's material parts, its form, and most of all to the specific type of causality as purposiveness that Hegel discusses in Teleology and Life. And secondly, we need to explain why the introduction of such notions helps to complete the project of articulating the unity of concept and mind-independent reality.

Regarding the first of these points, my view is that the innovations of Objectivity amount to Hegel's introduction of a version of hylomorphism. The second point is to explain what motivates this move. And here my answer will be that Hegel introduces hylomorphism for much the same reason as Aristotle did, which is to account for the fact that reality involves *change*. Hegel, as I shall argue, needs the transition to Objectivity and its hylomorphic ontology in order to make available explanations of how things come to be, how they are generated, qualitatively altered, and how they maintain themselves in the face of causal impact from without. Hegel, as I shall point out, accepts that reality is fundamentally dynamic and consequently, if the concept really is to turn out to be the principle of mind-independent reality, it must not abstract from its dynamic aspects. The latter, however, remain largely unaddressed (and *unaddressable* as we shall

see) on the previous account of Subjectivity, and the main revisions Hegel makes to his model help to remove this abstraction. Reshaping his ontological framework in face of the fact that reality is not static but essentially dynamic thus is a further move towards demonstrating that the concept is indeed at the heart of mind-independent reality and not just a useful abstraction we apply to it.

### 3.2 Differences between Subjectivity and Objectivity (and Life)

As a first step I will now take stock of how the fundamental notions used in Subjectivity differ from those introduced in Objectivity. This analysis of the terms – the metaphysical languages, so to speak, used in Subjectivity and Objectivity – reveals at least four major points of divergence which I discuss below:

1) To begin with, Objectivity addresses “the stones, the crossbeams, or the wheels, [and] the axles” (SL 666/12.169) of houses and clocks rather than the redness of roses which figures in Subjectivity. The object’s particularity is thus addressed in a way that evokes the idea of material parts rather than that of properties. Although in Objectivity Hegel is very careful to avoid the uncritical reimport of categories from the Doctrine of Essence, he explicitly allows the object to be regarded as consisting of “informed matter” (632/12.134) which makes no appearance in Subjectivity.

2) Hegel also introduces a new way of addressing relations among objects, namely in terms of causal relations by addressing “the interaction [*das Einwirken*] of objects” (SL 635/12.137). Objects are thus considered not in isolation but in light of how they interact with one another; in terms, that is, of what effects they have on each other. Relations among objects are not a topic prominent in Subjectivity and the specification of these relations in terms of causal interactions isn’t either.<sup>33</sup> However, to “avoid the *interaction* of substances”

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<sup>33</sup> Moyar (2020) points out that, for instance, the hypothetical judgment is related to causal notions (579); but he also says that overall Hegel chooses to put more emphasis on considerations about how individuals relate to their kinds, so that considerations about causes and conditions move to the background (575).

(SL 634/12.136), as Leibniz did, is apparently not an option for Hegel.<sup>34</sup> The introduction of causal relations therefore constitutes another difference between the chapters under consideration.

3) It furthermore becomes evident that the universal receives a new interpretation in Objectivity. In Subjectivity we learn that the universal is the kind which is substantial in as much as it figures as a core being uniting the manifold features of an individual. In Objectivity universality is meant to “pervad[e] particularity” (SL 632/12.134) and Hegel also says that it thereby determines the object as one, single thing: the universal “pervades particularity and in it [in *particularity*] is immediate singularity” (SL 632/12.134). Thus, on the one hand, the universal retains its role of determining the unity of the object as *one* individual. On the other hand, the language of *pervading* particularity suggests a more refined account of immanence as opposed to the substance-kind which is stipulated without much further elaboration as the essence of the individual.

As the text suggests, the new type of immanence has to do with the universal now emerging as a structural feature of the object, that is as its *form*. Accordingly, in Objectivity, Hegel says that it is *form* which determines that manifold items make up *one* object: it is a “form that [...] combines them into a unity” (SL 633/12.135). Universality therefore continues to be something immanent to the object. But the new type of immanence allows for a deeper explanation. Forms or structures have a distinct ontological status as opposed to the things that are structured by them. These structured things thus cannot be further universals (like properties) but, for instance, material parts – such as “the stones, the crossbeams, or the wheels, [and] the axles” (SL

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<sup>34</sup> Hegel is referring here to Leibniz’s rejection of theories of causation which entail that substances receive something (for instance a property) when being acted upon: “*no created substance exerts a metaphysical action or influx on any other thing*” (Leibniz 1989, 33). Leibniz’s basic substances, the monads, are therefore treated as causally shut off from one another. What appears to be changes in things inflicted by causal interaction with other things is for Leibniz never due to any process going on between these things themselves. Instead, it is orchestrated by God in terms of a “preestablished harmony” governing the behavior of the universe. Hegel’s criticism of this view shows that he considers causal interactions as essential to his metaphysical outline of the object.

666/12.169) of houses and clocks which enter the stage in Objectivity. The universal can then be immanent to such things as the way in which they are *arranged or organized*. It can “pervade” the material parts of a clock, for instance, in terms of the construction plan which determines how the wheels and axles must work together in order to make up one, definite object, namely a clock. In Objectivity, Hegel therefore invites a new perspective on the universal and its role for the unity of the object in asking how *form* can account for unity within manifold material parts.<sup>35</sup>

4) Finally, Hegel introduces the idea of purpose viz. final causation: the concept which has hitherto been determined as judgment and as syllogism “enters with respect to objectivity into a relation of *purpose*” (SL 630/12.131). This account of the concept as purpose had already been foreshadowed in the Doctrine of Essence<sup>36</sup> but it remains shelved until we reach Teleology and Life where Hegel connects his new perspective on the universal as form with a type of causality which is irreducible to relations of efficient causation (i.e. mechanical interaction) between material parts. As Hegel aims to show, in paradigmatic cases of objects, form fulfils its unity-generating function because it is not merely a by-product of how material parts happen to be arranged by manner of mechanical interactions. Instead, Hegel introduces the idea that in at least some cases (the paradigmatic ones!), form is more than a mere arrangement of parts and plays a role in fulfilling a goal, reaching a predefined end or *telos*. While we have seen already that in Objectivity Hegel brings causality back to the agenda, it is crucial to note that he does not only address efficient but also *final* causation.

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<sup>35</sup> Again, careful not to rely uncritically on ideas from the Doctrine of Essence; Hegel rejects treating the object as “differentiat[ing] itself into *matter* and *form*, matter being its presumed self-subsistent universal aspect and form the particular and singular instead” (SL 632/12.134). As I will explain below, this use of the notions of matter and form is different from the one that I think is operative in Objectivity.

<sup>36</sup> In the course of his discussion of the category of ground, Hegel claims that the notion of purpose is required for an adequate understanding of the unity of wholes: “the whole as essential unity, is to be found only in the *concept*, in the *purpose*. Mechanical causes are not sufficient for this unity, for they do not have as their ground the purpose which is the unity of the determinations. [...] But this definition of ‘ground’ is at this point still premature; to be a *ground in a teleological sense* is a property of the *concept* and of the mediation effected through [...] it, and this mediation is reason” (SL 388/11.293–4).



### 3.3 Hegel's Hylomorphism

All of the terms and topics mentioned in 1) to 4) are either absent or remain in the periphery of the dialectic of Subjectivity. However, they come to the forefront of attention in the discussion of Objectivity and Life. Hegel, it seems, moves from one metaphysical language to another. The interpretative challenge thus is to clearly state the nature of the new framework as well as the motivation for its introduction.

Regarding its nature, my interpretation is that Hegel introduces a *hylomorphic* ontology. To begin with, it is hard not to notice that the framework used in Objectivity bears a striking resemblance to the one introduced by Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* (and *Physics*). In my view, it is no coincidence that the four main differences between Subjectivity and Objectivity coincide with the four explanatory principles (the material, efficient, formal, and final cause) that Aristotle introduces in his mature philosophy – and which he left largely unmentioned in his earlier account in the *Categories*. As is well known, Aristotle's mature ontology is a hylomorphic one, and I think the right way to describe what Hegel does in Objectivity is to say that he also adopts a version of this doctrine. Hegel's reliance on the four explanatory principles and a corresponding way of describing objects has been pointed out above. It supplies us with *prima facie* evidence for reading Objectivity against the background of what I think is Hegel's hylomorphism.

This take on the chapter also explains how Hegel paves the ground for the central antagonism between the mechanistic and teleology that he wishes to settle. While he ultimately opts for a full-blown version of hylomorphism including appeal to the final causality of forms, the terminology he uses also lends itself to (Hegel's rendition of) mechanistic rival theories by Descartes and others which were designed to resist an appeal to substantial forms and final causation. For Hegel can play devil's advocate and methodically adopt a Cartesian perspective simply by bracketing the idea of final causation. What remains is an ontology which accepts the interaction of material parts and its outcome in terms of these parts being arranged in certain ways – but refuses to treat these arrangements as causally relevant. As we shall see in due course,

Hegel's refutation of mechanism is achieved precisely by adopting it for the sake of the argument and then demonstrating how it fails. This strategy becomes readily available by using a hylomorphic framework and strategically bracketing those of its elements which are controversial in the eyes of (mechanistically inclined) opponents. The appeal of Hegel's hylomorphism can then be demonstrated by showing that more minimal positions (such as the anti-teleological ontology of mechanism) fail. Adopting a hylomorphic framework thus comes in handy with regards to Hegel's argumentative goal of refuting mechanism.

This being said, my reading certainly also raises legitimate worries about how it fits into Hegel's metaphysical project in the *Logic*. I will now discuss three potential worries and show how a hylomorphic ontology is indeed compatible with Hegel's account. This also provides a welcome opportunity to specify what sort of hylomorphism is at work in the Objectivity chapter.

*3.3.1 Worry 1: Matter has no place in the Logic because matter is spatially extended and spatial extension is not addressable within the Logic.*

By Hegel's own standards, the outline of reality provided by the *Logic* is settled upstream of the considerations of "Realphilosophie", upstream, that is, of the empirical reality of nature and spirit and thus it abstracts from temporal and spatial features. If anything, the *Logic* explains how fundamental reality must be thought in order to be capable of manifesting itself in time and space – but time and space as such cannot play a constitutive role within its discourse.

To be sure, Hegel often uses expressions evoking spatial associations such as "being there" [Dasein], which literally means "being in a place". But he is always quick to point out that in the *Logic* these associations are misleading for "the representation of space does not belong here" (SL 84/21.97). In Life (cf. SL 678/12.181) Hegel comes dangerously close to characterizing the manifold material parts of a living being in terms of matter with spatio-temporal features. But even here he is quick to add that this is nothing more than an illustration of how we *could* think of the parts of living beings within the empirical reality of "space and time if", that is, "these could already be mentioned here" (SL 678/12.181).

Given this reluctance to allow spatio-temporal characteristics into the discussion at this point of the *Logic*, it might be felt that an appeal to matter is problematic within Hegel's project. And this worry is undoubtedly legitimate if by matter one means spatially extended particles, as they figure in Cartesian or Newtonian accounts. Matter conceived in this way can indeed enter the stage no sooner than in the *Philosophy of Nature* where it is introduced by Hegel as the unity of time and space (cf. EN §261/TWA 9.56).

However, this legitimate *caveat* does not rule out a less empirical conception of matter in terms of the notion of potentiality. Some bricks, for instance, can figure as matter not only in as much as they are spatially extended or consist of spatially extended particles. The bricks can also be called material in as much as they represent that which has the *potential* to be arranged such as to make up a house or a wall. On this view, the matter of a given object is the material parts of this object in which its form is realized. What warrants calling these entities "matter" is the fact that they have the potential to be formed in certain ways, not that they have spatial extension. Although, of course, bricks are in fact spatially extended, this is not the fact that determines their role as materials. By contrast, this is determined by the fact that they have *potentials* that become *actualized* if organized or *formed* in certain ways.

In this sense metaphysicians can juggle with the notions of matter and form conceding that in the empirical world they become manifest in space and time – but denying that this is fundamental to their roles as the potentiality and actuality of objects. An Hegelian metaphysician can furthermore concede that mechanistic philosophers, such as Descartes, want to work with the specification of matter as spatially extended, but they do not have to buy into this specification in order to criticize mechanism. For the problematic feature of mechanism is not so much that it equips matter with the property of extension but that it denies causal relevance to the structural features i.e. the *form* of the object.<sup>37</sup> The more general conception of matter as

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<sup>37</sup> Historically, Descartes is a good example: he has no problem with accepting that matter is always "arranged in a certain way" (Descartes 1985, 132), and that such an arrangement is both the outcome of efficient causal interactions as well as itself an efficient cause. What it can never be for Descartes is the *aim, goal, or telos* of such interactions: "*It is not the final but the efficient causes of created things that we must inquire into.* When dealing with natural things we will, then,

potential residing in the parts of an object therefore both serves Hegel's critical intentions as well as the aim of outlining a positive alternative to the mechanistic philosophy. And it does so without violating the *Logic's* standard of keeping clear of spatio-temporal considerations.

3.3.2 *Worry 2: Matter has no place in the Logic because it serves as a final substratum and Hegel's over-all project is precisely to avoid this type of metaphysics.*

Another worry with an appeal to matter in the context to Hegel's metaphysics is that the notion of matter has traditionally been associated with the idea of an ultimate substratum.<sup>38</sup>

Hylomorphism, as it is sometimes argued, implies that the analysis of macroscopic objects in terms of their form and matter must come to a definite end point. For if the analysis in terms of form and matter can be applied to houses, so it can be applied to bricks, and again to the materials making up bricks, and so on. What awaits us at the bottom of any such series, it is argued, must be unanalysable and thus put a definite end to hylomorphic analysis. The entity that plays this role is matter devoid of form, *prime matter*.

This notion of matter as prime matter indeed doesn't sit well with Hegel's overall approach as it is too foundationalist and puts an unintelligible abstractum, a "*groundless* subsistence" (SL 393/11.298), at the bottom of reality. However, it is not clear if anybody (including Aristotle himself) ever claimed that prime matter exists.<sup>39</sup> It can be seen instead as a merely hypothetical end point of hylomorphic analysis rather than something actual. After all, it is not necessary to assume that an analysis in terms of matter and form must come to an end in terms of an unanalysable substratum. Perhaps there is structure all the way down and anything

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never derive any explanations from the purposes which God or nature may have had in view when creating them and we shall entirely banish from our philosophy the search for final causes" (202).

<sup>38</sup> In discussing this worry I have in mind an observation made by Puntel (1981, 63–6 [1st ed. 1971]) and Theunissen (1978, 23–4; 38–52). According to them Hegel's criticism of pre-Kantian metaphysics targets its appeal to "substrata". By this they mean a tendency to regard the conceptual structure of reality as "applied" to presupposed, underlying entities which, as such, remain outside the realm of the conceptual. Examples for this are the entities posited by precritical *metaphysica specialis* (God, world, soul) but also the Kantian thing in itself. Some (not all!) conceptions of matter certainly fit this description so it is important to address the issue of substrata.

<sup>39</sup> Aristotle appeals to "prime matter" in Met. VII.3 (1029a11–25). However, he "does not here indicate whether he thinks there actually is such a thing" (Cohen and Reeve 2021, section 6).

material is always also *formed* in some way. In this spirit Hegel defends the interpretation of matter as *always informed* while rejecting the idea of prime matter as a mere artefact of abstraction:

it is merely the abstracting understanding that fixes the matter in isolation and as formless in itself. *By contrast*, the thought of the matter does indeed contain in itself the principle of the form and, for that reason, in experience too, a formless matter does not occur anywhere, as concretely existing. (EN §128A)

It is therefore clear that Hegel's rejection of matter is levelled at the idea of *prime matter* but not at the idea of *informed matter*. What is more, Hegel draws a connection between the latter account and the doctrine of the concept. If we accept that "matter as such is not self-standing and, on the other hand, that the form does not reach the matter from the outside but instead [...] bears within itself the principle of matter", we have grasped "the free and infinite form that will shortly turn out for us to be the *concept*" (EN §128A). It is therefore no surprise that in Objectivity (on a level explicitly informed by the doctrine of the concept) Hegel allows us to regard the object as consisting of "informed matter". At the same time, he consistently rejects treating it as "differentiat[ing] itself into *matter* and *form*" (SL 632/12.134), that is as a composite of *formless matter* and *immaterial form* glued together in an external fashion.

### 3.3.3 *Worry 3: Hylomorphism reactivates categories from the Doctrine of Essence which are no longer suitable within the Doctrine of the Concept.*

Finally, some might object to my reading that in Objectivity Hegel explicitly warns against the recycling of categories derived from the Doctrine of Essence. However, three out of the four explanatory principles characteristic of hylomorphism (matter, form, and efficient causation) plus the appeal to the notion of wholes are precisely such categories. There may be therefore a more general worry concerning my emphasis on matter, form, efficient causation and the interpretation of the object as a whole of material parts: for all of these notions have a history within the development of the *Logic*, they all make their first appearance in Essence. At the same time, Hegel writes that the categories of Essence (i.e. the "relations of reflection") lack the level of sophistication he demands for Objectivity. I think we can qualify this *caveat* but first let us take a look at how Hegel really formulates his warning:

One can just as well take it [the object] as a thing with properties, as a whole consisting of parts, as substance with accidents, or as determined by the other relations of reflection. But these are all past relations that in the concept have come to an end. (SL 632/12.134)

Does this mean that any use of categories like matter and form, cause and effect, part and whole are ‘forbidden’? I don’t think that this is what Hegel means. As we have seen already *vis a vis* the categories of matter and form, Hegel does not jettison them altogether. Instead, he warns against a problematic use of such notions.

What makes them problematic is that they can invite abstract understanding to single off their relata as independent and only externally connected. Properties and accidents for instance, writes Hegel, could be seen as something existing independently i.e. “separable from the thing or the substance” (SL 632/12.134) that has them. The same goes for the parts of a whole; we could abstract from the mutual requirement between part and whole and think of parts as pre-existing building blocks that are indifferent to making up a whole. Or we could think of an efficient cause as something original – abstracting from the fact that every cause is also the effect of some antecedent process of causation. By using the “relations of reflection” we could thus slip back into a style of thinking which undermines the idea of mutual requirement carefully established in the doctrines of concept, judgment and syllogism.

We could – but we don’t have to. If we remain conscious of Hegel’s warning that the terms involved in relations such as part-whole or cause-effect are mutually requiring ones, and that this requirement can only be properly understood against the backdrop of the mediation among the moments of the concept, then these categories can indeed have a comeback and help to spell out in greater depth how the concept can be seen not just as the form of thought but also as immanent to the mind-independent reality of things. As Hegel will show throughout the dialectic of Objectivity and Life, some of these supposedly surpassed notions help to spell out a view of the object as a unified whole which is indeed capable of capturing the structure of mind-independent reality while making no compromises concerning its intelligibility.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> The idea that previous stages of the dialectic are not simply discarded but also preserved is also in line with Hegel’s idea of “Aufhebung” as both overcoming and *preserving*. According to Hegel, this pertains both to the historical

Having thus dispelled what I think are legitimate worries about reading Objectivity against the background of a hylomorphic ontology, I will now turn to an explanation of why Hegel makes this move.

### 3.4 Why Hylomorphism?

So far we have gained a description of what the dialectic of Subjectivity amounts to, how the ontological framework of Objectivity differs from the latter, and we have identified the latter as a form of hylomorphism. But to really make sense of the transition we also ought to make a serious attempt in understanding what motivates the switch from an ontology involving individuals, their properties, and kinds, to one treating objects in terms of materials, forms, efficient causes, and purpose. What one would like to know is not just *that* and *how* Hegel modifies his framework, but also *why*. In other words, what is the benefit of learning yet another metaphysical language given the important advances established by the end of Syllogism?

#### 3.4.1 Historical Precedence

In order to understand the motivation for the transition it is, I think, helpful to compare it to other cases where philosophers have made similarly fundamental changes to their frameworks. There are obviously strong ties to Kant's *Third Critique* in Hegel's text. For, the topic of a critical comparison of mechanistic and teleological theories is central to Kant's "antinomy of the power of judgment" (AA V:385) as much as it is to Hegel's Objectivity chapter. Interestingly, Kant too frames the opposition between mechanism and teleology regarding their ability to account for the "generation of material things" (AA V:387; cf. *ibid.* 408–9) and not in terms of the sensuous manifolds unified by the subject according to the *First Critique*. And it is also interesting that Kant speaks of the "generation" and so points to dynamic processes. Kant certainly is an important background for Hegel also in this case.

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development of philosophy and to the logical development of thought as articulated in the *Logic*: "The relationship of the earlier to the later philosophical systems is, generally speaking, the same as the relationship of the earlier to the later stages of the logical idea and, to be sure, in such a way that the later ones contain within them the earlier ones as sublated" (EL §86 A2).

That being said, the fundamental distance between both authors is that Hegel rejects the Kantian “as if” perspective on the generation of objects. He is not interested merely in what epistemic maxims we are warranted to apply to nature, but instead in how the very being of objects needs to be thought. Most notably, Hegel’s appeal to *purposiveness* strives to articulate this objective significance which he finds lacking in Kant’s account:

[T]he connection of purpose is not a *reflective judgment* that considers external objects only according to a unity, *as though* an intelligence had given them to us *for the convenience of our faculty of cognition*; on the contrary, it is the truth that exists in and for itself and judges *objectively*, determining the external objectivity absolutely. (SL 656/12.159)

Thus, in as much as Hegel emphasises his interest in the metaphysical structure of mind-independent reality, “the truly speculative ideas of Aristotle” (SL 692/12.195) certainly are a legitimate point of reference too. This pertains not only to the theory of the soul in *De Anima* but also to the fundamental, strategic decision of Aristotle to introduce hylomorphism. In this respect, I see a parallel between Hegel’s transition from Subjectivity to Objectivity in the move Aristotle makes from the *Categories* to the *Metaphysics* (and *Physics*). Here we have a historical precedent for the challenging transition in Hegel. And with all due respect to the difficulties involved in drawing such parallels, there is a lot to be learned from considering this one.

First one should note the obvious parallel between the fundamental notions involved in the *Categories* and those operative in Subjectivity. Both explain being in terms of the notions of individuals, their properties, and the genera to which these individuals belong. Furthermore, both texts avoid the discussion of matter, efficient causation, form, and final causation while these notions become crucial in the ontology of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* as well as in Hegel’s Objectivity chapter. With this I do not mean to say that the parallel can be extended indefinitely. I do not propose that Hegel’s *Logic* is nothing but a compilation of Aristotelian theorems. What I do mean to say is that there is a remarkable similarity regarding the development of basic notions used to outline the metaphysical structure of objects. And I claim that this similarity can also help to find a clue regarding what motivates the switch from one framework to the other.



Aristotle researchers have proposed various interpretations (cf. note below) regarding the transition from the *Categories* to the *Metaphysics*. A widely held view is that the *Categories* are an early work leaving out certain levels of complexity which are made explicit only in the mature ontology of the later works. There is disagreement regarding whether this level of complexity is being withheld on purpose (the *pedagogical* view) or whether Aristotle simply had to discover it himself (the *developmental* view). But it is uncontroversial that the innovation of the mature work consists in the introduction of matter and form and that the main motive for introducing these notions is that they allow to theorise something that is largely absent from the ontology of the *Categories*, namely *change*.<sup>41</sup>

In my view it is this emphasis on the being of things comprising dynamic elements of becoming which is crucial not just for Aristotle but also for Hegel. I therefore suggest that the main motive for the making the transition towards a hylomorphic framework in Hegel's objectivity chapter is to account for change. To substantiate this interpretation I will now *outline how a hylomorphic framework helps to theorise change* in ways unavailable within the previous ontology and I will *demonstrate that Hegel is indeed interested in the resulting dynamic account of objects*.

### 3.4.2 *Thinking Change*

We now need to see why non-hylomorphic ontologies (such as the ones operative in Subjectivity or the *Categories*) have a problem with addressing change and what hylomorphism contributes towards remedying this problem. To start with, let us look at an example for the sort of change that occurs when an individual is altered regarding its features (qualitative change). An individual, say a rose, can undergo alteration regarding its properties by gaining and losing them. A rose that is no longer *red* but turned *brown* in excessive summer heat loses *redness* as a property and gains *brownness*. Regarding such a process it is usually assumed that while something changes, namely a

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<sup>41</sup> For a helpful overview of “opposing beams of interpretive light” on the relation between the *Categories* and the subsequent hylomorphic account see Studtmann (2012, 72–7; cf. note 5, p. 80). For a differentiation of developmental and pedagogical view see Lewis (2009, 162). For an exposition of the problems of qualitative and substantial change in the context of Aristotle's hylomorphism see Shields (2014, 60–73). The view that Aristotle introduced hylomorphism in order to accommodate change has been proposed previously by Graham (1987).

quality, something else remains, namely that which *has* the quality. For the Aristotle of the *Categories* it is the *individual* rose that is the subject of change. An Hegelian advocating the substance-kind model of the object might agree that the individual remains the same through the change of quality but they might want to emphasise especially that the individual can do so because it has its kind as an *immanent*, stable core of its being.<sup>42</sup> It's the rose *qua* member of the rosy kind which remains the same thing when turning from red to brown. Subtle differences granted, both the Aristotelian view and Hegel's account allow for the explanation of qualitative change along the lines just described. So where's the problem?

The problem is that this account of change is very sketchy. There is little explanation regarding how something like a rose can gain (or lose) the positive traits it has. And this leaves the door wide open to interpretation: Are particular properties such as *redness* or *brownness* somehow produced by the kind, in the way that some scholastic philosophers thought substantial forms directly cause individual things to have their particular character?<sup>43</sup> Or is there a sort of metaphysical stock of free-floating properties that individuals somehow draw from, now taking redness from the stock, then brownness?<sup>44</sup> That sounds either hopelessly magical or it ruins the immanence of universals by postulating free-floating properties. What we lack is a convincing story of how individuals come to exemplify their properties.

In our sample case such a story could, for instance, include reference to interactions between the parts of the rose and its environment such as the sun heating it up and the air

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<sup>42</sup> Regarding Aristotle's *Categories* saying that the kind was "immanent" to the individual may already be saying too much for "[a]lthough there is metaphysical structure to the fact that, e.g., *this horse is white* (a certain quality inheres in a certain substance), the fact that *this is a horse* is a kind of brute fact, devoid of metaphysical structure" (Cohen and Reeve 2021).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Pasnau (2004, 34–8) for a discussion of this view which treats substantial forms as "the explanatory basis of the entire substance, serving as the internal [*efficient*] cause of a thing's accidental properties" (34).

<sup>44</sup> Such a Platonic account of universals would run counter to Hegel's commitment to the idea that universals do not exist apart from their individual instances. Explaining change in these Platonic terms would furthermore involve acceptance of the idea of *methexis* according to which individuals partake in the forms they exemplify. One of the worries one might have with this alternative is that it remains quite unclear how an individual gets to partake in a form and what explains that it partakes now in the form of redness and then in the form of brownness. Hylomorphists, by contrast, can appeal to the idea that individuals receive their forms through causal interactions resulting in their matter being rearranged.

helping water to evaporate from its petals which factor in its turning from red to brown. This way of thinking, however, neither lends itself to the ontology of the *Categories* nor to that of Hegel's Subjectivity chapter. It is, by contrast, a lot more natural within a framework addressing the fact that a rose consists of material parts that interact with each other as well as with other things and bear potentials for being configured in various ways, i.e. to actualise various forms and therefore to exemplify various properties.

From this point of view, change is not just glossed over in terms of gaining or losing properties, but it gets explained in terms of a thing's matter being rearranged as a result of causal interactions with other things. It's wind, sun, and the fact that rose-parts jointly react to such influences in a typical way that bring about dryness as well as its visible correlate of acquiring a brown colour in the rose. This level of explanation is wholly absent within the draft of a theory of change available in the non-hylomorphic ontologies discussed above. Hylomorphists, by contrast, can explain qualitative change in a more profound way referencing causal interactions, materials, and the form they acquire by means of impacting one another.

Thus, regarding qualitative change, the new framework gives us a richer account explaining how properties come to be exemplified, rather than just stating that they are "gained" or "lost". A more severe issue, however, becomes evident regarding a different form of change, namely *substantial change* or *generation*. While in qualitative change a pre-existing individual is altered, substantial change denotes the coming to be of a new individual. For instance, when a new table is built by a carpenter, a whole new thing comes to be rather than an existing one undergoing alteration.

This creates an irresolvable riddle for ontologies like the ones operative in the *Categories* or in Subjectivity. While it is straightforward what is the subject of change in qualitative change, namely an individual belonging to a certain kind, this answer is unavailable in cases of substantial change. For prior to the generation of an individual there is no individual and consequentially no instance of a kind that could be said to undergo alteration. Consequentially, either all cases of

substantial change have to be treated as cases of *creatio ex nihilo*, with every new table, every new-born child, and so on emerging from nothing; or, a different perspective on the subject of change has to be envisaged.

This second alternative is by far the less extravagant one and the solution of choice for hylomorphists. For within a hylomorphic framework an individual object comes to be from materials which pre-exist its generation. Thus instead of claiming that things come to be literally from nothing, hylomorphists introduce the idea of matter as a “relative nothing”, something lacking the actuality but carrying within it the potential reality of the new object. Change, to borrow an expression from Jonathan Lear (1988, 58), thus “requires a certain blend of reality and unreality” which hylomorphists achieve by introducing matter as the subject of change. The subject of change in the table example thus is the timber from which it is made and in the case of a newly generated organism this role is played by the (in itself) inorganic matter from which it gets composed. Tables, organisms and other things can thus be explained as being generated from materials instead of arising from brute nothing. The fact that hylomorphism provides a straightforward way of explaining what remains a deep puzzle in non-hylomorphic ontologies, namely qualitative and *a fortiori* substantial change, is *the* classical motive for its introduction. It remains to be shown that it is also Hegel’s.

### 3.5 Why should Hegel Care about Change?

I will now outline why, in a general sense, Hegel is committed to explaining change as a basic characteristic of reality, and I will also address the worry that his theory of change is at odds with a hylomorphic interpretation. Against this backdrop I will discuss how Hegel’s commitment to explaining change factors into the central problem of the object’s unity and how this unity thereby emerges as tied to the intrinsic activity of the object. Finally, I will provide an interpretation of Hegel’s notorious and enigmatic claim that the transition towards Objectivity has something to do with the ontological proof of God.

### 3.5.1 *The Reality of Change*

If we ask what motivates taking change as a fundamental feature of reality, the parallel with Aristotle turns out to be less helpful. For the latter, the basic reason to account for change is that he takes its reality to be indisputable. Aristotle's standard reply to somebody entertaining Parmenidean scepticism about change is a nod to the empirical world (cf. Shields 2014, 75): look around you, change is obvious and this is good enough a reason to adjust our ontology accordingly! Such a handwaving gesture to the empirical world is not something Hegel would be sympathetic towards. For him, how we formulate our basic notions must follow from the immanent and presuppositionless development of pure thinking, not from empirical data.

At the same time, the path of presuppositionless thought comes to affirm the reality of change in its own ways when it discovers that the truth of being is becoming (cf. SL 59–60/21.69–70). Although the category of becoming itself is not about the becoming of this or that specific thing, it bequeaths the topic of becoming to the further development of the *Logic*. And within this development the becoming of something determinate will come up as “a becoming that has [...] become *concrete*” (SL 90/21.104).

In this context Stephen Houlgate has recently emphasised that the category of determinate being involves change and that thereby “being shows itself once more to be dynamic, rather than settled and stable” (Houlgate 2022a, 181). While this supports my claim that Hegel regards change as a fundamental feature of reality, Houlgate has also pointed out that “Hegel's account of change [...] differs from more traditional accounts [those of Aristotle and Kant] because he does not assume that change requires a permanent substrate” (Houlgate 2005, 328). This point requires some discussion as it could be seen to conflict with my interpretation in as much as I argue that hylomorphism is attractive precisely *because* it provides an account of the subject of change.

This being said, the subject of change conceived of as matter need not be a “permanent substrate” in the sense of something wholly unaffected by the change. When a carpenter

transforms some timber into a table, the table arises from preexisting materials, namely the timber, but these materials do not survive this process unaltered. By contrast, they are turned into *table parts* rather than remaining just pieces of timber. Likewise, when the carpenter sands the top of an already existing table, this table's matter is being rearranged so that the table can change from rough to smooth. Again, neither the table, nor its matter, simply stay the same in this process. For the table undergoes qualitative change and its matter must be rearranged or reformed in the course of it.

Thus there really isn't anything involved that literally stays what it is when we express processes of change in hylomorphic terms. In my view, a hylomorphic account of change only invites the idea of an unaltered, "permanent substrate" if one treats matter as independent from form, as something that remains what it is and is unaffected by alterations of form. This however is precisely not the account of matter I attribute to Hegel. On the contrary, I think that for Hegel matter is intimately tied to the notion of form and that there is no such thing as a formless, ultimate substratum which literally stays the same. The idea, however, that concrete becoming requires something pre-existing that undergoes alteration is not at all alien to Hegel. For becoming turns out as concrete precisely by taking the form of a "transition, the moments of which are themselves something" (SL 90/21.104). Treating the first something as material (e.g. some timber) from which another something (e.g. a table) gets composed doesn't seem to imply that the material needs to be a permanent substratum and it helps to further develop and articulate the idea that the being of things comprises a processual aspect.

In fact, Hegel's hylomorphism will help him to resurrect the idea that being is dynamic rather than static within the Doctrine of the Concept. Most notably, this becomes a topic in Life which Hegel explicitly calls a further development of becoming: "becoming, [...] has to further deepen and fulfil itself in itself. We have such a deepening of becoming within itself in [...] *life*" (EL §88A). Hegel is thus committed to holding on to the *Logi's* early insight that becoming is the truth of being in the further development of the dialectic. Therefore, if a stage in this

development, such as Subjectivity, has a hard time articulating the reality of change, this is indeed a good reason to move beyond it. Introducing hylomorphism as the ontological framework for Objectivity and Life thus can be seen as motivated by Hegel's belief in the reality of change and his goal to express the actual as a process of self-realisation.

### 3.5.2 *Unity within a World of Change*

The insight that a fully-fledged account of reality has to include change also has important repercussions for Hegel's account of the object's unity. The constitution of the object gets revisited under the conditions of a world of change. Unity thus emerges as arising within processes in which materials interact and *alter* each other. Here the key question is what these processes must be like in order to bring about unity among the things involved in them. Another way of putting this is to say that unity occurs when pre-existing materials not only effect changes in their accidental features but instead turn each other into a new *kind* of thing which they jointly realise. Unity therefore turns out as concerned with *substantial change*, and it contrasts with merely qualitative change.

Much of the dialectic of Objectivity and Life will therefore be concerned with outlining and assessing the conditions required for processes of alteration to bring about and maintain the being of unified wholes. As we shall see in due course, for Hegel the paradigmatic cases of such unity are living beings. And he explicitly frames their constitution in hylomorphic terms by stating that they come to be from pre-existent materials; materials that initially do *not* have the form of a living being but become literally *trans-formed* into one. For on Hegel's account, life presupposes mechanical and chemical objects and it comes to be via the "transformation of them into the living individual" (SL 686/12.189). The constitution of a living being thus turns out to be a matter of dynamic processes, namely of changing the form of pre-existing materials. But also, when the unity of a living being has been generated, its continued existence too is not something static but rather a form of *creatio continua* in which the living being constantly recreates its form. That is, in the case of a living individual, the materials making up this object do impose change

upon each other but at the same time, their interactions create a self-enclosed and stable process on which their unity depends. Understanding unity therefore becomes the endeavour to understand what processes of alteration must be like in order to bring about and maintain the being of a unified whole.

Importantly, this perspective allows for a deeper meaning to be given to the idea that the object has unity independently from external factors. In Subjectivity the ground of the object's unity is the kind immanent to its being. However, on this level of the dialectic we are not in a position to explain further how exactly an immanent kind brings about unity in the active manner that Hegel ascribes to the universal as a "creative power" (SL 533/12.36). Processes of *bringing forth*, *creating* and so on remain only hinted at,<sup>45</sup> so that we cannot really articulate the idea that unity is as a result of the object's own activity.

This idea of a genuinely self-articulating unity of the object is something Hegel finds missing, for instance, in Kant's *First Critique*. While Kant does maintain that the object's unity the result from an activity, he insists that this activity can only be attributed to the epistemic subject and never to the object itself:

[T]he **combination** (*conjunctio*) of a manifold in general [...] is an act of the spontaneity of the power of representation, and, since one must call the latter understanding, in distinction from sensibility, all combination [...] is an action of the understanding, which we would designate with the general title **synthesis** in order at the same time to draw attention to the fact that we can represent nothing as combined in the object without having previously combined it ourselves, and that among all representations **combination** is the only one that is not given through objects but can be executed only by the subject it-self, since it is an act of its self-activity. (B 129–30; Kant's emphasis throughout)

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<sup>45</sup> One occasion on which Hegel does introduce this language of unity being related to an activity is the hypothetical syllogism which is meant to demonstrate how "the *form-activity* of translating the conditioning actuality into the conditioned is *in itself* the unity into which the determinacies of the oppositions [...] are *sublated*, and where the difference of A and B is an empty name. The unity is therefore a unity reflected into itself, and hence an *identical* content, and is this content not only *implicitly in itself* but, through this syllogism, it is also *posited*, for the being of A is also not its own being but that of B and *vice versa*, and in general the being of the one is the being of the other and, as determined in the conclusion, their immediate being or indifferent determinateness is a mediated one – therefore, their externality has been sublated, and what is *posited* is their *unity withdrawn into itself*" (SL 622/12.123). However he leaves no doubt that the idea that the "universal is active" and brings about the object's unity can only properly addressed at a later stage and in terms of the notion of "purpose" which "is this self-determining which realises itself" (TWA 19.154).



Kant's insistence that the generation of unity is a privilege of the epistemic subject is precisely what, in Hegel's eyes, brings him to the verge of "psychological idealism" (SL 520/12.22) according to which we create the object. Hegel's aim, by contrast, is to think unity as arising from the object's *own* "self-activity"; as a process of self-constitution or self-realisation that we can grasp but never create by exercising our conceptual capacities.

In this sense, the emphasis on dynamic aspects of generation, self-maintenance and activity marks the completion of a transfer of powers from the subject to the mind-independent reality of things – a project by which Hegel distances himself from the Kantian philosophy from early on but which is only partly achieved within the syllogistic mediation. This still does not mean that Subjectivity merely articulates forms of thought that we apply to a reality devoid of such forms. Subjectivity does have ontological implications.<sup>46</sup> However, due to its bracketing of change and activity this ontology only incompletely articulates the idea that the object has unity by means of its very own devices.

According to the perspective I therefore suggest, one of Hegel's most important points in *Objectivity and Life* is to rearticulate the *unity of the object* in face of his acknowledgment of the reality of change. An account of unity bracketing the dynamic aspect of reality remains abstract and leaves a crucial feature of mind-independent reality unaccounted for. Since Subjectivity largely engages in such an abstraction from change it cannot serve as a fully articulated ontology of the object. The account available through Hegel's discussion of the syllogism makes important steps towards this goal. But due to our discussion of change we are now in a position to appreciate that, as Taylor (1975, 313) put it, "ontological reality shows a unity that can only be

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<sup>46</sup> According to Hegel it is "[e]verywhere presupposed by the use of the forms of the concept, of judgment, inference, definition, division, etc., [...] that they are not mere forms of self-conscious thinking but also of objective understanding" (SL 30/21.35). What Hegel says about the category of syllogism, namely that "to the thought there corresponds being" (ibid.) thus has at least some validity also for the category of judgment. Suther (2020, 778) summarises this view when he writes that if the forms of thought established in Judgment and Syllogism "are to represent more than a subjective perspective on the world, [more than] 'our' take on things, then they must be shown to be the forms of things themselves. The syllogism, for example, cannot be just an indifferent or inert form that is 'applied' to external contents".

hinted at in the syllogism”. As I hope to have shown, this “hint” is meant to lead us towards an understanding of unity within a world of change.

### 3.6 Activity and the Curious Point about the Ontological Proof

Speaking of hints, it has to be said that no discussion of the transition towards Objectivity would be complete without an interpretation of Hegel’s curious remark that it is a version of the ontological proof of God. Difficult as it is to integrate this claim into any interpretation of the *Logic*, we will see that it fits surprisingly well with my reading according to which Hegel strives to account for change and generation.

In its traditional form, an ontological argument is the attempt to demonstrate that God exists from “none but analytic, *a priori* and necessary premises” (Oppy 2023). Kant’s critique of the ontological proof (B 620–31) targets a version of that, namely the idea that the concept of God implies the existence of God. On this traditional perspective, a proponent of an ontological argument thus aims to show that a certain object exists in virtue of its concept so that knowledge of its concept is sufficient to prove its existence. Throughout the *Logic*, Hegel seems to defend the ontological argument (against Kant’s criticism) on several occasions (e.g. SL 63–6/21.73–7; 625–8/12.127–30). However, it is difficult to say how much Hegel’s version of the argument has to do with the traditional idea of proving the existence of an object through its concept.

The traditional approach suggests that we have a certain conception of God (e.g. as *ens realissimum* or sumtotal of predicates) and that this conception itself answers the question whether or not a corresponding object exists. In my view, there is something deeply unhegelian about the idea that philosophy should prove that there actually are things that correspond to a given concept, since it presupposes that there is a gap between ‘our concepts’ and what there actually is. For Hegel however, the point is not that there might be such a gap and that philosophers need to close it by demonstrating the necessary existence of certain entities. Rather, he thinks that being and thought are always already *one* so that the point is not so much to prove the existence of certain objects but instead to articulate how the unity of being and thought is to be *understood*. I

thus sympathise with Dieter Henrich who notes in his classical discussion of the ontological proof that “the problem of the ontological argument in Hegel cannot be concerned merely with the transition from a thought to the certainty of the existence of its object” (Henrich 1967, 210). I would even venture to say that this is not at all Hegel’s concern and instead a fallback into the traditional version of the argument.

Instead, I argue that for Hegel the significance of the ontological argument is that it offers us opportunities to reflect how the unity of thought and being can be grasped and what categories are adequate to expressing this unity. This is not something that happens just once, at some privileged point in the *Logic* but throughout its course.<sup>47</sup> However, there are specific stages within this long argument where improvement in terms of how the unity of being and thought is grasped, becomes especially manifest; not unlike the way in which historical events can make long-stretching developments manifest in an instant. Below I will take a closer look at one of these ‘events’, namely Hegel’s curious remark that the transition to objectivity was a version of the ontological argument. As I read it, the transition to objectivity shows how the conceptual structure of objects can do justice to the fact that their being is not static but dynamic and therefore subject to change. In doing this, it demonstrates that a proper grasp of the unity of being and thought requires an ontological framework that allows for change to be thought. Hegel’s argument therefore does *not* make an attempt to prove that a certain object exists – but it does show how the conceptual structure of objects can be adequate to their reality within a world of change.

### 3.6.1 *The Ontological Proof and its Significance*

Hegel introduces the ontological proof as concerned with “*the connectedness of concept and existence*” and he adds that this topic has also been the “concern of the treatment of the *concept* just concluded and of the entire course that the latter [the concept] traverses in determining itself to

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<sup>47</sup> As Henrich (1967, 193) suggests, there even is some plausibility to the widespread idea that Hegel’s entire system (including the *Realphilosophie*) is part of this long ontological argument.

*objectivity*” (SL 626/12.127–8). Hegel therefore says that both his doctrine of the concept and the ontological proof of God have a common purpose, namely to articulate the idea that concept and existence are intimately connected or that reality is not devoid of reason but instead bears the same basic, intelligible structure as thought.

After all, this is not so obscure since the God of the philosophers indeed often has the function to ensure the intelligibility of reality. According to Kant (cf. B 609–11) it is exactly this idea which motivates attempts to prove God in the first place, namely to give an account of why the world is intelligible. In Kant’s frame it is the “transcendental ideal” or the “sumtotal of possibility” which, if proven as existing, would necessitate the “thoroughgoing determination” of all things, which is nothing other than an account of (the ground of) their intelligibility.

For Hegel the desire to prove the existence of such an ultimate ground of intelligibility is a crude way to approach the central issue regarding the rationality of reality. For him, the so-called “proof” is interesting not because it (unsuccessfully, as Kant showed) attempts to prove the existence of God, but rather because it helps us to articulate an advanced grasp of the idea that reality is indeed intelligible. This, for Hegel, does not need to be proven via demonstrating God’s existence – but it needs to be understood and grasped adequately.

This understanding and grasping of the “*connectedness of concept and existence*” is not yet fully accomplished at the end of the Subjectivity chapter. The account of the reality as structured by the concept which we get via the dialectic of Judgment and Syllogism is “still abstract reality”, and “this still abstract reality completes itself in *objectivity*” (SL 626/12.127–8). In essence, what Hegel says fits readily into his overall project. He wants to show that the structure of thought is not something we, as knowers, only apply to the world, but instead that it lies at the heart of the being of things. Articulating this idea is the core goal of his *Logic* and, in Hegel’s eyes, it also constitutes the kernel of truth contained in the traditional ontological proof. However, an important stage in the endeavour to articulate the intelligibility of reality has not yet been reached.

### 3.6.2 *God's Properties vs. God's Activity*

Hegel suggests that by the end of Subjectivity we do not, as of yet, fully grasp the idea that reality is intelligible, or that the concept is itself something real. Thus, there must be some aspect of reality which is not yet properly addressable by means of the metaphysical outline provided through the dialectic of Subjectivity. Hegel elaborates on this aspect – again with reference to the ontological proof. As he sees it, the traditional idea that the concept of God contains reality *qua* its concept invites a misunderstanding of God's being. Namely, it suggests that all we need to do in order to grasp God's being is to analyse his properties, namely his being *all-knowing*, *all-mighty*, *all-benign* and so on. This perspective, Hegel says, is ill-fated. Instead, in order to grasp the idea that concept and reality are united in God we should focus not on his properties but on his *activity*:

[T]he mere determination of a subject matter through predicates [i.e. that which denotes properties], without this determination being at the same time the realization and objectification of the concept, remains something so subjective that it is not even a true cognition and *determination of the concept* of the subject matter – “subjective” in the sense of abstract reflection and non-conceptual representation. – God as living God, and better still as absolute spirit, is only recognized in *what he does*. Humankind were directed early to recognize God in his *works*; only from these can the *determinations* proceed [*hervorgehen*] that can be called his *properties*, and in which his being is also contained. It is thus the conceptual comprehension of God's *activity*, that is to say, of God himself, that recognizes the *concept* of God in his *being* and his being in his concept. (SL 626/12.128)

Hegel thus tells us that we are kept within an abstraction if we attempt to grasp the connection between concept and reality by analysing an individual, namely God, in terms of its properties. To avoid this abstraction, we are to focus not just on properties but also on the underlying process, the “works” or the “activity” from which such determinations as properties result. What are we to make of this advice?

First, we are to note well that Hegel makes a general point here which applies not only to the divine being but indeed to all things. The topic of God and the “proof” of his being comes up because, rightly conceived, it has the potential to elucidate the idea that the concept is immanent to reality *in general*; thus, according to Hegel “the ontological proof is *only one application* of this logical progression” (SL 626/12.128; my emphasis) which is meant to articulate the

connectedness of concept and existence. This remark makes clear that whatever is to be learnt from the proof cannot be exclusive to the specific content of God but must have a much broader significance for Hegel's conception of objects and their concept. When Hegel writes:

[It] is thus the conceptual comprehension of God's *activity*, that is to say, of God himself, that recognizes the *concept* of God in his *being* and his being in his concept. (SL 626/12.128)

I think we should read him as making a general point about what it means to grasp the concept of an object as immanent to its reality. And if I am right that Hegel is not primarily interested in ontotheology here but rather mentions God as an example for the "logical progression" leading to the "realization of the concept", we can indeed generalize from what Hegel says about God to a statement about *any object*:

[It] is thus the conceptual comprehension of [any object's] *activity*, that is to say, of [the object itself], that recognizes the *concept* of [the object] in [its] *being* and [its] being in [its] concept. (SL 626/12.128; alterations in brackets mine)

What we arrive at this way is a view of objects which ties their conceptual structure to an activity, that is, to a dynamic process from which properties emerge as results. This perspective on objects is indeed relevant to the innovations of Objectivity as I have outlined them above and I will now show how.

### 3.6.3 *Activities and the Innovations of Objectivity*

According to my interpretation, the transition towards Objectivity is necessary because change as a fundamental aspect of reality is not sufficiently addressable in Subjectivity. This insufficiency represents a limitation to grasping the unity of concept and mind-independent reality Hegel wishes to articulate. In fact, the concept has not yet been shown to be immanent to a world of change. In the passages related to the ontological proof, Hegel insists that we fail to grasp the concept's unity with mind-independent reality if we focus only on positive traits, i.e. the properties of things. Instead, he demands that we are to regard these positive traits as the outcome of an underlying dynamic process, namely an activity.

The Objectivity chapter then outlines an ontological framework that allows us to conceptualise these processes in terms of the information of matter. This move is the first step in

the challenging project of demonstrating that intelligible structure is not external to a reality which is subject to change and becoming. Hegel shows that there can be different ways of thinking the process of informing matter and that some of them are more adequate for articulating the unity of being and thought than others. On the lower ranks of the hierarchy we will find that Hegel discusses objects where the activity that organises their matter remains external to the object itself. This pertains especially to the mechanical object where the principles that govern its organisation remain external and for that reason also inexplicable. However, Hegel's argument is not that we should take this as evidence against the presence of rational structure in the world; rather, he points out how these primitive ways of informing matter are logically derivative from more advanced ones where the principles that govern the information of matter in an object are immanent to the object itself. Through this, we are meant to see that the conceptual structure of the object – rightly understood – is by no means external to its reality or existence: after all, there is therefore *some* truth to the ontological argument, namely that concept and reality are not external to each other. However, for Hegel this does not need to be *proven*; rather it needs to be *understood* and the dialectic of objectivity aims at establishing this understanding.

My reading thus deemphasises the traditional concern with an eminent being (God, the *ens realissimum*, the absolute, the infinite ...) where there is an exemption to the Kantian rule that being is not a predicate, so that at least such an eminent being could be known to exist *a priori*. I admit that exegetically, reading Hegel along these lines is an option;<sup>48</sup> however, I would add, it is not the best option for understanding Hegel's engagement with the unity of being and thought. In particular, a 'proof' of the existence of (some version of) God adds little to understanding why Hegel thinks there needs to be a transition from Subjectivity to Objectivity, a transition from an ontology of individuals, their substance-kinds, and properties to a hylomorphic one.

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<sup>48</sup> In the context of the Doctrine of Being, a recent proposal has been made by McNulty (2023, 281) who shows how Hegel can be seen to demonstrate that "[t]he infinite [...] can exist by definition. Its concept is necessarily non-empty".

By contrast, if we take Hegel's remark about the ontological proof as general advice regarding the reality of the concept as a dynamic process, it turns out as much less enigmatic. On this reading, Hegel's point is that we can come to understand the unity of concept and reality if we begin to think of the concept as the structure of dynamic processes, of activities rather than static traits. As I have shown above, this interest in the reality of change is also the typical motive for adopting a hylomorphic ontology which not only addresses positive traits but also the potential or material aspect from which such traits arise. In this respect Hegel's notoriously enigmatic reference to the ontological proof turns out to be less mysterious, and adequate within the overall interpretation of the transition I outlined above.

In summary, it should have become clear that the dialectic of Objectivity is not merely an application of previously established categories but instead is a substantial development of Hegel's ontological account of the object. Its most important characteristic is the introduction of a hylomorphic ontology which allows us to conceive of objects in a processual rather than static way. In what follows I will revisit the discussion of individuality against the background of Hegel's account of Objectivity and Life. Beginning with the problem of unity, I will explain how Hegel makes the case for his view that the fundamental objects of his ontology are marked by immanent purposiveness. However, the dialectical nature of Hegel's thought requires that this idea is not immediately presented as a solution to the problem of unity but rather that it gets discussed within a dialectic. The first step of this dialectic is thus concerned with a rival account of how objects are constituted within a world of change, namely the so-called mechanistic account of the object. By showing that this account fails to explain the unity of the objects, Hegel then paves the ground for developing his positive views on what counts as a genuinely unified object.



#### 4 Mechanism and the Problem of Unity

In *Mechanism*, Hegel deals with the early modern, Cartesian idea that the form of an object has no causal relevance of its own, and is instead merely a by-product of the uncoordinated causal interplay of underlying parts. As such, the over-arching goal of the chapter is to reject the mechanistic reduction of form and to develop an argument in support of Hegel's own insistence on the causal relevance of forms. In Hegel's eyes, one of the core vices of the mechanist account is that it cannot explain the object's unity and that this is due to its characteristic reduction of form to a mere by-product of material interaction.

To make this case, Hegel tests to what extent a mechanistic appeal to material parts and their causal relations could – if at all – explain unity. As we shall see in section 4.1, the first stage of this evaluation is an analysis of the notion of causation at work in mechanistic ontologies, namely *efficient causation*. Due to its intrinsically externalising character, Hegel argues, the source of unity (if conceived as an efficient cause) can never be strictly speaking immanent to the objects unified thereby.

This gives rise to a further level of Hegel's critique which I discuss under the heading "the problem of indifference" (section 4.2). Due to the externality of the mechanistic account of unity, objects are indifferent to the connection among their parts. To put this into more concrete terms, mechanism implies that there are no principled constraints on what counts as a unified whole and what does not. As a consequence, one can identify three forms of indifference that pertain to *the division of the world into objects, the internal division of objects into parts and the normative evaluation of their arrangement*. In each case, the mechanistic ontology is at odds with the possibility of non-arbitrary knowledge about things, such as the capacity to discriminate unified objects from random aggregates or the capacity to distinguish arbitrarily chosen parts from genuine ones.<sup>49</sup> Finally, we

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<sup>49</sup> In construing Hegel's argument in terms of an evaluation of ontological views through their implications for plausible forms of knowledge, my interpretation is indebted to James Kreines' work (2004, 2015). Kreines has suggested that mechanism, as a general hypothesis about the structure of things, "would undermine any possible account of explanation" (2004, 39). This, he insists, is "not an epistemological worry" (45) since what mechanism undermines is not just our capacity to know which of several alternative descriptions of an object is the right one; instead, mechanism implies that the ontological structure of the world excludes such a privileged way of describing it. In this spirit Kreines discusses the relations among objects and their internal division into parts. (cf. 43–4) I basically

shall see (section 4.3) that Hegel does not totally reject mechanism as a category by showing that it can at least explain a primitive version of unity pertaining to natural aggregates.

#### 4.1 The Regress of Causes

According to mechanism, what combines a plurality of items into a whole is the causal interactions among these things. They become parts of a whole by means of having an effect on each other. As Hegel puts it, in the mechanically construed object “causality” functions “as *identical* determinateness of a diversity of substances” (SL 635/12.137). On this model, the parts of a watch, for instance, are *one* object because one gear causes the other to move. It is because these things exercise causal powers on each other that they “are capable of *mixing* and *aggregating*, and as an aggregate of becoming *one object*” (SL 635/12.137). This is indeed an answer to the problem of unity; a bad one though, as Hegel aims to show in an intricate argument which I hope to unfold now.

At first glance the mechanistic account locates the source of unity thoroughly within the object. For, after all, it is the parts themselves that exercise causal powers and figure as either cause or effect of each other’s behaviour. Is it not so that things connected by acting upon each other are tied together by their own devices? If this was the case, mechanism would provide a promising alternative to a Kantian model according to which the subject’s activity unifies objects.<sup>50</sup> And indeed, Hegel thinks that the mechanistic model aims at taking seriously the idea that objects are unified through their *own* activity which is articulated through the causal interactions of their parts.

However, he also points out that the emergence of unity from within the object seemingly provided by causal interactions is illusory. This has to do with the notion of (efficient) cause

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agree with this analysis and will rely on it in what follows. However, I think that it is helpful to be more explicit about what is at the heart of the insufficiency of mechanism. As I hope to show, the underlying problem is the incapacity of mechanism to account for the unity of objects. It is this problem which mechanism cannot solve convincingly and which engenders the undermining of knowledge.

<sup>50</sup> Recall here again the above quoted (section 3.5.2) passage from the first *Critique* where Kant lays out the theory that objects depend for their unity on “an act of” the subject’s “self-activity” (B 130).

itself, which Hegel takes to be intrinsically externalising. What appears to be an “originary causality of the object is immediately a non-originariness; the object is indifferent to this determination attributed to it; that it is a cause is therefore something accidental to it” (SL 635/12.137).

To appreciate this objection to a causal model of unity, it is necessary to make a brief detour via Hegel’s general critique of efficient causation. Hegel alludes to his earlier discussion of causation in the *Doctrine of Essence* when he writes that mechanism, “has that posited within it which proved to be the truth of the relation of causality, namely, that the cause which is supposed to be something existing in and for itself is in fact effect just as well, positedness” (SL 635/12.137). The main point that Hegel makes is that the notions of cause and effect cannot be applied to something that either represents a first cause or an ultimate effect.

Instead, Hegel argues, the concept of efficient causation is such that any cause is always also the effect of an antecedent cause just as much as any effect is always also the cause of a further effect. In other words, it would mean using the notion of an efficient cause *incorrectly* if one was to claim any specific event or entity as the first origin of an effect. Thus, for Hegel, explanation of something through reference to efficient causes always implies an infinite series of antecedent causes. Each of them is itself the effect of a preceding cause. This granted, an explanation through efficient causes always points beyond what was initially assumed as a cause and requires further causes that are, as it were, “external” to the *explanandum*. In this specific sense, Hegel writes, is

*causality external to itself*, as the *originariness* which is within just as much *positedness* or *effect*. This union of opposite determination *in an existent substrate* constitutes the *infinite regress* from cause to cause. – We start from an effect; the latter has as [*qua* being an] effect a cause; but this cause has a cause in turn, and so on. (SL 498/11.402–3)

Now what does this mean with respect to the generation of unity within an object? Hegel wants to say that introducing causal relations in order to explain the unity of an object externalises the source of unity. Treating parts as connected through causal ties only generates the semblance of the object being autonomous regarding its unity. The reason why this is so, lies in the nature of

efficient causality as “*external to itself*” and thus always pointing to a potentially infinite history of antecedent causes. As soon as I treat one gear of a watch as the cause of the other gear’s movement, I am committed to also explaining what caused the first gear to move and so on *ad infinitum*. As a result, mechanism implies that nothing really derives unity from its own activity but instead has “the determinateness of its totality *outside it*, in *other* objects, and these again *outside them*, and so forth to infinity” (SL 633/12.135).

#### 4.2 The Problem of Indifference

The regress problem constitutes the opening of Hegel’s critical analysis of mechanism. That being said, we should not be overly quick in making it solely responsible for the insufficiencies of mechanism’s causal approach to unity. While Hegel points out that the nature of efficient causality implies an infinite chain of causes, he also maintains that we can conceive of an “immanent turning back of this progression *in infinitum*” and that it can be “represented as a *totality*, as a *world*, [...] a *universe*” (SL 633/12.135). This remark can be seen as a hint that the main concern with mechanism is not so much that it removes the ground of unity infinitely far away from the object; instead, Hegel makes much of the idea that this ground is *external* to the object in the first place. The externality goes along with what Hegel refers to as “indifference” regarding the object, its parts, and their connection. As he puts it with explicit mention of the causal model of mechanism:

[M]echanism is this, that causality, as *identical* determinateness of a diversity of substances and hence as the foundering into this identity of their self-subsistence, is *mere positedness*; the objects are *indifferent to this unity* [my emphasis] and maintain themselves in the face of it. (SL 635/12.137)

Speaking from a more general perspective Hegel also refers to things combined mechanistically as “alien” to their connection:

This is what constitutes the character of *mechanism*, namely, that whatever the connection that obtains between the things combined, *the connection remains one that is alien to them* [my emphasis], that does not affect their nature [...]. (SL 631/12.131)

That said, without further explanation the talk of “indifference” or “alienness” remains rather murky, so it is important to interpret Hegel’s use of these terms. A promising way to do so is to

give an analogy to what Hegel would agree is a mechanistic way of exercising our cognitive capacities, namely learning by heart.<sup>51</sup> When learning by heart (a poem for instance) we add one word to another without making explicit reference to why *these words* are connected in *this order*. That is, from the vantagepoint of learning by heart, there are no principled reasons why it should be “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?” instead of “summer’s ? compare Shall thee a to day” or any other combination of these (or other) words. Of course, Shakespeare has written them in the first way, but the author and his reasons to choose these words in this order make no appearance in their mechanical reproduction. From the mechanistic point of view there is just a sequence of signs and no relevance is assigned to why the sequence contains these instead of other signs, how they are grouped together into words and verses, and why they occur in a certain order. All that matters is that a certain sequence is reproduced, regardless of what motivated this specific arrangement of signs in the first place.

Prior to this abstraction, of course, there is something that harmonises words into a poem, namely the semantic and aesthetic dimensions of language. But once these dimensions are taken out of the picture, we arrive at a version of the indifference which Hegel laments regarding the mechanical object: what we get is a combination in which the things connected neither have a meaningful relation to each other, nor to the whole they make up. The point is that mechanism (as an ontological theory) follows a similar pattern in regarding objects as a plurality of things pushed into unity by an alien force acting from without. Just as any random combination of words can be remembered mechanically, any plurality of things can be forced together in any arrangement.

Thus, with the mechanistic “push and pull” as the sole ground of unity, it becomes irrelevant what is connected to what, which gives rise to a lack of definiteness described by Hegel as “indifference”. In order to develop this observation into an argument against mechanism it is

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<sup>51</sup> “The mechanical dimension of memory precisely consists solely in the fact that here certain signs, sounds, and so forth are construed in their merely external combination and then reproduced in this combination, without it being necessary thereby to attend explicitly to their meaning and inner combination” (EL §195A).

helpful to distinguish different dimensions of indifference. The three dimensions I have in mind pertain to

1. the way the world is partitioned into objects,
2. the internal division of objects into parts,
3. and the arrangement of parts within an object.

On each of these levels, I argue, we will encounter a version of indifference that undermines the intelligibility of objects in an implausible way. The first dimension, for instance, has to do with the fact that mechanism implies a vast plethora of alternatives in which the world is divided up into objects while at the same time, none of them has priority over the other. This ontological implication then can be evaluated from an epistemic angle. If the world really was as the mechanist suggests, any selection of an object of knowledge would be arbitrary because whenever one makes some individual thing the object of inquiry there would be a great many alternatives and no way to choose from them. Say I study the behaviour of a bird sitting on a tree. What warrants me to study the bird instead of a compound of bird and tree? The mechanist would have to agree that both things qualify as an object and that there is no principled difference between studying birds and bird-tree compounds. But that surely is absurd and exposes an insufficiency of mechanism.<sup>52</sup>

I gave this brief exposition of the first type of indifference for illustrative purposes. A proper argument must follow. But I want to use this occasion to point out the structure of the arguments I am thinking of. They start from the assumptions mechanism makes about unity and then expose implications of these assumptions on an ontological level. The evaluative step is then to ask how these ontological claims relate to (what I assume are) plausible assumptions about our

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<sup>52</sup> A possible reply could be that *our interests* determine what counts as an object. For instance, a hunter might justify counting the bird rather than the bird-tree compound as an object by pointing out that only the former is relevant for a roast dinner. However, this move undermines the mind-independence of the object for as soon as our interests decide over what counts as an object and what does not, the deciding voice in this matter is no longer the object itself but the subject that has these interests. Note however, that there may be some “objects”, namely artefacts, where matters of interest and utility figure into *what they are*. As we shall see in due course, this is precisely why Hegel denies that artefacts are paradigmatic cases of what it means to be an object.

ability to gain knowledge of objects. The conclusion then comes down to exposing how a mechanist world would be unable to account for these abilities and that their possibility speaks against the truth of mechanism. Of course, this type of argument is vulnerable to scepticism about knowledge. But I hope that the specific forms of knowledge I refer to<sup>53</sup> are such that principled doubt about them can be recognised as hyperbolic.

#### 4.2.1 *Problem 1: The Division of the World*

The first level of indifference is a direct corollary of what mechanism says about the conditions under which many things make up an object. The mechanistic account of unity is that the condition should be the presence of a causal relation among the things combined. Now let's imagine a world of objects composed in this way. As soon as one thing, A, has an effect on another thing, B, the two of them make up an object, AB. Now, as we have seen (via Hegel's analysis of the regress of causes), causal relations must be viewed within the context of antecedent causes. Thus, A doesn't have its causal powers without a reason, so that there must equally be something, C, which acts as a cause for A to have an effect on B.

The upshot of the causal account is that the world of objects expands into manifold combinations of causally interacting things, each of which represents a further object. For one thing, this world grows to include larger composites in the way AB must be amended to ABC. On this level we get a world partitioned into objects that are parts of larger ones (together with those things that have causal influence on them). This level of division introduces manifold objects that are ordered like non-intersecting spheres. But the mechanistic picture implies further fragmentation also including intersecting spheres representing objects that share parts such as CA and AB. It is important to note that even if there were independent grounds for treating AB as one object against alternative combinations, the problem of indifferent groupings would arise again for anything which is identified as the cause of AB's unity; after all, C does not have its

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<sup>53</sup> As I just said, the first type of knowledge is the ability to identify something as an object of inquiry in a non-arbitrary way. The other two forms are about the possibility of *analysing* objects into parts and of *normatively evaluating* the arrangement of parts within an object (as "broken" or "injured", for instance).

causal powers from internal devices either; as Hegel has it, in mechanism, “nowhere is a principle of self-determination to be found” (SL 633/12.35). From this it follows that C also partakes in various compounds with causally connected things (such as D). Each of these combinations fulfils the mechanical conditions for unity as long as they stand in some causal relation. We can thus depict the multilevel partition of the mechanistic world as follows:

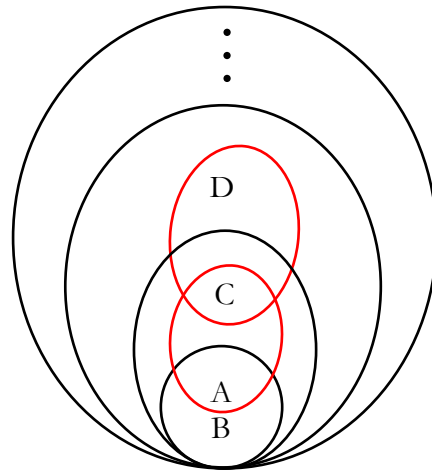


Figure 2: The division of the mechanistic world into objects

By this I hope to provide an illustration of the manifold ways in which the mechanistic world is ontologically divided. Admittedly I have not put much energy in developing the mechanistic account. Of course, it is possible to restrict the conditions for unity further so that fewer combinations qualify as an object. But I think the core of Hegel’s argument is not just that indifference comes about because there are *many* objects, but rather because there are no resources for choosing between them. Any choice between the various options of what recommends itself as an object within the mechanistic world is just as good as the other. This, not the plurality of objects *per se*, brings about indifference. For Hegel, the corresponding epistemic perspective (“determinism”) is marked by acquiescence regarding the inevitable arbitrariness that affects its choice of objects:

*Determinism*, which is the standpoint that cognition adopts when it assumes as truth the object as we first have it here [the mechanical object], assigns for each determination of the object that of another object; but this other object is likewise indifferent both to its determinateness and its determining. – For this reason determinism is itself so



indeterminate as to be bound to an infinite progression; it can halt at will anywhere, and be satisfied there, because the object to which it has progressed, being a formal totality, is shut up within itself and indifferent to its being determined by another. (SL 633/12.135)

A mechanistic way of explaining the unity of an object will have to point to those things that have a causal influence on this object. But those objects exercising causal influence do what they do also because other things make them so. This is where indifference takes effect: What exactly should be identified as *the* cause for the unity of AB? As soon as C is considered within the scope of its own causal determination through other objects, manifold options of grouping them arise. At the same time there are no resources for preferring any of them over the other. Neither are there objective grounds for choosing AB as the explanandum in the first place (ABC, AC, and a great many more would have been equally valid options); nor is there a way to account for whether the connection between A and B should be explained by pointing to C or to the various further compounds in which C partakes. As Hegel concludes,

[f]or this reason to *explain* the determination of an object, and to this end to extend the representation of it beyond it, is only an *empty word*, for there is no self-determination in the other object to which the explanation has been extended. (SL 633/12.135)

The attempt to give an account of the conditions under which many things make up a whole in mechanistic terms is affected by an irresolvable arbitrariness. It is not clear which of many possible alternatives should count as one object and it equally remains a matter of indifference what entity figures as the ground of an object's unity.

#### 4.2.2 *Problem 2: The Internal Division of Objects*

As I said above, there are, in my view, further reasons supporting Hegel's rejection of mechanism. One is that the indifference regarding the division of the world into objects also pertains to the internal division of objects into parts. Hegel was aware of this problem and explicitly says that the mechanical object is not only indifferent regarding its relations to other objects but also regarding the "determinacies [...] which are in it" (SL 633/12.135), that is, regarding its internal division. The "difference" among the object's "determinacies" (how it is divided into parts) is not governed by any principle which brings about a further level of

indifference. To be sure, the mechanist account does imply that objects have some internal division – for otherwise, what would be the *relata* of the causal ties it postulates? At the same time, however, the object is represented as fragmented into multiple, simultaneously applying types of division none of which being intrinsically related to the object itself:

The determinacies, therefore, which are in it do indeed pertain to it; but the form that constitutes their difference and combines them into a unity is an external one, indifferent to them; whether it be a mixture, or again an order, a certain arrangement of parts and sides, these are combinations that are indifferent to what they connect. (SL 633/12.135)

Let's now try to give a more detailed account of the idea entailed by these rather compressed remarks of Hegel. Suppose we just make a bold choice from the unstructured pool of objects the mechanistic world has on offer and identify one object in particular. Let's also assume we made, through some happy intuition, a lucky choice and manage to pick out an object that we (again intuitively) agree to have easily identifiable parts, such as a bird. On the intuitive level we come to the conclusion that this thing is built from parts such as wings and legs, a heart and a brain, and so on. Now we check this way of analysing the object with the mechanistic principle for unity. Do these things make up a whole? Surely the answer is yes because the identified parts stand in various causal relations with each other. For instance, when birds fly it is the movement of the wings that causes the other parts of its body to move along while the heart produces a certain blood-pressure and so causes the brain to maintain its activity. The mechanistic account of unity through causal relation, it seems, fares not so badly after all when it comes to identifying the internal division of an object into parts.

But this impression is misleading and potentially driven by our implicit use of non-mechanistic intuitions. For, how would the mechanist know that analysing the body into such parts as wings, legs, brain and heart is the right way to analyse it? Surely this is *one way* to do so – but what warrants the conclusion that it is *the right way* of analysing this object? The intuitive parts I chose above are functional parts that serve specific purposes within the organism. But the notion of purpose is unavailable to the mechanist. All he has is the idea of what Kant calls a “nexus effectivus” (cf. AA 5:372), a web knitted exclusively according to the pattern of *efficient*

*causality*. This pattern, however, is also present in various other options of division: let's say we divide the bird into its upper and lower half. Surely these parts are connected by a causal tie, engendered by gravitational forces at the very least.<sup>54</sup> The same applies to a division into equal masses of 5g or into cubes of 1cm<sup>3</sup> in volume.

While we can clearly identify these ways of analysing a bird as irrelevant for the sort of thing a bird is, the mechanist couldn't. The reason is this: our intuition that birds are not composed from equal masses of 5g (in any sense other than the fact that their mass in grams can be divided by 5) is driven by functional considerations. The division into organs is warranted by purposeful connections among the parts, while the division into equal masses of 5g is not. The trouble for mechanism is that it has no access to such criteria of choice when it comes to analysing an object. Since the object is itself "indifferent" to its parts there is no way of choosing among the many ways in which it can be divided. Any analysis that fulfils the minimal criterion of causal relation among the parts recommends itself just as much as any other which makes any account of division arbitrary.

#### 4.2.3 *Problem 3: Arrangement and Normative Evaluation*

Finally, there is a third way in which the mechanical object's indifference undermines its intelligibility. This has to do with the arrangement of parts and the possibility of evaluating objects normatively.

As Hegel points out several times throughout his discussion of mechanism, the mechanical object does have "a certain *arrangement* of parts". As such, mechanism is different from contemporary conceptions that regard objects as mereological sums of items. For instance, on the influential mereological account of David Lewis, the order or arrangement of parts plays no role at all: ABC is the exact same things as CAB.<sup>55</sup> By contrast, the view Hegel considers in

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<sup>54</sup> Any two masses exercise gravitational forces on each other. Although these forces diminish relative to the physical distance between the involved bodies they are believed to never cease to zero. In this sense gravitational forces are a good example for ubiquitous causal connections in nature.

<sup>55</sup> This is due to Lewis' holding the view "that if some entities compose something, they compose exactly one thing. You can never build two distinct composites out of the same parts. That is, sameness of parts is sufficient for

mechanism does include the idea of arrangement; however, mechanism is similar to the mereological view to the extent that it does not ascribe *significance* to arrangement. How the things that make up an object happen to be arranged is a matter of coincidence and has nothing to do with the object that comes to be through this connection. The object, while having a certain arrangement of parts, is, as it were, indifferent to this arrangement in the sense that any other arrangement would have been equally adequate for the realisation of this object.

Koslicki gives an example which is helpful for illustrating the relevance of arrangement. Although aimed at the contemporary, mereological view I mentioned above, the example is instructive for approaching Hegel's critique of mechanism too. Koslicki suggests comparing two ways in which the parts of an artefact, a motor cycle in this case, can be arranged: once as a fully assembled vehicle and once as heap of motorcycle "parts". As she writes,

there is a vast and important difference between a heap of disassembled motorcycle parts, piled up, as they might be, at [... a motorcycle] factory or in someone's garage, and the motorcycle in running condition that results from assembling these parts in a particular, fairly constrained, way. Anyone who is at all mechanically inclined or who is interested in actually riding their motorcycle will attest to the importance of the distinction between a motorcycle in running condition and its disassembled parts. (Koslicki 2008, 3)

Koslicki's point is that the contemporary view cannot account for this "vast and important difference" because it denies that the order viz. arrangement of parts is relevant for the identity of an object.

Now, the mechanistic account of the object does not, as the contemporary view does, deny difference between the motorcycle and the heap of its components. From the mechanistic point of view these entities differ with respect to the arrangement of their parts. Consequentially, they are *not* literally the same thing. That said, mechanism fails to provide resources for qualifying the difference between the heap and the motorcycle in working order in normative terms. There

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identity: if x and y have the same parts, then 'they' are identical" (Bennett 2015, 251). This principle is typically referred to as the "uniqueness of composition"; with regards to its ontological implications also c.f. Koslicki (2008, 4; 17).

is no sense in which the fully assembled motorcycle could count as better, more functional, or complete as compared to the heap of parts. Both objects differ but this difference fails to engender significance. At the same time, it seems obvious that the mentioned difference is important because the motorcycle in working order is manifestly better as soon as using it for getting from one place to another is a matter of concern at all. The point is that everyone, including metaphysicians of mechanist inclinations, would agree that this difference is significant, while the mechanist ontology offers no reasons why it should be.

So far, I have made this point largely independently of Hegel's text; but I can do better than this. Already in Subjectivity Hegel had highlighted the importance of normative evaluation by pointing out that there are judgments the subject of which "contains the *ground* for *being or not being what it ought to be*" (SL 585/12.87). Now, in the Objectivity chapter, the issue returns in terms of a critique of the mechanist idea that unguided causal interaction forms the only basis for the constitution of objects. In the "mechanical process" we think of the object as the result of various causal interactions taking place in a process-related sense. The question then is, what needs to be the case for such processes to have an outcome which can be judged as *objectively good or bad*.

Crucial to Hegel's analysis is the observation that in mechanism these processes come into view *only* in terms of the results it brings about: "the mechanical object is, *as such, an object only as product*" (SL 637/12.140). By this Hegel means that the whole which comes to be through the interaction of certain entities is not present as a projected outcome guiding the process throughout its development; this would be precisely the idea of what Kant called "causality according to concepts" (AA 5:373) and it is this idea that mechanists want to do without. Instead they endorse the view that objects are the results of causal interaction without an inherent plan or projected outcome. Thus, from the mechanist vantagepoint, the object is "only a product" in the sense that its coming to be does not imply a pre-set structure characteristic and immanent to the result of this process.

Here again Hegel exploits the idea that the mechanical object is determined by things which are *external* to it. The specific constitution of an object is subject not to an inbuilt structure but merely to the impact of other things which are indifferent towards what they bring about.

Thus, “what” the mechanical object

*is, is only by virtue of the mediation of an other in it. It is as product that it thus is what it was supposed to be in and for itself, a composite, a mixture, a certain arrangement of parts, in general such that its determinateness is not self-determination but something posited.* (SL 637/12.139)

It may strike us as strange that Hegel mentions a sense of what the mechanical object is “supposed to be”; for is it not precisely the absence of any such sense of “supposed to be” which has been identified as characteristic to the mechanical view above? In my view the point of Hegel’s argument is that mechanism should not be seen as the denial of determinateness. Instead, it is characterised by *indifference* about determinateness: the mechanical process does have a definite result, it is not a claim to indeterminism, as it were. At the same time however, the events that lead to this result are not directed at any specific outcome. The “supposed to be” of mechanical interaction is not the “for the sake of which” of purposeful activity. That is, while the mechanical object is supposed to have *some* definite arrangement of parts, *any* arrangement is just as good as the other because there are no constraints on what *should* come to be:

*the result of the mechanical process is not already there ahead of that process itself; its end is not in its beginning, as in the case of purpose. The product is in the object a determinateness which is externally posited in it.* (SL 637/12.140)

From this it should have become clear that the mechanical object lacks an inbuilt standard that would constitute not just different arrangements of the same parts but also greater or lesser adequateness of these arrangements. This account of the ontological structure of things is, as I will now argue, destructive to the possibility of another plausible form of knowledge, namely normative judgments. Simply put, in the mechanist world, damaged motorcycles and broken legs are just as good as their intact counterparts. But of course this intimation requires further elaboration.

The plausible form of knowledge which is undermined by mechanism is that we cannot make normative judgments and evaluate things as good or bad. While Hegel does not address this explicitly in the discussion of mechanism, his analysis of the “judgment of the concept” clearly shows that he thinks normative evaluation is an indispensable feature of our intellectual engagement with the world:

The concept is at the basis of this judgment [the judgment of the concept], and it is there with reference to the subject matter, as an *ought* to which reality may or may not conform. – This is the judgment, therefore, that first contains true adjudication; the predicates, “good,” “bad,” “true,” “right,” etc., express that the fact is *measured* against the concept as an *ought* which is simply presupposed, and is, or is not, in *agreement* with it. (SL 582/12.84)

Furthermore, in the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel appreciatively references what he takes to be the commonsensical view of judgment; according to his analysis this pre-philosophical attitude thinks of judgments *primarily* in normative terms:

In ordinary life, too, one only calls it judging when a judgment is of this sort, e.g. the judgment whether an object, action, and so forth is good or bad, true, beautiful, and so forth. One will not ascribe a power of judgment to someone [simply] for knowing, for example, how to make positive or negative judgments such as ‘this rose is red’, ‘this painting is red, green, dusty’, and so forth. (EL §178R)

It is clear from the above that Hegel thinks that normative evaluation is an important part of how we relate to things intellectually. In this context, one should also keep in mind that Hegel wants such evaluations, and indeed judgments in general, to be objectively valid rather than nominalistic expressions of our preferences.<sup>56</sup> As a consequence our ontological outline of the world must not undermine the possibility of objective, normative evaluation.

Thus, the final issue Hegel takes with mechanism is that it does just this by removing the idea of inner standards from the formation of objects and their forms. This is not to say that normative evaluation is impossible within the mechanistic framework; things without inner standards of adequateness can still be judged as good or bad, etc. But the criteria applied in such judgments depend on those making them and have no resonance within things themselves. Thus,

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<sup>56</sup> “If we say ‘this rose *is* red’ or ‘this painting *is* beautiful’, what is thereby said is not that it is *we* who in some external fashion make the rose red or the painting beautiful, but instead that these are the objects’ own determinations” (EL §166A).

what a mechanistically construed ontology undermines is the possibility of *objective* validity with respect to normative evaluations.

In the emaciated way normative evaluation is available to mechanists, to judge something as good or bad, healthy or injured, etc. only ever is a matter of subjective preference. The force of Hegel's argument stems from the fact that there are at least certain cases in which a merely subjective approach to normative judgments is recognisably inappropriate. Leaving aside whether or not beauty lies in the eye of the beholder, to say the same about the brokenness of your car's motor is absurd, and to say it about the injuries of a person with a broken leg is cynical.<sup>57</sup> In this broad sense Hegel's intuition that normative evaluation is objective, is, I think, very plausible. Consequentially, the fact that mechanism undermines the objective validity of normative evaluation constitutes a further reason to reject its ontology.

To review my argument: Hegel's case against mechanism starts from expounding what I have called the problem of indifference, that is, the fact that mechanism fails to account for the possibility of non-arbitrary knowledge of objects. This problem has been traced back to three specific sources of indifference relating to the world's division into objects, the internal structure of objects in terms of parts, and the normative relevance of their arrangement. It is the idea that objects come to be through an uncoordinated process of causal interactions that lies at the heart of Hegel's critique of mechanism. As I hope to have shown, Hegel's main point amounts to the recommendation that we should not view the composition of complex substances in terms of uncoordinated causal interaction. Instead a more demanding principle of unity is required.

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<sup>57</sup> Hegel often displays a realist attitude to aesthetic judgments too (cf. EL §166A). But the argument from normative evaluation does not hinge on this controversial position alone. The more pertinent cases are about the competent use of the predicates "good" and "bad". And here we can positively relate his view to plausible everyday scenarios: physicians, for instance, have the bewildering tendency to call text-book manifestations of pathology "beautiful"; but no one who takes the medical profession seriously at all would call them "good", which is, I think, an expression of everyday, normative realism. On Hegel's attitude towards normative evaluation also cf. Rand (2015).



### 4.3 Absolute Mechanism as an Approximation of Substantial Unity

So far, I have focussed on the critique of mechanism and I haven't said much about the positive contribution of this category. However, in the section on Absolute Mechanism, Hegel considers mechanism not simply as a failed account of objectivity but rather as its most primitive case.

While mechanism certainly cannot deliver a paradigmatic case of a unified object, it does capture, according to Hegel, a first intimation of it.

The negative strand of Hegel's engagement with mechanism aims at showing that a complete lack of coordination for the causal interactions of materials is not compatible with the possibility of unified objects. Instead there must be a source of coordination, of rules for causal interactions if they are to effect the composition of unified wholes. In the paradigmatic case Hegel positively envisages, this source of coordination is the *form* of the object which acts as a *final cause*: for example, the way matter is arranged in an oak tree, its form, is responsible for this matter producing not random configurations but instead preserving the specific arrangement pertinent to an oak tree. Unity then becomes graspable as a joint effort for reaching a common end (namely to preserve form). But mechanism is supposed to be only a first and still insufficient draft of the logic at the heart of such a paradigm case. That means, we are to expect that something will play the part of a unifying, immanent form, although this part is not played very well. As a minimum requirement, there must be a source of coordination, of rules for causal interactions.

As we have seen above, this cannot be achieved by pointing merely to the mutual causal impact manifold items have on each other. That said, Hegel thinks that, in a primitive sense, the requirement can be met when there is a significant asymmetry in power or strength between several amounts of items. Hegel's standard example for such a case is the solar system where a star of greater mass, the "central body", commands regularities in the surrounding matter and so governs its organisation into one object, namely the solar system. Here a plurality of items is

bound together by a typical pattern of interaction while what commands the pattern is a centre of superior power which determines the activity within its sphere of influence.

One may wonder how the supposedly unguided interaction of the mechanical process could deliver sources of regularity. Hegel seems to think here that such processes incidentally bring about items of relatively superior power which, under pertinent circumstances, start to dominate the behaviour of weaker items. We could think here of the incidental aggregation of physical matter which constitutes a centre of gravity, or equally of influential groups within a society who, building on an originally *incidental* surplus of power, establish rule over others.

Hegel's interpretation of such cases is that the central body governing the interactions of manifold items is not only another item but also plays the role of universality which yokes together a dispersed plurality into a unified whole. Here, mechanism does indeed arrive at a version of universality as causally relevant for the unity of the object; it does so in terms of universality embodied in a superior object:

The central body has therefore ceased to be a mere *object* [...]. Its determinateness is essentially different from a mere *order* or *arrangement* and *external combination* of diverse parts; as a determinateness that exists in and for itself it is an *immanent* form, a self-determining principle to which the objects inhere and in virtue of which they are bound together in a true One. (SL 641/12.144)

As I said above, Hegel often points to the physical example of the solar system when addressing mechanism in this positive sense. But he also maintains that there are versions of mechanical objects within the spiritual world of social institutions. A government, for instance, can act the role of a central body uniting the manifold individual citizens by means of regulating their strivings and needs through laws (cf. SL 642/12.144–5; EL §198R). What Hegel seems to mean here is this: only if individual interests are coordinated such that they result in law-abiding behaviour, is there a unified whole in which individuals partake as citizens. The commonality in both examples is that unity among otherwise dispersed items is achieved through a type of universals, namely through *laws* – be it civil law or the laws of classical mechanics. A peculiarity of

Hegel's account is that laws must be embodied in either case through the central body or its social analogue, the government.<sup>58</sup>

As Dean Moyar (2020, 614–5) has pointed out, the positive account of mechanism also restores the possibility of descriptions in terms of the syllogistic models Hegel had analysed in Subjectivity. For instance, in analysis of the social example, Hegel does not hesitate to use the scheme of three syllogisms with different moments figuring as the middle term each time (S-U-P; U-S-P, and S-P-U):

[T]he *government*, the *individual citizens*, and the *needs* or the *external life* of these, are also three terms, of which each is the middle term of the other two. The *government* is the absolute center in which the extreme of the singulars is united with their external existence; the *singulars* are likewise the middle term that incites that universal individual into external concrete existence and transposes their ethical essence into the extreme of actuality. The third syllogism is the formal syllogism, the syllogism of reflective shine in which the singular citizens are tied by their *needs* and external existence to this universal absolute individuality [...]. (SL 642/12.145)

It should be noted that this way of making use of syllogisms is even further removed from a formal theory of inference. The terms Hegel appeals to are neither linguistic nor are they identical with ontological constituents like properties and kinds. Instead Hegel feeds his hylomorphic account into the structure of the syllogism and addresses the materials and form which together account for unified substances. There are, as one could say, 'objective syllogisms' which describe the unification of materials according to forms. More of this thinking will become operative in Hegel's account of teleology and it is noteworthy that Hegel foreshadows these ideas already within the final stage of Mechanism.

However, as much as Hegel presents this account of mechanism as a positive contribution to thinking the unity of objects, he leaves no doubt that it remains "a superficial manner of observation, lacking in thought, insufficient for making do either in relation to nature

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<sup>58</sup> With an eye to Descartes' mechanistic thinking, this constitutes a genuinely different position. For Descartes (1985, 90–2) the causal interactions of material particles is governed by laws too. But these Cartesian laws are stipulations by a creator God acting from outside the realm of ordinary objects. Hegel's positive account of mechanism by contrast only accepts laws that are imposed by entities within the realm of the thereby governed objects. While avoiding the idea of universals as brute stipulations, the mechanistic construal of embodied laws also constitutes the limitations of this perspective as we will see below.

or even less in relation to the spiritual world” (EL §195A). Mechanism, according to Hegel, only describes the most primitive instances of substantial unity or, more precisely, of *almost*-unity. As such it cannot deliver *a paradigmatic case of* but merely *a striving for* substantial unity.

Regarding the reasons for this insufficiency Hegel’s text is, unfortunately, not very clear. One option to still give an explanation is to draw from Hegel’s own sources and to appeal to an Aristotelian argument known as the “syllable regress”. The claim made in this argument is that unity cannot be achieved without launching a regress if it hinges on the presence of an element within the plurality which is to be unified. As I will show now, a version of this problem arises once attempts are made to articulate the unifying form of mechanical objects as immanent to these objects. I will first sketch Aristotle’s argument and then go on to explain how it can help us to see why mechanistic unity is incomplete.

Suppose, says Aristotle (in Met. VII.17, 1041b10–20)<sup>59</sup>, we are looking for the unity of two syllables *a* and *b*. If we argue with a third syllable *c* as the ground of unity we may be able to explain the connection among *a* and *b* but we are faced with a new problem of what explains the connection between *ab* on the one hand and *c* on the other hand. If we stick to the strategy of pointing to further items like *d*, the same problem will surface again and so on to (bad) infinity. As Anna Marmodoro summarises, in Aristotle this line of thought has the function of establishing that “the unifying form in a substance cannot be of the same ontological standing as the items it unifies: if it unifies the parts of a substance, it cannot itself be a further part of the substance” (Marmodoro 2013, 16).

Now in Hegel’s account of the mechanical object it is a “central body” which is supposed to play the role of “an *immanent* form [...] in virtue of which [...] manifold items] are bound

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<sup>59</sup> The key passage is: “Since that which is compounded out of something so that the whole is one, not like a heap but like a syllable—now the syllable is not its elements, *ba* is not the same as *b* and *a*, nor is flesh fire and earth (for when these are separated the wholes, i. e. the flesh and the syllable, no longer exist, but the elements of the syllable exist, and so do fire and earth); the syllable, then, is something—not only its elements (the vowel and the consonant) but also something else, and the flesh is not only fire and earth or the hot and the cold, but also something else:—if, then, that something must itself be either an element or composed of elements, (1) if it is an element the same argument will again apply; for flesh will consist of this and fire and earth and something still further, so that the process will go on to infinity.”

together in a true One” (SL 641/12.144). Note, however, that Hegel also maintains that this ‘form’ is, at the same time, *embodied* in a further object: the sun as opposed to the planets viz. the government as opposed to the citizens. We thus have a situation where the unifying form is treated as a further element of the plurality it is supposed to unify. As we have seen above, this account of unity is regress-driven: for while a central body may be the cause of unity for the items in its periphery, it would take a further unifying item to also unify the central body with its periphery. If the sun ensures that Venus, Earth and Mars constitute one system what then ensures that Venus, Earth, and Mars constitute a unity *together with the sun?*

Arguably this would have to be done by a further unifying central body but of course the same question would reoccur regarding this larger system: what unifies it with its unifying element? This cannot really be a satisfying account of unity for someone like Hegel who thinks that “to *explain* the determination of an object, and to this end to extend the representation of it beyond it, is only an *empty word*” (SL 633/12.135). Thus, the central body – even if it gets called a form, cannot really live up to what it ought to be, namely an *immanent* form which would generate unity without launching a regress.

What a unifier fashioned after the model of the central body cannot do is to establish unity between itself and the items it governs and so it remains true that the “mechanical object is [...] characterized as having no real substantial form” (Stern 1990, 79). As I hope to have specified above, this lack crucially hinges on the absence of true *immanence* of forms within the logic of mechanism. This problem haunts the category of mechanism even in its most advanced version so that the paradigmatic type of unity must be searched for elsewhere, namely in the categories of Chemism, Teleology and Life. As a hint guiding our ongoing investigation into these issues we can conclude this section by stating that more advanced forms of unity will have to account for the immanence of form and that this excludes the idea of form as a literal part of the object.

## 5 Towards a Paradigm of Unity: The Ontology of Purposiveness

As the previous chapter should have made clear, the structure of genuine unity can only be intimated within the mechanist framework. The closest we got to unity was the idea of a central body which, however, still commands unity in an externalising fashion. In face of mechanism's failure, it is clear that a more sophisticated account of the object's unity must not appeal to external unifiers; instead, unity must be derived from a source immanent to the object. In the following I will explain how Hegel makes use of teleology in order to complete his account of substantial unity in the *Logic's* Objectivity and Idea of Life chapters. The analysis of Mechanism has brought to light that an account must be given which does not appeal to external unifiers. This idea guides Hegel's perspective on teleological systems and ultimately leads to an account of paradigmatic cases of unified wholes in the Idea of Life.

In my presentation of this train of thought I start by expounding the general conceptual framework of purposiveness by introducing Hegel's notions of "subjective purpose", "means", and "realised purpose" (section 5.1). This framework is neutral to the distinction between external (tool-like) purposiveness and the immanent purposiveness characteristic of life. However, as we shall see in section 5.2, Hegel argues that external purposiveness is insufficient for delivering a paradigmatic account of the object's unity.

Against this backdrop, I then present his positive account based on the idea of immanent purposiveness (section 5.3). The proposal Hegel makes, is that objects are unified through their form. However, in order to play this role, form cannot be merely a mere arrangement or by product of the causal interplay of underlying parts (as it was the case in Mechanism). Instead, on Hegel's positive account, forms are equipped with a peculiar type of causal power, namely they are *final causes*. On this view, a plurality of items is a unified whole to the extent that their interaction results in the realisation of a common goal, while this goal is not external to the object but immanent to it as its own form. Thus, not just any arrangement of causally interacting items

qualifies for unity, but instead only such combinations where the interaction is organised in a purposeful manner (where this way of organisation is the form *and* the telos of the object).

The appeal to immanent purposiveness however raises two further questions which I discuss in the concluding section 5.4: First, I point out that the appeal to immanent purposiveness can seem to make Hegel's solution exclusive for just one type of object, namely living beings. However, I argue that while Hegel regards these objects as paradigm cases of unity, he concedes that other types of objects (such as artefacts and natural aggregates) can be understood to approximate this paradigm to a certain extent. Secondly, I raise the issue that Hegel's account of unity is not as such also a theory of *numerical* unity. As a consequence there needs to be an independent discussion of how Hegel thinks that objects can be not just unified but also countably distinct from one another. This issue then sets the scene for the topic of the subsequent Chapter 6: *Hegel and the Problems of Difference*.

## 5.1 The Conceptual Framework of Purposiveness

### 5.1.1 The "Extra-Mundane" Existence of Purpose – Subjective Purpose

Hegel begins his discussion by pointing out a difficulty. The difficulty is that purposiveness is often used in a sense which is incompatible with the very idea of an immanent source of unity. This is the idea that purposes are tied to an intelligence which attributes them to a world of pre-existing materials: "[w]here there is the perception of a *purposiveness*, an *intelligence* is assumed as its author" (SL 651/12.154). This intelligence could either be a finite subject – like someone who crafts and uses a hammer to the end of hitting nails – or a divine subject that crafts and equips the world with purpose according to its own design. In both cases, purpose is only externally attributed to worldly objects. Thus, purpose is thought of as having an essentially extra-mundane existence in minds (either finite or divine) which is projected onto mind-independent reality.

While Hegel agrees that there are important ways in which purposes can be external to the world, he insists that the universal pattern of purposiveness is broader than this and also includes immanent goal-structures, as we tend to assume them in living beings. As pointed out by

deVries, our own experience as agents who realise goals in an intentional and subject-related way provides reasons to assume such immanent and mind-independent purposiveness:

Indeed, reflection on the subjective or intentional model of teleology is sufficient to demonstrate the need for a concept of natural or objective teleology, Hegel believes, for intentional teleology actually *presupposes* natural teleology. In the intentional model of teleology a subjectivity works its will upon a distinct objectivity; normally it does so by employing an instrument, a means for its end. But since the instrument is itself in the objective order, how is the subjectivity to work its will upon it? There must be something that bridges the gap between the subjective and objective realms, normally the body. The possession of a body, a single, unified entity with both subjective and objective aspects, is the necessary presupposition of intentional teleology. But the body itself is teleologically saturated: the heart beats in order to pump blood; the body moves in order to nourish itself. Intentional or subjective teleology is built on the natural, objective teleology of the organism. (deVries 1988, 8; cf. deVries 1991)

We'll have to come back and say more about these "teleologically saturated" objects mentioned by deVries. At this point, however, my main motivation for citing his reconstruction is to show that Hegel cannot afford a restriction of his account of purposiveness to the external attribution of goal-structures. When we set ends by the powers of our minds, for our actions or for the things we craft, this already implies a further realm of goal-structures that don't need to be "set" or attributed through us. On the high level of generality on which Hegel discusses purposiveness there must be room for the idea of mind-independent, immanent purposiveness too!

This also pertains to the outlook of solving the problem of unity: solving this problem, as we saw at the occasion of examining Hegel's account of mechanism, requires that the source of unity is immanent to the thereby unified object. Accordingly, if purposes are to play the role of unifiers, they cannot be, as the subjective model claims, located in the mind and as such external to the object. If the subjective account's appeal to externality was inscribed in the fundamental structure of purposiveness, purpose would be another non-starter for the establishment of immanent unity.

That being said, there is a sense in which purpose must indeed be independent from the world; or at least, it must be independent from the *fully actual* world and retain a status of *possible reality* or *reality-as-projected-outcome* of a purposeful activity. This idea is way less esoteric than it may, at first, appear to the modern mind. All Hegel says is that in order to realise a purpose, there



must be something analogous to a not yet executed plan of what should become. Thus, if there ever is to be a realised purpose, this presupposes the idea of a projected outcome which is not yet actualised in the objective world:

To this extent purpose still has a truly *extra-mundane* concrete existence – to the extent, namely, that this objectivity stands opposed to it, just as the latter, as a mechanical and chemical whole still not determined and not pervaded by purpose, stands on its side opposed to it. (SL 658/12.161)

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that the extra-mundane existence of purpose necessarily resides in a mind. As we have already seen above, what Hegel means is more basic than an account of intentional agency or the specific purposefulness of artefacts. Instead he wants to articulate the idea that in all teleological processes the end must govern and therefore pre-exist its own realisation. It is in light of these considerations that Hegel characterises the structure of goal-directed, or teleological activity as follows:

Of the teleological activity one can say, therefore, that in it the end is the beginning, the consequence the ground, the effect the cause; that it is a becoming of what has become; that in it only that which already concretely exists comes into existence, and so on [...]. (SL 664/12.167)

What is required for this is not necessarily a mind with a plan but, more generally, the potential existence of a certain outcome. Here it is helpful to point out that Hegel shares a conviction which Jonathan Lear identifies as Aristotle's, namely the belief "that there is *real* purposefulness in the world. And real purposefulness requires that the end *somehow* govern the process along the way to its own realization" (Lear 1988, 40). As Lear goes on to explain,

it is not, strictly speaking, the end *specified as such* that is operating from the start: it is *form* that directs the process of its own development from potentiality to actuality. Form which exists as a potentiality is a force in the organism for the acquisition of a certain character: namely, actual form. Form as an actuality is the end or final cause. (Lear 1988, 40)

By referencing "the organism" Lear is pointing here to the immanent purposiveness of life. But his remark is very useful for understanding not just this specific type of purposiveness. It also helps to see that the potential form of an object is not necessarily grounded in a mind. To be sure, the idea of a guiding potentiality is not totally cut off from the actual. Instead, it requires that "the existence of potential form at the beginning of a developmental process is due to the

antecedent existence of actual form” (Lear 1988, 40). In some cases this is indeed the mind of an agent (with a plan for action) or a builder’s mind with a plan for building a house. But in other cases, such as in living beings, the potential existence of one being is grounded not in a mind but in the preceding generation of exactly such beings.

It should have become clear that understanding the various applications of purposiveness in the explanation of artefacts, agency, and living beings requires a general account of purposiveness and that Hegel considers it illegitimate to narrow this account to the idea of externally attributed goal-structures. He argues instead that the very possibility of applying purposiveness to the respective “content” of, for instance, an artefact or a living being rests on a broad conception of purposiveness “as such”:

When purposiveness is attributed to an *intelligence*, as was said above, this is done with specific reference to a certain content. But, as such, purpose is to be taken as the *rational in its concrete existence*. It manifests *rationality* by being the concrete concept that holds the *objective difference in its absolute unity*. (SL 567/12.160)

The general idea of purposiveness (“as such”), as we saw above, requires a mode of potential existence of purpose. Hegel’s term for this aspect of teleology is “subjective purpose”. However, this must not be narrowly conceived of in terms of an intelligence viz. a mind.

The quote I just gave is interesting also in another respect. Hegel identifies purpose, without any hesitation, with the concept and, in the very next sentence, with the syllogism: “it [purpose] is essentially *sylogism*” (SL 567/12.160). The syllogistic structure of the concept however, as it is introduced and developed throughout the *Logic*, cannot be exhaustively grasped in terms of a mere potential or a merely projected form of the object. At most, this would correspond to the moment of universality taken in abstraction from its interconnection with particularity and singularity. It should therefore come as no surprise that Hegel thinks that the idea of subjective purpose is just as incomplete as the isolated moment of universality. Thus, in order for a purpose to become manifest in the objective world, it is required that it translates its potential into something actual.

### 5.1.2 *The Connection of Purpose to the Actual World – the Means*

Just as the moment of “universality is [...] not singular immediately but lowers itself to it through particularity” (SL 590–1/12.93), so purpose “is in need of a means for its realization” (SL 659/12.163) as well. The merely potential, and as such empty, form of the object must thus inform some material and thereby acquire a “content as against the [merely] posited differences of the form” (SL 658/12.161). The “extramundane”, “posited” existence of subjective purpose contrasts with the reality of mechanical and chemical objects; with “an objective world” which is “indifferent to the determination of purpose” (SL 659/12.163). At the same time, however, this *not yet teleological world* provides a virtually endless supply of raw materials which can be turned into means to an end. For example, rocks as such only obey the laws pertinent to the mechanical (and chemical) world. However, rocks can be turned into the building blocks of a house so that their causal powers become useful for the purpose of sheltering things. By the same token, plants and animals turn nutrients which, as such, have no specific affinity to life into means of realising their respective life-forms.

Thus, in teleological objects, the means plays the role of establishing a connection between the purpose as a projected outcome and the causal interplay of materials. The causal role of purpose is not to add a further instance to the efficient causality of things but instead to coordinate their interaction. For instance, the purposive structure of a house does not change the behaviour of the bricks which figure as parts of the house; these items follow nothing but their own tendencies. What is changed, however, is the result of this activity. Instead of just pushing on any other item, bricks used as means for the purpose of building a house, push on other bricks in exactly such a way that they jointly produce a wall which carries a roof. The point is, that a means is not forced into exercising a certain activity, instead it invests its intrinsic activity into the realisation of a pre-existing goal. If a more figurative expression is allowed, one could say that pre-existing materials are “tricked” into becoming means to an end rather than being forced to do so.

Hegel's further discussion is increasingly marked by a critical undertone directed against various aspects of external purposiveness. As a consequence my exegetical approach of neatly separating the general framework of purposiveness from the evaluation of specific forms of purposiveness must be applied with the caveat that Hegel himself, to some extent, combines both steps. I will turn to a dedicated discussion of his critique of external purposiveness below. However, it is important for understanding Hegel's account of realised purpose that this critique targets cases in which the goal and the actual outcome of a purposeful activity are not identical. A house, for instance, is an example for a teleological object. However, it is not a *perfect* example: a house exists for the sake of human inhabitants but *not* for its *own* sake. Hegel's basic worry is that in such cases, the realisation of a purpose can never be complete; instead, what comes to be is always just another "means, and so forth into infinity; only a purposeful means would result, but not the objectivity of the purpose itself" (SL 662/12.165). What is postponed eternally here, is a definite realisation of purpose as opposed to an endless chain of means for subordinate goals. The notion of "realised purpose" forms the third and final element of Hegel's outline of the general structure of teleology.

### 5.1.3 *The Actuality of Purpose – Realised Purpose*

Broadly speaking, the notion of realised purpose denotes the actual outcome of any goal-directed activity. Thus, it is different from subjective purpose representing merely a projected, potential outcome, and it is also different from the means which help to translate the projection into reality. In a more restricted sense, Hegel draws a line between an instrumental outcome and a genuinely purposive outcome. Regarding the first case we might think of a sculptor chiselling a block of marble. Here, the chisel is a means for shaping the marble according to the sculptor's plan. The resulting form is the realisation of this, initially, merely projected outcome. Now focus on the relation between the chisel and the resulting statue: as Hegel points out, a tool-like means as a chisel, remains detached from the product it helps to create: a chisel is not a *part* of a statue. That way, the means not only helps to realise the purpose but also stands between the purpose

and its realisation, separating them. The core meaning of the notion “realised purpose” however is that the projected outcome becomes real *within* the activity of the means, not simply in a further object processed by the means:

In being active in its means, therefore, purpose must not determine the immediate object *as something external* to it, and the object, accordingly, must merge with it in the unity of the concept through itself; or again, the otherwise external activity of purpose through its means must determine itself *as mediation* and thus sublimate itself as external. (SL 662/12.165)

Thus, according to Hegel, a truly realised purpose becomes manifest within the entities it uses as means. It therefore constitutes a whole of purposeful items and their conjunction is not only an instrument for further goals. The point Hegel makes here is that the definite outcome of a purposeful activity must have the purpose within it, and it can only have the purpose within it if it literally consists of the means serving to this end.

#### 5.1.4 *Summary*

It is clear that Hegel’s presentation of realised purpose is tailored to fit the idea of immanent purposiveness and only derivatively applies to external purposiveness. The details of his distinction between these two types of purposiveness will have to be considered in greater detail below. For now, with the discussion of the notions *means*, *subjective*, and *realised purpose*, we are in a position to summarise the underlying conceptual framework of purposeful activity.

The key idea is that in teleological objects the causal interactions among their materials is coordinated by a common goal. This goal determines in what way a plurality of items must work together, in order to jointly constitute one object. This way of working together is the form of the object. It must be present in two modes of existence: a) As “subjective purpose” form exists as a potential guiding and pre-existing the becoming of the object. B) As “realised purpose” the form is the actual pattern of causally related items which comes to be. The transition from subjective to realised purpose is, as Hegel points out, not immediate but requires the mediation through means. Potentiality does not “pop” into actuality, it must rely on actual things and their causal powers in order to become manifest within objective reality. As we saw above, Hegel thinks that, in a fundamental sense, a means should not be conceived of as a mere tool

processing the organisation of things other than itself. If a purpose is *realised* in the full sense of this expression, the means are identical to the items which make up the object and their actual way of causally interacting is identical with the goal towards which they strive.

Importantly, this account of purposiveness removes the externality pertinent to mechanical objects. A mechanical object is held together by a unifier which is external to it, namely the central body. An object with a goal-structure, by contrast, is unified by the goal its components jointly help to realise. Artefacts are an interesting intermediate case: the way their parts are arranged serves a purpose and they are unified precisely because this arrangement or form ties them to a joint telos. On the one hand, that means that they are connected to their unifiers through their form, and not merely by a privileged component like the mechanical object's central body. Houses are not unified by some sort of "central brick". On the other hand, there still is a difference between the form of a house and its purpose, in as much as the latter belongs to a house-user rather than the house itself. The form of an artefact is *purposeful* but it is not itself a purpose. Where this distinction between the form and the purpose, i.e. the formal and the final cause disappears, we find cases of genuinely immanent purposiveness.

## 5.2 The Critique of External Purposiveness

Through the idea of purposiveness, a way out of the problems that, up to now, have precluded a genuine solution to the problem of unity is beginning to emerge. However, it has also become clear that Hegel puts great weight on the distinction between different types of purposiveness and that a paradigmatic form of unity is available only through immanent purposiveness. As I said above, the critique of external purposiveness is implicit to Hegel's presentation of teleology in the *Logic's* eponymous chapter. His positive account of immanent purposiveness is presented in the Idea of Life. I will now explain the limitations of external purposiveness and give an account of its immanent counterpart. This will allow for an interpretation of Hegel's proposed solution to the problem of unity.

### 5.2.1 *Two Objections to External Purposiveness*

For Hegel, the alternatives of external and immanent purposiveness are not equal options that apply to different phenomena. Instead, he thinks that immanent purposiveness is more basic than external purposiveness. How does he come to this conclusion? The key idea is that external purposiveness presupposes immanent purposiveness, so that if we think of an object with an external teleological structure, this always already involves and relies on objects with an immanent goal structure. More precisely, Hegel identifies two steps in the general pattern of goal directed activities where we run into regress problems if we treat external purposiveness as independent. This general pattern, as we have seen, involves the notions of *subjective purpose* ( $P_s$ ), *means* (M) and *realised Purpose* ( $P_r$ ). Any purposeful activity, Hegel would argue, is characterised by these three moments such that the projected outcome of the activity is translated into an actual product via the use of means. We can depict purposeful activity as a three-place relation:

$$P_s - M - P_r$$

#### ***Objection 1:***

With this in mind, let us now take a look at the problems Hegel identifies for external purposiveness. Regarding the first relation between  $P_s$  and M, Hegel points out that subjective purpose cannot relate directly or immediately to the objective world before it. Why is that? Well, no purpose can be realised directly or without a means for its realisation. Consequently, this also applies to the subordinate goal of adopting something as a means. As Hegel seems to suggest, it takes a means in order to seize (something as) a means. Thus, if there really is no way of directly accessing the pool of not-yet purposeful things, Hegel says, no purposeful activity could ever begin because it would not be able to adopt anything as a means. As Hegel puts it, whenever something could play the role of a means, another means would be required in order to make the acquisition; hence, a regress arises. If we thus examine the first relation ( $P_s - M$ ) concerning

the immediate connection of the subjective purpose and the object that thereby becomes a means, then *the purpose cannot connect with the object immediately* [my italics, LW], for the latter is just as immediate as the object of the other extreme in which the purpose is to be realized *through mediation*. Since the two are thus posited as *diverse*, a means for their connection must

be interjected between this objectivity and the subjective purpose; but such a means is equally an object already determined by purpose, and between this objectivity and the teleological determination a new means is to be interjected, and so on to infinity. The *infinite progress of mediation* is thereby set in motion. (SL 665/12.168)

**Objection 2:**

However, this is not the only concern Hegel has against external purposiveness. In fact, he makes much of a second regress problem concerning the other relation between M and P<sub>r</sub>. The second (arguably the *main*) criticism Hegel levels against external purposiveness is that it cannot reach a state of perfection regarding the realisation of ends. This has to do with the fact that the product of an externally purposeful activity doesn't come to be for its own sake but instead for the sake of something else. For instance, we make hammers for the sake of hitting nails and we hit nails for the sake of fixing things together and these again serve as means to a further end; but we do not do any of this *for its own sake*. While we can of course make an arbitrary halt at some point and simply stipulate some stage of a teleological activity as its 'final' result, it would be just as good to call it a means serving for a further goal. As Hegel writes,

[i]t is therefore entirely a matter of indifference whether we consider an object determined by external purpose as realized purpose or only as means; what we have is not an objective determination but a relative one, external to the object itself. All objects in which an external purpose is realized equally are, therefore, only a means of purpose. (SL 665–6/12.168–9)

Hegel repeats this point several times:

The activity of purpose through its means is still directed against objectivity as an initial presupposition; this is precisely what that activity is, to be indifferent to determinateness. If it were again to consist in determining the immediate objectivity, the product would again be *only a means* [my italics, LW], and so forth into infinity; only a purposeful means would result, but not the objectivity of the purpose itself. (SL 662/12.165)

The conclusion or the *product* of the purposive activity is nothing but an object determined by a purpose that is external to it; *thus it is the same as what the means is*. In such a product itself, therefore, *only a means* has been derived, not a *realized purpose*; or again: purpose has not truly attained any objectivity in it. (SL 666/12.168)

This second objection thus amounts to the idea that an externally purposive activity can never be completed or reach a definite end. Instead of linking the projected outcome of an activity with its complete realisation, the means can only bring about further levels of means, 'tools for making tools', if you will. The point of Hegel's argument is that this endless chain of means makes



implicit reference to an ultimate goal which, however, makes no appearance in the series itself. After all, what warrants the status of a *means* for the things related through external purposiveness is their relation to an end. At the same time, this status is something of a dangler unless there is some definite goal which guarantees that the subordinate objects are indeed means, i.e. good for the achievement of an end instead of just accidentally entertaining causal relations. However, just as much as such a definite goal is presupposed by external purposiveness, it nonetheless cannot be thought according to this category. Instead, the notion of a definite end requires the more advanced notion of immanent goal structure, which has been Hegel's point from the beginning.

In face of this, Hegel's complaint about external purposiveness is that according to this model, an activity can neither come to a definite end, nor can it originate in the first place. Both would require a type of entity which already possess certain things as means (without the need to pick them from a world indifferent to its goals) and represents the ultimate goal for a chain of means-to-end-relations. Hegel summarises this double negative outcome of the analysis of external purposiveness starting with the incapacity of reaching a definite end:

The result now is that external purposiveness, which only has so far the form of teleology, only goes so far as to be a means, not to be an objective purpose, because subjective purpose remains an external, subjective determination.

He then continues by addressing the other issue about the inability to seize means in the first place:

Or in so far as purpose is active and attains completion, albeit only in a means, it is still bound up with objectivity *immediately*; it is sunk into it. Purpose is itself an object and, as one may say, it does not attain a means because its realization is needed before such a realization can be brought about through a means. (SL 666–7/12.169)

Hegel's critique thus comes down to this: external purposiveness cannot be primary or original because it presupposes immanent purposiveness. This is the case because without immanent purposiveness it would neither be possible to originate nor to terminate any goal-directed activity.

### 5.2.2 *Unity and External Purposiveness*

Now this is all well and good, but what does Hegel's argument have to do with the problem of unity? Has he lost track of his central concern, or have I been wrong to regard this problem as

the central concern in the Teleology chapter? By no means! There is a clear indication that the problem of unity is indeed at the heart of Hegel's argument. This especially concerns the second issue regarding the incomplete realisation of purpose in external teleology. As Hegel argues, the product, that is the object that arises from an externally purposeful activity, exhibits a quasi-mechanistic type of unity because the telos which acts as a unifier is not immanent to it. Here is what Hegel says:

If we now examine the product of teleological activity more closely, we see that purpose comes to it only externally if we take it as an absolute presupposition over against a purpose which is subjective, that is to say, in so far as we stop short at a purposive activity that relates to the object through its means only mechanically, positing in place of one indifferent determinateness of the object an *other* which is just as external to it. A determinateness such as an object possesses through purpose differs in general from one which is merely mechanical in that it is a moment of a *unity* and consequently, although external to the object, is yet not in itself something merely external. The object that exhibits such a unity is a whole with respect to which its parts, its own externality, are indifferent; it is a determinate, *concrete* unity that unites different connections and determinacies within itself. This unity, which cannot be comprehended from the specific nature of the object and, as regards determinate content, is of another content than the object's own, is *for itself* not a mechanical determinateness, yet still is in the object mechanically. (SL 664–5/12.167)

Hegel's point here is that the unity of the (externally teleological) object is compromised because its purpose is not immanent to it. That is, the way items are organised within the object, its form, may be explicable by reference to a telos but this telos is not identical to the way of organisation pertinent to the object itself.<sup>60</sup> The form that unifies it, is not the form of *this* object but “of another content than the object's own”. The connection among building materials of a house, for instance, can be explained by reference to the needs and goals of human inhabitants – through the *human* form of life – but it “cannot be comprehended from the specific nature of the object” – i.e. the house – itself.

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<sup>60</sup> Hegel deploys here another Aristotelian idea, namely that the formation of an artefact, while guided by a principle, is not guided by an *immanent* principle: “art is a principle of movement in something other than the thing moved, nature is a principle in the thing itself (for man begets man), and the other causes are privations of these two“ (*Met* XII.3 1070a5–10). Also note that the causes of things that come to be in a less advanced way are said to be “privations” of the causes responsible for externally teleological and living objects. As we will come to see (subsection 5.4.1), Hegel similarly regards lower-level (e.g. *mechanical*) wholes as special cases of the paradigm case of life.

Again, a regress problem is imminent. If purpose is the source of unity while, at the same time, this source is not within the unified object, we need to point to another object in order to explain the unity of the first one, and so on to infinity. From this it becomes clear that the teleological object as the product of external purposiveness has something in common with the mechanical object, namely that the source of its unity is not immanent to it. It thus turns out that the grounding of unity is no less precarious in the teleological object than in the mechanical one: for the former too, in order to derive its unity, “points [...] *outside and beyond* itself” (SL 633/12.135) to other objects which are also determined from without. As we have seen already, this launches the familiar problem of indifference and thereby prevents a satisfying solution to the problem of unity.

In another respect, however, Hegel points out that the teleological object is *unlike* the mechanical one. This relates to the fact that its presupposed source of its unity is not, like the central body, simply a stronger player in the game of mechanistic push and pull, but instead an entity which is capable of originating and terminating goal-directed activity, namely an instance of inner purposiveness. And in this sense the “result” of Hegel’s analysis of teleology is not merely a critical account of the “external purposive connection” but also reveals “the truth of such a connection, *inner purposive connection* and an objective purpose” (667/12.169; my emphasis). I will now turn to a discussion of this positive strand of Hegel’s analysis and show how it finally delivers his proposed solution for the problem of unity.

### 5.3 Unity and Immanent Purposiveness

To sum up the train of thought we have been following one can say this: the guiding question targets the source of unity within the manifold items that make up an object. The suggestion Hegel puts forth in *Teleology* is to identify this source of unity with the joint goal accomplished by the combined activity of manifold materials. That is, many materials make up one object if and only if they interact such that they serve a common goal.

The remaining problem on the level of external purposiveness is this: as long as the purpose lies outside the group of items serving as means to achieve it, the product of their activity is only a further means to a further (external) purpose. A teleological object conceived in this way is still affected by indifference because there would be no ontologically committing facts about what to count as one object. Whichever collection of means is posited as one object, it would be equally appropriate to include their product, because the product would again be a means to a purpose and so forth. Thus, to exorcise indifference entirely, the purpose must be an immanent one instead of an external one. But what exactly does it mean for a purpose to be immanent? Here the best answer we can get from Hegel is contained in his analysis of the Idea of Life which I shall consider now in some detail.

I will put forth the claim that in a living being, purpose is immanent as the form of this very object. After briefly expounding the status of life as a category in Hegel's *Logic*, I will go on to explain how the notion of life helps to grasp the thought of a genuinely unified substance. Here the main point is that life provides an account of how purposes can be immanent to objects, namely as their form. As I will furthermore argue, this type of *immanence as form* successfully avoids the problem of indifference.

### 5.3.1 *Life as a Category*

To begin with, Hegel does not discuss the notion of life in terms of its finite realization in the productions of either nature or spirit. Within Hegel's system, this is the task of the *Philosophy of Nature* and the *Philosophy of Mind* respectively. The *Logic*, by contrast, expounds "logical life" as the ideal and basic structure of life (be it natural or spiritual) independently from its contingent realization in a particular realm of actuality (cf. SL 677/12.180). More precisely, what is discussed is the ideal and basic structure of a living individual. This type of object, Hegel argues, cannot be adequately grasped by any of the categories discussed so far and thus requires a further move within the dialectic:

the earlier determinations of the objects do not attach to it [a living being], not the relation of mechanism or of chemism, and even less so the reflective relations of whole and part,

and the like. As externality, it is indeed *capable* of such relations, but to that extent it is no longer a living being; when a living thing is taken to be a whole consisting of parts, something exposed to the action of mechanical or chemical causes, itself a mechanical or chemical product (whether merely as such or as also determined by some external purpose), then the concept is taken as external to it, the individual itself as something *dead*. (SL 680/12.183–4)

What Hegel is saying here is not that the notions of part and whole, or of mechanism and chemism, have no bearing on living individuals. Of course living beings have parts that make up wholes (and of course there are efficient causal relations among their parts as in the mechanical object). However, we would not fully understand how a living individual is unified into a whole or what role the causal ties among their parts play for such an object if we were to look at them exclusively through the lens of those categories. The same applies, as is evident from the quote, to the notion of external purposiveness. It is the advance over this previously discussed notion of external purposiveness that reveals the positive contribution of Hegel's unusual take on the notion of life. As I shall point out now, a key function of this step is to establish a paradigmatic account of substantial unity by conceptualizing the immanence of purpose in terms of the idea of *immanence as form*.

### 5.3.2 *Life: Purpose is Immanent as Form*

As Hegel writes, in order to gain an adequate understanding of the idea of life, it is required that “the *purposiveness* of the living being is [...] grasped as *inner*; [that] it is distinguished from its externality but, in thus distinguishing itself from it, pervading it thoroughly and self-identical” (SL 680–1/12.184). Here we should keep in mind that the adequacy in question is not primarily about giving an adequate account of the *phenomenological* reality of life. The latter is a key concern for Kant who worries that we are pressed to use “unusual [...] modes of explanation” (McLaughlin 2015, 1721) by the fact that there are living beings which are characterised by a certain type of reciprocity in their constitution. Hegel's point is rather that the need for immanent purposiveness arises within pure thought, as a necessary requirement for thinking the notion of genuine unity; whether such things exist or not and what that means for our ways of explaining them is a different question from Hegel's (onto-logical) point of view.

With this caveat in mind we can go on and take into account Hegel's further elaboration on immanent purposiveness. As he writes, the purposiveness of the living individual constitutes a *sui generis* type of objectivity in terms of an organism (over and above the objectivity pertinent to mechanical, chemical, and teleological objects):<sup>61</sup>

This objectivity of the living being is the *organism*; it is the *means and instrument* of purpose, fully purposive, for the concept constitutes its substance; but precisely for this reason *this means and instrument is itself the accomplished purpose* [my emphasis] in which the subjective purpose thus immediately closes in upon itself. (SL 680–1/12.184)

A further remark about the purposive structure of life states the following:

Thus the idea is, *first of all, life*. It is the concept which, distinct from its objectivity, simple in itself, permeates that objectivity and, as *self-directed purpose, has its means within it* [my emphasis] and posits it as its means, yet is immanent in this means and is therein the realized purpose identical with itself. (SL 675/12.177)

The common thread of these passages is that purpose is *within* the means that help to realise it. The most important question then is how to interpret this “immanence” within the means. One possible answer is that Hegel thinks the means as such are the goal of their activity. But this isn't very plausible for what living things preserve is not the particular matter from which they are built. They are more like Theseus' ship, exchanging materials all the time and yet remaining the same in a different sense. This different sense which Hegel, according to my reading, has in mind is the form or way of organization of the materials which serve as means to an organism. Thus, when Hegel writes that on the level of life, the “purpose is attained in the means” (669/12.171) I read him as arguing that purpose is “in the means” as their way of organization or form.<sup>62</sup> On this reading, inner purposiveness requires that the purposeful organization of materials (serving as “means”) is itself the goal of these materials' joint activity and hence “within them” as their form. That way, the goal to be achieved is nothing other than the purposeful arrangement of things that help to realize it.

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<sup>61</sup> Again, we are led to thinking a form of objectivity because it explains the ontological requirements for substantial unity – not because the contingent existence of organisms in nature demands a certain way of analysing them.

<sup>62</sup> When referring to the notions of form, way of organization, arrangement and so forth, I always understand these notions as referring to patterns of causal relations. The form of an object is the net of causal relations among the things that make up the object.

We can illustrate this idea by contrasting a tool like a chisel with the parts of a tree. A chisel is a means for realizing, say, a statue, and as such, for realizing something other than itself. What is realized by means of a chisel is a certain organization of e.g. a block of marble, so that the marble acquires the form of a statue. Although the form of the chisel (i.e. the way its matter is organized) helps to bring about the form of the statue, these two forms viz. ways of organization are different. The parts of a tree, its leaves, branches and stem can also be seen as “tools” for realizing a purpose, namely the life form of a plant. What these things do, their causal efficacy, also serves a purpose, namely to maintain the life of an individual tree. In contrast to the chisel, however, these “tools” do not invest their causal powers in creating a form which is alien to them. The form of the tree they help to realize is their very own form. So on the level of life the distinction of means and ends, while still applicable, becomes blurred. The parts of living things help to realize a goal which resides within them. Immanent purposiveness can thus be characterized in the following way: if purpose is present *within* an object, it is immanent to it as the form or way of organization of this object. This form must be such that the materials arranged according to it continue to bring about this very arrangement. The goal or telos of the object is thus identical to its (own) form.

I will now proceed by showing what can be gained by adopting immanent purposes as the source of unity for individual substances. I will first elaborate on the type of immanence involved and show how it helps to avoid regress problems tied to less advanced forms of immanence. Building on this, I shall consider to what extent Hegel’s appeal to immanent purposes is effective in dissolving the problem of indifference which we have found to undermine mechanistic accounts of unity.

### 5.3.3 *The Problem of Indifference Revisited*

So what do we gain through appealing to the immanence of purpose? We have been following Hegel’s dialectic closely, and we have seen other types of immanence fail regarding the problem of unity. Most notably, in Absolute Mechanism, the idea that a further object could play the role

of an immanent unifier was dismissed because this would launch a regress problem akin to Aristotle's syllable regress. Hegel's position which has just been established, that immanence of purpose should be understood in terms of an immanence of form, avoids this problem. How so? First, remember that Hegel's hylomorphism is non-mereological; that is, it does not entertain the belief that form and matter are distinctly existing entities that would require unification themselves. What requires unity are the materials which make up an object. In Absolute Mechanism, it is the central body – a further object, that is – which brings about unity among the parts of an object. The problem is that such an embodied unifier cannot be immanent to the object except as one of its parts.<sup>63</sup> That way, in order to account for the unity among the items that make up the object, a further element needs to be added and hence the problem of unity repeats itself regarding the connection of this new element and the first ones.

By contrast, appeal to form as the source of unity is innocent of introducing further elements into the object's composition that would require further unifiers. Instead, Hegel's account of unity through immanent purposes as immanent forms can be seen as honouring Aristotle's warning that whatever is identified as the source of unity must be conceived of "not [as] an element but [as] a principle" (Met. VII.17, 4041b25–30). Assuming that "principle" here simply means "immaterial form" and that such forms require no further unification with the materials they en-form, Hegel's account successfully blocks the regress: if unity among several items or elements is achieved through their form (conceived of as a net of relations among them) there is no need to introduce further objects or further elements.

This account of immanence as form allows for a resolution of the problem of indifference. For with the resulting conception of an immanent unifier in hand, it is no longer necessary to point beyond one object to other ones in order to account for unity. It is the object itself which determines – *qua* form – the group of items which belong to it as parts. Consequently

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<sup>63</sup> Hegel calls the central body "an *immanent* form" (SL 641/12.144). According to my interpretation (cf. section 4.3.) this should be read as *playing the role of* an immanent form, in the sense that the central body is the closest equivalent to an immanent form in the mechanical realm.



the problem of indifference drops away. We are therefore to expect that Hegel's solution provides resources to do away with indifference in all three ways that have been discussed above:

First, the Hegelian solution allows for setting up rules for *dividing the world into units* without including arbitrary collections of items. The bird sitting on a tree is unified by a different form as opposed to the tree. Or to say the same thing, the causal interaction of their components is governed by a different goal structure in each case. Consequently it is no longer a matter of indifference whether we regard trees and birds as the only objects within the scenario or whether we also include the compound of both as a further object. The latter is clearly ruled out because birds have a life-form which is different from that of trees; hence they must be ontologically kept apart.

Secondly, the *internal complexity* of a living being is no longer subject to capricious choice. The joints involved in the construction of a bird have a robust *fundamentum in re*, because the corresponding parts (or "members") have functional relevance for realizing and maintaining the form of the bird. Thus, its division into organs (roughly according to the principles of functional anatomy) is rooted in its mind-independent ontological stature while the arbitrary projection of equal parts of 5g mass is not.

Thirdly and finally, the form pertinent to a certain kind of living being constitutes an ideal which can be met to a higher or lesser degree. Thus there also is a *fundamentum in re* for *normative evaluations*. To stick to the example I used above, consider a bird with a broken wing. Here we have a plurality of materials causally arranged in a way which still supports bird-life, but to a lesser degree because this bird will be disadvantaged in the continued realization (or "reproduction") of its form. Although it will be subject to debate in what cases deviance from usual- or standard-form is also an imperfect realization of form, the case is clear enough: the fact that the broken wing is less able to support the self-maintenance of the object of which it is a part warrants the judgment that there is something wrong with this thing, that it is not as it should be. Thus, the

appeal to immanent purpose as immanent form can be seen as also solving the normative strand of the problem of indifference.

#### 5.4 Further Reflections

It should have become clear why Hegel's appeal to immanent purposiveness is successful in removing the problem of indifference. However, the proposed solution also raises further worries, one of them being the restriction of its applicability to the realm of life; another one being its difficulty in accounting for numerical difference among objects that agree in form. I will now explain and discuss these worries. The applicability problem can, as I will show, be countered by reading Hegel as proposing a *paradigm theory* of unity. That way, the mechanical, chemical, and teleological realms do not represent complete absence of unity but instead instances of it – instances which are below a paradigmatic type of unity characterized through the idea of life.

The point about numerical difference requires a more elaborate reply. I shall explain in this section why the type of unity established so far is not automatically also *numerical* unity. A detailed discussion of what individuates substances as numerically different entities will be subsequently discussed in Chapter 6.

##### 5.4.1 *A Paradigm Theory of Unity*

Unity can either be treated as applying to objects in a yes-or-no-manner or it can be treated as a relative concept, allowing for degrees of unity. Every philosopher who adopts the idea that life is somehow decisive for the unity of objects has to make a decision how to treat the vast number of things we ordinarily call objects but which are not living beings. In contemporary philosophy, van Inwagen (1990) famously defended the claim that there are only simples and organisms, thus denying the existence of artefacts and natural, non-living aggregates. On this view, chairs and mountains simply don't exist – instead there are atoms arranged chair-wise and mountain-wise. Apart from the counter-intuitive, revisionary character of this approach (what was van Inwagen sitting on when he wrote *Material Beings?*) it is not very appealing for Hegelians for a further

reason: Hegel is sceptical of the existence of atoms which he deems entities that exist only in abstract thinking. Hence for him, appeal to atoms arranged chair-wise would come down to claims about things that only exist in our minds, not in the world.<sup>64</sup>

So the bite-the-bullet solution according to which there simply are no objects below the level of living beings is not an option for Hegel. The alternative is to allow for *degrees of unity*. In contemporary neo-Aristotelian literature, Koslicki discusses a

conception of wholes [...] which allows for *degrees* of wholeness, corresponding to the strength of the principle of unity by means of which the parts of an object are held together: depending on the particular category of entity in question, principles of unity can range from bits of glue or bands holding together individual wooden sticks into the shape of a bundle, to full-fledged and teleologically loaded Aristotelian forms. (Koslicki 2008, 152)

Hegel's position, I think, should be seen as broadly similar to this. Hegel's "*degrees of wholeness*" correspond to the principles of unity at work in Mechanism, Chemism, Teleology, and Life. As we have seen when discussing Mechanism, Hegel is not simply dismissive of this position and allows for a positive account of mechanical objects in Absolute Mechanism. Now, from the perspective of Life, the unity of a mechanical object is incomplete due to its dependence on external factors and because it cannot be fully explained without appeal to an infinite series of cause and effect relations. Nonetheless, Hegel does not say that a mechanical object, such as a planet in the solar system, has no unity at all. Instead, he argues that it depends for its unity on other objects. This dependence both lessens its ontological status as a unified whole and compromises the complete intelligibility of this unity. There is, however, no indication that Hegel thinks the mentioned dependence cancels unity entirely.

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<sup>64</sup> It is relatively straightforward that Hegel rejects appeal to simple substances: "The object is in itself a *plurality*, and must therefore be regarded as a *composite*, an *aggregate*. – Yet it does not consist of *atoms*, for atoms are not objects because they are not totalities" (SL 632/GW12.134). However, it is not quite clear (to me) *why* Hegel rejects the idea that objects could consist of atoms. Some of what he says *vis-à-vis* the atomism of the ancients (esp. Democritus) suggests the worry that if objects were to have atoms as parts, they could not really count as unified wholes: According to Hegel, the aggregation of atoms to larger compounds can only ever amount to a "superficial relation, a synthesis which is not determined through the nature of what is united, a unification in which, after-all, these things, which are in and for themselves, remain separated" (TWA 18.360–1 cf. SL 134–5/21.153–5). That said, it remains somewhat murky why this should be so: Why couldn't many simple things be purposefully arranged such as to jointly constitute a whole in Hegel's sense? A reconstruction of why Hegel thinks that atomism is incompatible with the unity of the object would exceed the scope of this thesis. Presumably, a promising strategy would be to compare Hegel's critique of atomism to Aristotle's in *De Generatione et Corruptione*.

A comparable analysis could be given for Chemism and for the external purposiveness discussed in Teleology. However, instead of going into details here I want to underscore the underlying approach I believe Hegel takes regarding a graduated conception of unity. According to my interpretation, Life functions as a theory of paradigmatic unity. What warrants the paradigmatic status of living things is their independence from external factors and the resulting complete (i.e. regress-free) intelligibility of their unity. Objects that meet the ontological standards expressed in Hegel's analysis of Life thus represent a standard of the congruence of what is actual and what is rational which Hegel's metaphysics aims to elucidate. Developing this standard or paradigm does not mean that things exhibiting a less developed unity, and that are henceforth less completely intelligible, do not exist.<sup>65</sup> I thus subscribe to Kreines' conviction that Hegel "recognizes the reality of much that lacks a complete reason or ground, or much that is incompletely explicable" (Kreines 2015, 259). The only addition I would want to make to this is that Hegel, by the same token, recognizes the reality of objects with a lesser degree of unity.

One worry with what I just said might be that, ultimately, Hegel's paradigm is not Life but the Absolute Idea. Indeed, the structure of the *Logic* supports further advancement over and above the level of Life. That said, it becomes increasingly difficult to determine the precise philosophical function of these concluding chapters. Presumably, he is not addressing individual substances or at least the notions discussed become increasingly problematic for spelling out an ontology of individual substances. What would it mean, for instance, to say that the true paradigm for the structure of objects was a "method"? Since my goal has been to identify the paradigm for the unity of individual substances, it is therefore fair to say that Hegel's conception of Life represents this paradigm – notwithstanding the undeniable presence of further philosophical concerns within the concluding sections of the *Logic*.

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<sup>65</sup> We can think of this in terms of what Hegel says in the context of the *Doppelsatz*: Here, Hegel appeals to the distinction "between what in the broad realm of [...] existence [*Dasein*] is merely *appearance*, transitory, and insignificant, and what truly merits the name '*actuality*'" (EL §6). In contrast to that which merely exists, the actual is also congruent with the rational and therefore, in principle, fully intelligible. (cf. Stern 2009b for this interpretation) This leaves open that there is a wider realm of reality which isn't fully actual in this demanding sense but just *exists*. Thus, while for Hegel some things are not fully intelligible and actual, this is *not* to say that they do not exist at all.

A final remark about the relation between below-paradigm and paradigmatic cases of unity must be made. For Hegel does not, as Koslicki (cf. 2008, 152) thinks Aristotle does, advocate a bunch of different and rather unconnected principles of unity. Instead he seems to be saying something along the lines of Horstmann's (1990, 53) analysis: according to this interpretation, Hegel embraces a universally "organological conception of objects" entailing that mechanical objects must be understood as "special case[s]" within this conception. The point is that Hegel does not want to leave room for a dualistic conception where a mechanical and an organological (viz. life-related) account present equally valid alternatives.

On this view, there must be a way to point to an underlying principle common to all objects from mechanical ones all the way up to those unified through immanent purposiveness. According to my reading, what all objects have in common is that their unity depends on form understood as pattern of causal interaction among their parts. Remember that even in Mechanism Hegel mentions this by pointing to "the *form* that [...] combines" manifold items "into a unity" (SL 633/12.135). The same applies to the paradigm case of an organic object: it is a certain pattern of causal interaction that combines otherwise unconnected materials into a whole. The crucial difference is that, in the case of mechanical objects, this pattern "is an external one" (SL 633/12.135), whereas in the paradigmatic realm of life, the pattern is maintained by the object itself. It is thus fair to say that the unity pertinent to living beings is the paradigmatic one and that mechanical, chemical, and externally purposeful objects represent special cases derived from this paradigm.

#### 5.4.2 *Below Numerical Unity*

Finally, I turn to the worry which I described above as the most serious one. This concerns the fact that the account of unity Hegel derives from the Idea of Life is situated below the level of numerical unity, and hence does not account for numerical difference. Let me explain why this is so:

Thus far we have asked what turns many items into one, i.e. what are the conditions for the unity of an object. The answer to this question (as we found in Hegel) was that it is a structural principle, that holds among these items, namely immanent purposiveness. For instance, the many parts of an animal body are unified in virtue of jointly realizing a life; that's what makes them one thing rather than many. However, there can be many objects unified in the same way. For instance, the many members of a given (lowest) species all share the same type of life and hence, if we interpret (as Hegel clearly does) such a type of life as a universal, then we have to admit that the principle of unity operative in these many objects is literally the same entity. In face of this, it becomes important to ask what makes these objects "many", and it won't help to simply point to the fact that each of them has unity. For what brings about such unity is, as we have just seen, common to all of them; how then could it also set them apart as many, numerically distinct objects? As a consequence, form, due to its universality, may be the principle of unity for Hegel but this unity is not automatically *numerical* unity.

As we shall see, Hegel has an innovative and surprising explanation for how the form of things – despite its being common to many – can still be regarded as a source of numerical diversity. Hegel (in my view) succeeds in explaining what makes individuals differ from one another numerically. However, the peculiar account he chooses makes it necessary to regard the issue of *uniqueness* once more as an independent problem the solution of which does not come as a free meal with the proposed solution for the problem of numerical difference.

Thus, for Hegel, to climb from the branches of the Porphyrian tree all the way down to its roots, requires several further moves which are not immediately included within his account of unity. For this reason, the problems of *numerical difference* and *unique distinction* require further elaboration and I will now attend to these problems.

## 6 Hegel and the Problems of Difference

In the introduction of this thesis, I distinguished the problem of unity from two other problems concerning how individuals differ from one another. As I defined them, there are two distinct such problems of difference: one concerns the question what determines that two individuals are numerically distinct from one another, while the other addresses what makes an individual the very individual it is. To use the example from the Introduction, it is one thing to ask what makes two horses countably distinct units, and it is another thing to ask what makes each of these horses uniquely the one it is, say, Marengo, and not Copenhagen.

The subsequent chapter is dedicated to reconstructing Hegel's approach at answering these questions. Section 6.1 provides general background on how the problems of difference can be approached and what this means for their relation to one another. Hegel's own account has been said to incorporate elements from Leibniz's metaphysics which indeed forms an important background for his thinking about individuals. However, as I will show in section 6.2, it is a mistake to assume that Hegel adopts Leibniz's principle of the identity of indiscernibles.

Sections 6.3–4 treat Hegel's take on the *problem of numerical difference*. Starting from his discussion of how animal organisms differentiate themselves from their environment I will explore (in section 6.4) how Hegel's metaphysics of life functions as a more general account of what determines that individual substances differ numerically from one another. Section 6.5 brings up the remaining *problem of unique distinction* and explores to what extent Hegel's approach in the Idea of Life can contribute towards a solution of this problem. While Hegel does provide an account of the identity of individuals, he fails to explain how this makes them unique and as such non-substitutable by others.

### 6.1 Approaching the Problems of Difference

There are a number of possible approaches to explaining difference among individual substances. Individuals have thus been said to differ in virtue of their matter, the regions of space they occupy, a bare substratum or a haecceity, and through various versions of form. Broadly

speaking, Hegel's claim is that the concrete universal is responsible for the fact that its instances differ from one another. This can be seen as a version of the appeal to form as the principle of difference but before explaining in greater detail how this works, I will discuss some of the alternatives mentioned above. Part of what I want to show is that it is not always clear that a given approach can handle both problems equally well. In particular, it is not always the case that a good answer to the question about numerical difference is also satisfying with regards to the problem of unique distinction.

For instance, Aristotle famously argued that two human beings like "Callias or Socrates [...] are different in virtue of their matter" (Met. VII.8, 1034a5–10). Here matter is supposed to account for the fact that Callias and Socrates are two rather than one. Thinking of a situation in which both individuals exist simultaneously, say a joint symposium where Socrates dines at Callias' richly decorated tables, we might be convinced indeed that pointing to their matter is enough for explaining what makes them two. Socrates has *his* parcel of matter and Callias has *his* own. Now, one may challenge this account by raising the question what makes distinct parcels of matter distinct (Lowe 2005, 77–8) or by constructing thought experiments involving the migration of matter from one individual to another (Fine 1994). That granted, there is a *prima facie* appeal to the idea that two (simultaneously existing) individuals can have the same form but not the same matter, which therefore makes them numerically distinct.

However, as Elizabeth Anscombe once observed, accepting the above sketched solution to the puzzle about numerical difference among individuals does *not* entail that any individual "is who he is because of *the* matter of which he is composed" (Anscombe et al. 1953, 94). Matter, even if said to provide a respectable solution to the problem of numerical difference, may still leave us wanting regarding the further problem of unique distinction.

For how does matter factor into what makes Callias the one he is, Callias, and not Socrates? In fact, both parcels of matter seem to be doing the exact *same* job in both men, namely that of enmattering human form. One might object that surely they are doing this in different



ways, because, for instance, Socrates is snub-nosed while Callias is not. But then it is no longer matter but form (accidental form in this case) that turns Callias from a mere token of a type into the unique human being that he is. Matter, even if it was to make two individuals numerically distinct, does not seem to be an ideal candidate for what makes each of them the very individual it is, something with a unique identity, something that cannot be substituted by another token of the same kind.

There are of course, plenty of alternatives. One of them is the idea that regions of space differentiate individuals from one another. However, it is unclear how regions of space differ from one another themselves. As Leibniz observed (cf. NE 230), every bit of empty space is perfectly like any other, so that it may seem that it is individuals that introduce distinction into space rather than the other way round. Another alternative is to introduce what Loux calls a “preindividuated bearer of numerical diversity” (2006a, 231) such as a bare substratum. However, this solution comes at the cost of introducing a rather exotic entity: a bare substratum is neither an object nor a quality, it is a featureless particular that factors into the constitution of an object. However, while it is supposed to lack qualities of its own, it is also said to fulfil all sorts of functions for an individual substance such as bearing its qualities and making it distinct from others.<sup>66</sup>

With matter, space, and bare substrata being for the very least problematic accounts of diversity among individuals, another set of alternatives can be derived from various reinterpretations of the idea of form. Obviously this strategy must involve some way of treating

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<sup>66</sup> For an instructive critique of bare substrata cf. Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2002, 18) who point out that the “substratum theory is self-contradictory because the substratum theorist himself must attribute various properties to the substratum. Among these are the property of being such that properties can subsist or inhere in it, the property of being concrete, the property of being a substance, and (absurdly) the property of lacking all properties”. Lowe draws attention to the fact that bare substrata show the marks of an *ad hoc* explanation that is “dreamed up merely in order to ‘solve’ a difficult ontological problem but otherwise serving no useful purpose” (Lowe 2005, 88). The point is, that such an explanation of difference among individuals turns out as mysterious as soon as we ask how exactly the bare substratum *makes* anything distinct. All one can say here is that bare substrata are preindividuated, intrinsically individuating and so on, but beyond such formulaic terms there is no real explanatory import. With an eye specifically to Hegel, it goes without saying that appeal to bare substrata would mean a fall back into the metaphysics of unknowable entities which he aims to overcome.

form as not, or not *merely* common to many but instead as entailing diversity and unique distinction for its instances.

One option is to argue for the existence of *haecceities*, i.e. unsharable properties “like *being Napoleon* and *being identical to Socrates*” which are “uniquely tied to specific individuals” (Cowling 2023, section 2). An obvious worry about haecceities however is that their individuating powers depend on the objects they are said to individuate: *being Socrates* applies uniquely to Socrates, but it is this very individual, namely Socrates, that determines what it means to be uniquely tied to Socrates. Thus, the uniqueness of a haecceity seems to depend on the individual that exemplifies it, and not the other way round.<sup>67</sup>

It might be felt that the circularity involved in haecceities has something to do with the self-relationality of a property like *being identical to Socrates*. A trope-theoretic approach is not limited to self-relational properties but instead treats *all* qualities as unsharable (not just haecceities). On this view it is the case that even if Callias was *snub-nosed* like Socrates, their respective *snub-nosedness* would still be unique to each of them. Here, *snub-nosed* is not treated as a universal common to two individuals but as an individuated quality, also referred to as a *trope*. The obvious issue with tropes is that one would like to know how such qualities are individuated. Plausibly, this is the task of the individual substances that exemplify (or perhaps rather *have*) them. But if individuals differentiate tropes, tropes cannot possibly render these very individuals different in the first place – or else the explanation of difference among individuals turns out as circular.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Lowe (2005, 87) (although he is also sceptical of haecceities) concedes that the circularity involved in haecceities may be avoided by reformulating the linguistic expressions denoting a haecceity: consider the property of “being identical with A”; “there may in principle be a predicate which expresses the property of being identical with *A* which makes no reference to *A*”. Similarly, there may be ways of expressing properties like “being Callias” without using the term “Callias”. If, however, these properties are supposed to explain that Callias is an *individual*, I don’t see how any linguistic reframing could avoid the issue that identity with Callias (no matter how this is expressed) entails identity with an individual and that the relevant haecceity depends on the uniqueness of this individual rather than the other way round.

<sup>68</sup> According to Lowe (2006, 27; cf. 2005, 83), tropes “are ontologically dependent entities, depending for their existence and identity upon the individual substances which they characterize, or to which they ‘belong’. A particular redness or squareness can, ultimately, be identified as the particular property-instance that it is only by reference to the individual substance which it characterizes. This is not an epistemic point but a metaphysical one: it concerns

By now it should have become clear that making the idea of form work as a principle of individuation is a rather delicate affair. The above-mentioned accounts have one thing in common, namely that they somehow tinker with the traditional belief that forms are sharable entities. Another option which does not necessarily involve non-sharable forms is to adopt Leibniz's view that no two individuals can agree in all their intrinsic qualities. This principle (the identity of indiscernibles) may be seen as offering an explanatory basis for understanding numerical difference among individuals in terms of their qualities. What explains that Socrates and Callias are two distinct individuals is the fact that they differ in quality. Importantly, appeal to this principle not only explains why two individuals are numerically distinct. It also attributes a unique identity to each of them so that the qualitative makeup of individuals allows us to answer not just the question "How many?", but also the question "Which is which?".<sup>69</sup>

This solution, however, comes at a price, namely that we have to accept the identity of indiscernibles as a necessary truth. Independently, however, from commitments peculiar to Leibniz's system, it is hard to see why there could not be two perfectly similar individuals. Although this would be, of course, extremely unlikely, the metaphysical possibility of Socrates and Callias sharing all their (non-relational) qualitative characteristics does not seem to be excluded for any obvious reason.

Now, how does all this relate to Hegel? In my view Hegel belongs into the group of philosophers who explain difference among individuals through a reinterpretation of the notion of form. In Hegel's case that means that the basic or substantial forms involved in the constitution of an individual are natural kinds, or, to use his expression, concrete universals. Part of this idea is that the form of an individual is not merely something it has in common with others. Instead, Hegel argues that form entails a further determination of itself into particular and

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individuation in the metaphysical rather than in the cognitive sense—that is, individuation as a determination relation between entities rather than individuation as a kind of cognitive achievement".

<sup>69</sup> As we shall see in sub-section 6.2.1, it is a matter of interpretation to what extent Leibniz regards this principle as a *cause* for numerical diversity among individual substances.

ultimately individual ways of being. The universal is thus concrete in as much as it is not simply the result reducing many individuals to their shared characteristics; instead it is treated as the basis on which an individual can have adjectival characteristics in the first place. This is what Hegel is referring to when he speaks of the particularisation of the universal.<sup>70</sup> The most important question then is how this particularisation can ultimately arrive at the level of singular individuals, objects which are countably distinct from one another while also being unique individuals.

According to Robert Stern's interpretation, the particularisation of the concrete universal makes its instances distinct by conveying a unique character to them (cf. Stern 2009d, 358). This account combines Aristotelian traits of Hegel's thinking with an appeal to qualitative difference which is Leibnizian in character. For, while preserving the (Aristotelian) idea that the form of an individual is its genus or natural kind, this form is also said to convey a unique character to its instances. This however means, according to Stern, "that like Leibniz, Hegel must deny that two things could ever be qualitatively identical" (359). While emphasising Hegel's indebtedness to Leibniz, Stern's interpretation leaves open how close the proximity is between both accounts. This raises the question to what extent Hegel agrees with Leibniz that *all* (intrinsic) predicates applying to an individual substance are equally relevant for its distinction from others.

In what follows I will suggest that we should not read Hegel's doctrine of the universal's particularisation as an orthodox rendition of Leibniz's views on individuation. In particular, I deny that Hegel follows Leibniz in treating each and every (intrinsic) property of an individual as

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<sup>70</sup> Here it is important to keep in mind that Hegel rejects an account of universals or forms as abstractions from particularity. On such an account, a universal is generated by abstracting from (i.e. *leaving out*) those characteristics that a given object does not share with others. For instance, one can abstract from the particular characteristics of an individual rose and consider only those characteristics that it shares with other roses, other plants, other living beings etc. However, according to Hegel, this only leads us to "a surface that becomes progressively more void of content" (SL 546/12.49). However, for Hegel, the true notion of universality is not based on abstraction from but rather on the idea that universality is an "informing and creative principle" (532/12.35) and as such productive of particular characteristics: the "universal is [...] what is concrete, is not empty but, on the contrary, has content by virtue of its concept – a content in which the universal does not just preserve itself but is rather the universal's own, immanent to it. It is of course possible to abstract from this content, but what we have then is not the universal element of the concept but the abstract universal, which is an isolated and imperfect moment of the concept" (SL 532/12.35).

a potential ground of difference. Instead, I will argue that Hegel restricts the range of difference making properties to those that are relevant for the self-preservation of their bearers.

The next step (section 6.2) is thus to examine Hegel's critique of Leibniz's principle of the identity of indiscernibles. As we shall see (in section 6.3), Leibniz nonetheless plays an important role for Hegel's positive account. However, it is not the appeal to a unique qualitative identity that Hegel finds helpful, but rather the view that individuals enjoy *independence* regarding their inner activity. Against this background we will then see (section 6.4) how Hegel develops the idea of independence in his logic of life. On the view Hegel presents, the concrete universal does indeed entail numerical distinction among its instances but not by making them qualitatively unique but by grounding their independence from external causes.

Finally (section 6.5), I conclude that Hegel's account of difference remains problematic because it fails to solve the *problem of unique distinction*. The interpretation offered by Stern avoids this issue, but it does so at the cost of getting into a tension with Hegel's critique of Leibniz. Getting the relation of both thinkers right is therefore very important in the present context so that I will now make an attempt at clarifying Hegel's reception of Leibniz regarding the problem of numerical difference.

## 6.2 Hegel, Leibniz and the Identity of Indiscernibles

Leibniz's philosophy is an important background for Hegel's account of what makes two individual substances numerically distinct from one another. Most notably, Hegel's own views can be clarified by discussing how he engages with Leibniz's suggestion that difference among individual substances can be explained by appeal to the identity of indiscernibles. My perspective on Hegel's relation to Leibniz is that he rejects the idea that numerical difference among individuals rests on qualitative difference among them. At the same time there are elements in Leibniz, such as for instance the view that the principle of difference must be internal to the individual, which Hegel appreciates. I will first provide some relevant background regarding Leibniz's own approach and then proceed to a discussion of Hegel's reception of Leibniz. By

reconstructing Hegel's objection to Leibniz, I hope to show that Hegel ultimately rejects the view that numerical difference among individual substances is grounded in qualitative differences among them.

### 6.2.1 *Leibniz: PII as a Solution for the Problem of Numerical Difference*

The pivotal point of Leibniz's metaphysics is the existence of *monads*, of simple substances, that is, which are absolutely prior to the compound objects we encounter in the phenomenal world and even to the concepts we apply to them. Leibniz entertains the nominalist notion that universals do not exist *in rebus* but merely as abstractions (albeit adequate ones) performed by a mind (cf. McCullough 1996, 168).<sup>71</sup> At the same time, however, Leibniz is not only a nominalist but also a rationalist denying that any significant ontological fact could be inexplicable in principle. Within the peculiar fusion of theology and metaphysics that is characteristic for his thought, the acceptance of such intrinsically opaque features of reality would be tantamount to the idea that God acted without reason when creating the world – a proposition that Leibniz rejects as absurd. Thus, for Leibniz, the basic structure of reality cannot be other than open to rational inquiry.

Difference among individuals is one of the significant facts that fall within the scope of this requirement. As a consequence, for Leibniz, there must be reasons for the fact that two individuals are in fact distinct, or, to say the same thing, their diversity can never be purely numerical (*solo numero*); instead it must always be grounded in a knowable fact about these individuals themselves: as Leibniz put it in *Primary Truths*, “*there cannot be two individual things that differ in number alone*. For it certainly must be possible to explain why they are different, and that explanation must derive from some difference they contain” (Leibniz 1989, 32).

In terms of what determines individual substances as numerically distinct, it “is absolutely fundamental to Leibniz's thinking on individuation that whatever individuates a substance must

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<sup>71</sup> For an in-depth discussion of Leibniz's nominalism also cf. Mates (1986, 170–88) who suggests that for Leibniz universals do not even exist *in intellectus* but in fact not at all.

be something wholly internal to that substance itself' (Cover and Hawthorne 1999, 28). This thought motivates Leibniz's rejection of spatio-temporal explanations of difference: an individual's being two meters to the left of another at a given time presupposes difference among these individuals rather than accounting for it.<sup>72</sup> Regions of space (as well as moments in time), Leibniz argues, are "in themselves perfectly alike" (NE 230) and their distinction is derivative from individual substances rather than the other way round. However, in order play this role of fundamental units that account for difference in derivative entities (such as, for Leibniz, time and space), individual substances must bring along *their own*, internal principle of difference, i.e. they cannot again derive their difference from something other than themselves. While granting time and space a role for epistemically discriminating individuals, on the metaphysical level, Leibniz insists that "[i]n addition to the difference of time or of place there must always be an internal *principle of distinction*" (NE 230). In other words, it must be something about each individual *itself* that makes it different from others.

This something are the intrinsic properties of a substance and here Leibniz's well-known doctrines of *complete individual concepts* (CIC) and the *identity of indiscernibles* (PII) come into play. For Leibniz, each individual substance is characterised exhaustively by an infinite array of predicates, its complete individual concept (CIC). The idea then is, that no two individual substances could ever fall under the exact same CIC, as this would make them perfectly similar and hence remove the explanatory basis of their diversity. As Benson Mates explains, it

is obvious that by virtue of their accidents, any two individuals will fall together under a very large number of concepts, that is, will have a large number of attributes in common. But the principle [PII] assures us that however similar they may be, there will always be some concept under which one of them falls and the other does not. Thus God is able to tell them apart by their qualities; they are in principle *discernible*. (Mates 1986, 134–5)

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<sup>72</sup> Also cf. Look (2020, section 3.5): "What is particularly important to note, however, is that Leibniz is adamant that certain kinds of properties are *excluded* from the list of properties that could count as difference-making properties, chief among these *spatio-temporal properties*. This is what Leibniz means (in part) when he asserts that there can be no purely extrinsic (i.e., relational) determinations. Therefore, it is not the case that there could be two chunks of matter that are qualitatively identical but existing in different locations. In Leibniz's view, any such extrinsic difference must be founded on an intrinsic difference". Another class of properties excluded by Leibniz are purely quantitative ones such as, for instance, size (cf. Leibniz 1969, 255).

Of course, anybody with the slightest sympathy for realism about universals will ask here how Leibnizian individuals can be similar at all, and how precisely properties can be *intrinsic* to a substance given Leibniz's nominalism. However, we shall leave these questions to the Leibnizians,<sup>73</sup> and concentrate on other issues that are more relevant for the current purpose.

One of them is that for Leibniz, an individual could not fail to fall under the predicates that do indeed apply to it. That is, on his view, individual substances have literally *all* their (intrinsic) properties essentially. This doctrine, known as *superessentialism*, is important. For it ensures that the facts that determine an individual as distinct from others are not contingent.<sup>74</sup> An individual could not fail to differ from others precisely because it could not fail to exemplify any of the properties that make it different from others. The CIC of an individual therefore provides “a description that not only *is not*, but *cannot be* satisfied by anything else” (Mates 1986, 251).

Furthermore it is important to get right Leibniz's knowability requirement. Leibniz does *not* deny that we, as finite knowers, sometimes fail to “spot the difference” between two individual substances. It is well possible that I am unable to tell apart say a man from his twin brother, or one drop of milk from another; Leibniz would insist, however, that ontologically, there will always be some qualitative difference among them, as even if we fail to notice it, it must be there and therefore in principle detectable for an intellect, although perhaps, an intellect of greater powers than mine or yours.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> For a helpful account of how complete individual concepts relate to monads cf. McCullough (1996, 168–9).

<sup>74</sup> Leibniz rarely states this directly and the expression *superessentialism* is not his own. Evidence for the fact that Leibniz actually believed that individuals have all their properties essentially can be found in the *Dicourse on Metaphysics* where he argues that even future properties are a priori contained in the CIC of an individual. For Leibniz, it is therefore the case “that Caesar's future dictatorship is grounded in his notion or nature, that there is a reason why he crossed the Rubicon rather than stopped at it and why he won rather than lost at Pharsalus and that it was reasonable, and consequently certain, that this should happen” (Leibniz 1989, 45). Mates (1986, 252–3) discusses and defends the interpretation of Leibniz as a *superessentialist* according to which he holds that “no individual could have lacked any attribute that he does in fact have” (253).

<sup>75</sup> As Leibniz illustrates in a letter to Clarke, “[t]wo drops of water or milk, viewed with a microscope, will appear distinguishable from each other” (Leibniz 1989, 328). Of course the point is not that a microscope would always reveal the relevant difference-making properties – ultimately the gold standard for what counts as qualitatively distinct are the capacities of God's infinitely perfect intellect.



The idea that distinct individuals necessarily differ in quality constitutes the core of Leibniz's principle of the *identity of indiscernibles* (PII). In the *New Essays*<sup>76</sup> he states explicitly that PII secures the rational grounds of diversity among individual substances and hence makes sure that there is a knowable principle of individuation in each case:

The 'principle of individuation' reduces, in the case of individuals, to the principle of distinction [PII] of which I have just been speaking. If two individuals were perfectly similar and equal and, in short, *indistinguishable* in themselves, there would be no principle of individuation. I would even venture to say that in such a case there would be no individual distinctness, no separate individuals. (NE 230)

For Leibniz, numerical difference is therefore necessarily accompanied by qualitative difference so that the latter can play the role of reliably indicating the former.

The important question, to what extent Leibniz regards qualitative difference not only as an *indicator* but indeed the *cause* of numerical diversity, is notoriously difficult to answer. Russell, for one, decidedly denies this:

Leibniz's doctrine is, that two things which are materially diverse, i.e. two different substances, always differ also as to their predicates. This doctrine evidently presupposes both kinds of diversity, and asserts a relation between them. (Russell 1900, 55)<sup>77</sup>

Interestingly, however, Russell also points out that this very strategy of presupposing numerically distinct individuals that *then* come to be distinguishable through their predicates is problematic.

For it seems to suggest that two substances must be numerically distinct, independently from what only later comes into play as distinguishing predicates. However, on this pre-predicative level it is impossible (for Leibniz) to even speak of two distinct substances:

Until predicates have been assigned, the two substances remain indiscernible but they cannot have predicates by which they cease to be indiscernible, unless they are first distinguished as numerically different. Thus on the principles of Leibniz's logic, the Identity

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<sup>76</sup> For an overview of passages expressing the PII cf. Rodriguez-Pereyra (2014, 15–21) who also points out that there is an alternative interpretation of PII according to which it does not rule out "things that share all their properties" but instead states "that there cannot be perfectly similar things". Regarding this latter alternative one might think of tropes, which are (unlike properties) *not* common to many things but represent instead individualized qualities such as the brownness of *my* hair as opposed to the brownness of somebody else's. However, in what follows I stick to the widely held view that Leibniz thinks of qualitative difference in terms of unique sets of qualities and not in terms of individualized qualities.

<sup>77</sup> I thank Thomas Buchheim (who agrees with Russell's reading) for pressing me on this point. Cf. the discussion of Leibniz in Buchheim (1992, 72–4, esp. note 27).

of Indiscernibles does not go far enough. He should, like Spinoza, have admitted only one substance. (Russell 1900, 59).

Is PII thus meant to establish *why* individual substances differ in number or rather just *that* their (pre-established) numerical diversity is always reflected in qualitative difference? I do not pretend to have a definite answer here. If pressed, however, I would say that treating qualitative difference as the cause of numerical diversity is not against the spirit of Leibniz's notion. This is all the more so if the consequence of denying this are indeed as severe as Russell suggests: giving up ontological pluralism in favour of monism is the last thing that Leibniz would want. For the very least it is fair to say that the reasons why two individuals are countably distinct are provided through the fact that they have distinct qualitative makeups. Wherever this is not the case, where 'two' things (*per impossibile*) fall under the exact same CIC, Leibniz would argue that there are in fact no "separate individuals".

Before concluding this excursus on Leibniz I should like to make a final observation about the problem I have labelled the *problem of unique distinction*. Since Leibniz believes that every individual substance has a *unique* qualitative makeup (comprised in its CIC), his account of what determines numerical difference among individual substances not only provides the grounds for numerical difference among them; it also works as an explanation of what makes each particular individual this one and no other.

For the idea of a complete individual concept implies that it comprises a unique qualitative makeup for each thing, a concept that applies to exactly one individual, and therefore singles it out as the very individual it is: "a complete individual concept contains every attribute of every individual that can fall under it; it resolves every question that could be raised about such an individual – that is, it determines exactly one possible individual" (Mates 1986, 62-3). Leibniz's account of what differentiates individuals from one another therefore not only explains what makes each pair of them two distinct beings, it furthermore tells us what makes any given individual uniquely this one and no other.

Against the background of Leibniz's metaphysics of individuals we are now in a position to evaluate Hegel's engagement with it. As a first step I will discuss how the latter has been received in the literature and then proceed to my own evaluation.

### 6.2.2 *Interpretations of Hegel's Leibniz-Reception*

The literature on Hegel's account of what makes individuals numerically different from one another circles around how Hegel evaluates Leibniz's principle (PII). The main problem interpreters face is that Hegel's evaluation is ambiguous, rejecting the principle in some way and yet extolling its virtues. A relatively recent contribution by Southgate (2014) has the double merit of presenting an extensive collection of views on the matter and of adding a new position to them. According to Southgate, the majority of interpretations emphasises Hegel's allegiance to Leibniz and sees him as accepting PII. Contrary to this, Southgate proposes that Hegel rejects it. The debate is thus concerned with the question of whether or not Hegel accepts purely numerical difference and the role of properties for his account of individuation. In what follows I summarize and evaluate both strands of interpretation.

#### ***The Standard Reading: Hegel as a Leibnizian***

The majority view is that Hegel, like Leibniz, rejects purely numerical difference. This typically goes along with the inference that the rejection of purely numerical difference implies an endorsement of the idea that things, in order to differ numerically, must have different properties. A typical expression of this view can be found in Harris (1983, 165), who takes Hegel's position to be that each thing's "difference from other things can be asserted only on the basis of comparison, which again concludes from the inner natures of things compared to their likeness and unlikeness" and that "[s]heer numerical difference would be a difference without distinction, which is self-contradictory and impossible".<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> "The significance of Leibniz' principle that no two things can be indiscernible rests for Hegel on the internality of all relations and distinctions. If everything 'is what it is and not another thing', and if each is indifferent to its relation to every other, you cannot strictly say that 'everything is different'. Each is what it is and that is all. Its difference from other things can be asserted only on the basis of comparison, which again concludes from the inner natures of things compared to their likeness and unlikeness. A square differs from a circle because it is bounded by straight lines at right angles, which is its own intrinsic character, and because the circle has a circumference equidistant at all points

Going in a similar direction, Longuenesse (2007) explains the allegiances and differences between Hegel, Kant, and Leibniz. Like Kant, Hegel is worried that Leibniz does not adequately differentiate between the object of thought and the empirical object. This leads Kant to argue that only empirical objects are individuated (via their intuition in space). Hegel, by contrast, is said to modify Leibniz's account in a different way: while he rejects Leibniz's views on the nature of the conceptual, he agrees with him that difference among individuals must be derived from the concept of things. As a consequence, Longuenesse presents Hegel as arguing that the "relations between objects must be shown to belong, not to the mere exteriority of the sensible given, but to the synthetic unity of a construction of thought" (60–1). From this she concludes that for Hegel, qualitative similarity and dissimilarity "belong to more than a merely external comparison. Determining likeness and unlikeness allows a progression towards the internal characterization of each of the things thus related" (61).

In my view, this interpretation overestimates how much of a positive contribution to the problems of difference can be expected within Hegel's Doctrine of Essence. The latter is only "the great negative step on the way to the true concept of reason" (SL 26/21.30). Most notably, this pertains to the notions of likeness and unlikeness: it is precisely the problem of these categories that they do *not* go beyond an "external comparison", as Hegel leaves no doubt when he writes that the determination of difference by appeal to the "likeness and unlikeness" of things is merely the work of an "[e]xternal reflection" (SL 364/11.268).<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, the suggestion

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from its centre. Hence the difference is determinate and intrinsic, and only in this sense is it true that no two things are indiscernible and that indiscernibles are identical. Sheer numerical difference would be a difference without distinction, which is self-contradictory and impossible" (Harris 1983, 165).

<sup>79</sup> The subsequent categories of "opposition" are less dependent on an external reflection and thus correct, to some extent, the shortcomings of likeness and unlikeness. However, they still belong to the realm of reflection and according to Hegel even the most advanced form of reflection does "not express the *concept* of things and their relations and has only representational determinations for its content" (SL 383–4/11.287). Hegel thinks that the categories of reflection (*identity, difference*) lead to the idea of *contradiction* which presents an obstacle for the understanding and its attempts to grasp the concept. Interestingly, he also suggests that the idea of contradiction is relevant for a speculative conception of life and also at the heart of Leibniz's claim that singular beings are "entelchies": "Internal self-movement, self-movement proper, *drive* in general (the appetite or *nisus* of the monad, the entelechy of the absolutely simple essence) is likewise nothing else than that something is, *in itself*, itself and the lack of itself (*the negative*), in one and the same respect. Abstract self-identity is not yet vitality; but the positive, since implicitly it is negativity, goes out of itself and sets its alteration in motion. Something is alive, therefore, only to the extent that it contains contradiction within itself" (SL 382/11.287). Especially the reference to life is a further hint to

that Hegel aims to explain how individual objects relate to one another by appeal to a “synthetic unity of a construction of thought” has a suspiciously subjectivist, Kantian ring indicating a position that Hegel would want to overcome rather than embrace.

Robert Stern, by contrast, identifies the Doctrine of the Concept as the primary resource for reconstructing Hegel’s account of individuation. Following his analysis, Hegel aims for an alternative to the use of substratum and bundle theory, which are both equally problematic (cf. Stern 2009d, 346–7). Hegel’s solution, as presented by Stern, is based on the idea that a sortal concept (like “man”) is a concrete viz. “substance-” universal. The latter functions as a qualitatively determined basis in which the properties of an individual inhere:

[I]ndividuality is constituted by the particularized substance-universal (as an individual, I am a man with a determinate set of properties that distinguish me from other men); the substance-universal exists only in individuals, through its particularization (the universal ‘man’ exists *in rebus*, as instantiated in *different* men); and particularity is the differentiation of a substance-universal, whereby it constitutes an individual (it is qua man that I have the properties which distinguish me from other men). (Stern 2009d, 358)

As Stern points out, more conventional versions of the substance-universal view (e.g. Loux 2006b, 113) tend to treat those universals as “intrinsically individuating” (Stern 2009d, 348), thereby leaving behind an undesirable scent of mystery. However, by emphasizing that substance universals must be determined through properties,

Hegel’s doctrine of particularization seemed to make this less mysterious; but if that means that [for instance] two dogs can only be distinct if they have different properties, that would appear to mean that like Leibniz, Hegel must deny that two things could ever be qualitatively identical. (Stern 2009d, 359)

Thus, although Stern highlights the problems with an appeal to Leibniz’s principle, he seems to acknowledge that Hegel ultimately has no choice but to bite the bullet and accept (a version of) the identity of indiscernibles (also cf. Stern 2009a, 174).<sup>80</sup>

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where the shortcomings of identity and difference will be finally resolved, namely in the Doctrine of the Concept. The passage also shows that Hegel’s interest in Leibniz is not exhausted by his discussion of PII. While I put less emphasis on Hegel’s view of contradiction, both Leibniz’s appeal to entelechies and Hegel’s account of life will play an important role in my reconstruction of his theory of difference among individual substances.

<sup>80</sup> This does not necessarily mean that on Stern’s reading Hegel would have to also follow Leibniz in treating all properties as equally relevant for individuation. The key point rather is that the qualitative makeup of an individual is necessarily unique to it.

*The Minority Reading: Hegel Departs from Leibniz*

Although many interpreters have claimed that Hegel is walking in Leibniz's footsteps when discussing the problem of difference, there are good reasons to be sceptical about this view. While remaining a minority position, this has also been recognized in the literature. For instance, Robert Pippin points out that Hegel "attacks the so-called law of diversity (Leibniz's law), which holds that any thing is utterly unlike any other, as an insufficient formulation" (Pippin 1989, 221). As Pippin sees things, Hegel regards qualitative difference as a surface phenomenon and is "interested in the requirement that there be a structure for identification in place before the actual qualitative determination of experience proceeds" (ibid.). A similar view had been expressed earlier by Doz (1987) who suggests that Hegel, while rejecting Leibniz's interpretation of PII, grants a deeper, "speculative" meaning to the principle (cf. 91).

More recently, Yeomans (2007) has pointed out that Hegel does not accept Leibniz's principle in the "sense in which [...] two qualitatively identical spheres are taken to be a counterexample" (73, n. 39). That is, according to Yeomans, Hegel rejects the *identity of indiscernibles* – but he accepts the related principle of the *indiscernibility of identicals* according to which identical objects must have the same qualities (cf. 74). Hinting at Hegel's positive account of individuation, Yeomans suggests a sort of isomorphism (my expression) between epistemic and metaphysical processes: "objects individuate themselves in roughly the same way that we individuate them. For Hegel, the activity of an essence is in part the self-establishment of its identity in roughly the same way that *we* would establish its identity for ourselves" (72). A fully-fledged version of this positive view is however "only provided in the further development of the *Logic*" (75) and therefore not discussed in Yeomans' paper.

Southgate (2014) agrees with the above-mentioned authors that Hegel rejects PII and develops the so far most extensive version of this interpretation. While I am broadly sympathetic to his view, I think there are some points that are still unclear and require further elaboration. For instance, Southgate claims that for Hegel numerical difference between individuals is not a matter

of having different qualities. But what then is it a matter of? Here his interpretation is ambiguous: on the one hand he writes that “Hegel maintains that numerical difference is a *brute fact*” (86). On the other hand, however, he is conscious that this appeal to brute facts does not sit well with Hegel’s commitment to actuality being intelligible and hence explicable throughout (cf. 86). If difference between individuals is a *brute fact*, this would mean that it cannot be understood in terms of an explanandum at all. At times, Southgate then resorts to the idea that individuals are differentiated *directly* in virtue of belonging to a kind: “according to Hegel, the individuation of objects is a matter of kind-membership: being an instantiation of a natural kind itself suffices to individuate an object *in advance of* any further consideration of the specific properties ‘contained’ in the concept of that object” (86). As Southgate correctly notes (cf. 100 n. 103), this view is operative in the account of Michael Loux (cf. 2006b, 113); but for Hegel there is no such direct link from the universality of kinds to the singularity of individuals, as he thinks any transition from universality to singularity must be mediated through particularity:

Singularity connects with universality through particularity; the singular is not universal immediately but by means of particularity; and conversely, universality is likewise not singular immediately but lowers itself to it through particularity. (SL 590–1/12.93)<sup>81</sup>

What comes closest to a position compatible with Hegel’s commitment to mediation is a third formulation that Southgate uses, although he doesn’t develop it much:

[E]ach individual sets itself apart from other things through its inherent characteristics, say, its natural defenses. But it in no way follows from this that these characteristics are unique: a tiger would be no less capable of differentiating, defending, and preserving itself if it had, say, an identical twin. (2014, 98)

The idea here is that individuation does depend on certain qualitative determinations indeed but that these determinations need not be different themselves – as long as they help to bring about “real oppositions” that have something to do with “differentiating, defending, and preserving”

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<sup>81</sup> A similar view referencing particularity in terms of properties is stated in the PS (§120/9.76): “[i]t is through its determinateness that the thing excludes others. Things are therefore in and for themselves determinate; they have properties by which they distinguish themselves from others”. Note that this quote does not entail that difference consists in having *different* properties; it just says that difference is brought about *by means of* properties and thus leaves open the possibility of these properties being identical in many individuals. Regarding the issue of intrinsically individuating universals also cf. Stern (2009d, 348).

(97). This suggestion goes in the right direction, but some important aspects of Hegel's account still remain murky. For one thing, Southgate points out *that* Hegel disagrees with Leibniz but not how precisely Hegel's argument against Leibniz works. Thus, I will provide a more detailed reconstruction of Hegel's objection below.

Further to this I agree that Hegel's appeal to the natural defences of animals provides an important clue hinting at his positive theory of difference making characteristics, but I would argue that this clue is only an illustration rather than the theory itself. Southgate's account sticks too closely to this illustrative level and fails to reconstruct the metaphysical principles that underly it. What account of difference is it that Hegel illustrates by appealing to the natural defences of animals? This issue has not been sufficiently discussed so far. Therefore I argue that in order to grasp Hegel's solution to the problem of difference we also need a reconstruction of Hegel's *logic of differentiation*, rather than merely the illustration of such a theory. Beginning with Hegel's critique of Leibniz, I will now make an attempt at filling both of these blank spots in the literature.

### 6.2.3 *Hegel's Objection to Leibniz*

The view that Hegel follows a Leibnizian line of argument vis à vis the problems of difference is by no means unmotivated. There is in fact strong evidence that Hegel thinks there is a lot to be learned from Leibniz and his principle of the identity of indiscernibles. Tying numerical difference to qualities has, for Hegel, the significance of providing an explanation of numerical difference. Leibniz, as Hegel puts it, offers an account of "determinate difference" as opposed to the mere assertion that "everything is different from everything else" (SL 366/11.270). The latter would be "an altogether superfluous proposition, for in the plural of things there is already implied a multitude and totally indeterminate diversity" (ibid.). Thus, although Hegel is sceptical of Leibniz's account, he does consider him an ally in the desire to explain what makes an individual numerically different from other things. Leibniz's appeal to the identity of



indiscernibles is thus considered as an attempt at doing more than simply asserting that there are many different entities:

The principle [PII], however, “There are no two perfectly like things,” expresses more than that, for it expresses *determinate* difference. Two things are not merely two (numerical multiplicity is only the repetition of one) but are rather differentiated *by a determination*. [...] “[T]wo,” or any numerical plurality, does not yet contain *a diversity which is determinate* [...]. (SL 366/11.270–1)

Despite his sympathy for explaining numerical difference in terms of a “determination”, Hegel thinks that Leibniz commits a fatal error in executing this project. Hegel’s key concern is that Leibniz, by appealing to qualitative uniqueness, confounds the epistemic discrimination of objects as performed by a mind with individuation as a metaphysical fact about things themselves. Here it is important to highlight that Hegel assumes that an explanation of numerical difference among individuals should provide more than merely an epistemic criterion for telling them apart. On his interpretation of the problem, the explanation in question is *metaphysical* and therefore meant to satisfy the desire to know *why* two individuals are numerically distinct in the first place.

As we have seen above, it is not so clear to what extent Leibniz approaches the matter in the same way. It is possible to read Leibniz as claiming that numerical diversity among individual substances is merely *accompanied* by difference in character while leaving unsettled what makes these individuals numerically distinct in the first place. Clarifying Leibniz’s intention here is far beyond the scope of my analysis. What I do claim is that Hegel treats him as attempting a metaphysical explanation of what determines that individuals are countably distinct from one another and not just an explanation of how this is reflected in their character. Hegel’s issue with Leibniz then is that Leibniz ultimately fails to keep these two modes of explanation apart and ends up with what is merely a criterion for discriminating individuals, where, in fact, he should have provided a metaphysical ground for their numerical distinction. I now want to explain this criticism in some detail and show where Hegel departs from the Leibniz-inspired account that is often regarded as his own.

Qualities determine what a thing is like and thus constitute its character. Leibniz argues that this, the qualitative character of each thing, is also what constitutes the explanatory basis for there to be numerically distinct individuals. The *prima facie* plausible idea is this: If we accept (by PII) that each thing has a unique character, two things can be understood to be numerically distinct because they are *unlike* in quality; for instance: A differs from B because A is green while B is red.

Now, the obvious rejoinder is that qualitative difference among individuals seems to be a contingent rather than a necessary fact. According to Hegel, Leibniz's claim "that the determination of unlikeness pertains to all things, is surely in need of demonstration" (SL 366/11.271) while at the same time such a demonstration is not provided. Leibniz's account only works if PII is treated as a necessary truth – which is far from obvious; at least if one does not take for granted the peculiar commitments of Leibniz's overall system.<sup>82</sup> This familiar worry, however, is not Hegel's only concern with a Leibniz-style approach to the problem of numerical difference.

In Hegel's own discussion of the category of difference he targets instead the idea that the character of things is sufficient for generating difference among them. Here the point is not so much that two things might be perfectly similar or share all their intrinsic properties. The point is that even if they are *unlike* one another, this is not sufficient in order to make them numerically distinct. Hegel thus argues that a link between the separate existence of two individuals on the one hand and their unlikeness viz. qualitative difference on the other hand can only be established if an "external reflection" steps in and creates it by "refer[ing] what is different [i.e. distinct individual substances] to likeness and unlikeness" through the act of "*comparing*" (SL 364/11.268).

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<sup>82</sup> In my discussion of Leibniz, I have indicated that Leibniz's argument for the law is that it makes sure that God never acts without reason, for instance, when choosing which of many possible worlds becomes actual. Hegel apparently does not consider this as an adequate justification.

What Hegel has in mind here is the following train of thought: when considered in isolation, the qualitative makeup of one thing is indifferent to the qualitative make up of any other – and thus difference does not emerge at all. When *not* considered in isolation but in *comparison* with the quality of another thing a difference may appear – but this does not follow from the qualitative makeup of the considered objects alone but also requires a comparative conjunction of both.

This operation itself, the comparison, however, is not included in the qualitative makeup of things. It has to be added from without by a mind and is as such “a subjective operation that falls outside” (SL 365/11.269) of what is compared. Unlikeness or qualitative difference may therefore constitute a form of difference, but this difference does not arise from the respective individual substances alone:

*Unlikeness* is [...] difference, but an external difference which is not, in and for itself, the difference of the unlike itself. Whether something is like or unlike something else is not the concern of either the like or the unlike; each refers only to itself, each is in and for itself what it is; identity or non-identity, in the sense of likeness or unlikeness, depend on the point of view of a third external to them. (SL 363–4/11.268)

Hegel’s analysis amounts to the objection that taking qualitative difference as the principle of individuation runs the risk of conflating the epistemic and metaphysical senses of individuation: instead of explaining why individuals enjoy separate existence in the first place, the qualitative approach only explains how they can *appear* as separate units to an observer. Hegel’s goal however is to explain numerical difference as arising from the mind-independent reality of the individual itself, not just as a side-effect of an observing subject’s activity.

#### 6.2.4 *Further Reflections on Hegel’s Objection*

As we have seen, Hegel denies that qualitative difference (as Leibniz understands it) is sufficient for providing an explanation of numerical difference among individuals. Hegel’s point is not that the intrinsic determinations of things do not matter. Instead, he thinks that Leibniz treats them in a problematic way entailing that things only emerge as distinct if compared by an observer.

Although I hope to have presented what Hegel says in sufficient clarity, I do recognise that there may be worries about the validity of his point.

For instance, Hegel's argument might provoke the counter-objection that having distinct qualitative make-ups entails that the individual substances having these distinct characters must also differ in number – whether this is noted by an observer or not. And indeed, if A has the property *p* and B does not, it follows that A and B cannot be identical, that they must be two distinct things. Otherwise one and the same thing would *have* and *not have* *p* as a property. This seems to be valid independently of any observing subject detecting the unlikeness of A and B in terms of *p*. Thus, it seems, the unlikeness of things, does explain their numerical difference after all.

In light of this concern, one may wonder if Hegel went astray in his critique of Leibniz. However, I think there is a way of showing that he hasn't. This requires careful attention to the fact that Hegel is after a metaphysical explanation of difference. The task of a metaphysical explanation of difference is to disclose grounds for there to be two distinct individuals, not just to identify a reliable indicator or mark of difference. That is, for Hegel, it is not sufficient to point out some fact about individuals that warrants the inference that they are indeed distinct. Instead, what Hegel wants is an explanation of what brings about different individuals in the first place.

In Hegel's eyes, Leibniz oscillates between these two projects of giving a metaphysical explanation and identifying an unambiguous indicator of difference. From Hegel's point of view, Leibniz sets out to provide the former but ends up with the latter. The result is that the lines between that which *establishes* difference and that which merely *indicates* it to an observer are blurred and this is precisely what Hegel wants to avoid.

Of course it might be the case that Leibniz never wanted to give a metaphysical explanation of difference in the sense outlined above. Perhaps his project is more modest and merely seeks to identify those determinations of an individual that indicate its distinction from other things to an observer. That said, our present task is not to do justice to Leibniz but to

Hegel and to understand the nature of his objection. The philosopher Hegel criticizes (think *Leibniz*\* if you must) is guilty of palming off on us a mere sign of difference when we are actually looking for a metaphysical explanation.

With this in mind, it becomes important to distinguish between those properties that are indeed explanatory for *why* individuals are numerically distinct from one another, and others that only mark or indicate *that* they are. Note that it is not necessary for these markers to engender difference, all they have to do is to indicate it. In light of these two roles that can be played by the determinations of a thing, we can reassess Hegel's point that qualitative difference is insufficient as an explanation of why two individuals are numerically distinct. I think what Hegel means is that many of the qualities that Leibniz would count as difference making only contribute towards the task of *indicating* difference but fail to explain what brings it about in the first place.

From Hegel's point of view, there isn't anything essentially differentiating about properties such as white and brown, round and square, etc. For what is in fact white of colour, such as Marengo, the horse, could have been brown instead. Although this would make Marengo more similar to other horses, such as the brown furred Copenhagen, we wouldn't want to say that Marengo could have failed to be distinct from Copenhagen. Surely, if Marengo is an individual at all, his individuality is essential to him. His white colour, by contrast, seems to be an accidental feature which he may have failed to exemplify.

Leibniz, to be sure, would be happy to answer this question affirmatively for he embraces the view that individuals have all their intrinsic properties essentially (*superessentialism*). On that view, Marengo is white *essentially* and he could not have been brown instead. Leibniz goes as far as to claim that even past and future properties are essential to their possessors: Marengo could not have failed to participate in the battle of Waterloo and "Caesar's future dictatorship is grounded in his notion or nature" (Leibniz 1989, 45). Hence, for Leibniz every individual has a unique essence captured in its complete individual concept and comprising each and every intrinsic predicate that applies to the individual.

For Hegel, by contrast, the essences or natures of things are what they *share* with at least some other beings, namely with other members of their kind. The particular qualities they have over and above their natures, by contrast, apply to them contingently.<sup>83</sup> But then these contingent features cannot be what ensures that they are distinct from others. Referring to Leibniz's own example that, for instance, two leaves always differ regarding some qualitative characteristic Hegel therefore comments: "[a]ccording to its nature, one leaf from a tree is what the other is" and regarding that which makes it distinct from another "it is indifferent [*gleichgültig*], whether or not a caterpillar has bitten something out of it" (GW 23,1.95).<sup>84</sup> The point is that from Hegel's vantage point, things share their natures with other members of their kind and their non-essential features, such as the serrated shape of a leaf from which a caterpillar has eaten, are contingent. The caterpillar could have failed to alter the shape of the leaf – but this doesn't mean that the leaf could have failed to differ from other things.

It is important to note here that Hegel can still concede that such features *indicate* that an individual differs from another. When we compare, say, two leaves, we can tell them apart by their accidental features, for example by their shapes. But here it is us who, in observing and comparing things, point out relations that set them apart. These relations may obtain but they do not necessarily explain how the objects under consideration differentiate *themselves*. In as much as

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<sup>83</sup> If we have to treat each and every property of an individual substance as essential, we can, for instance, no longer explain why being a plant is more important for a rose than having, say, red blossoms. But for Hegel, to treat a "property [such] as the color of a flower as a predicate equal to its vegetable nature, is to overlook a difference which the dullest mind would not miss" (SL 576/12.87). Hegel, it seems, simply denies that all intrinsic qualities could be essential to their bearers.

<sup>84</sup> Leibniz brings up the example of two tree leaves in the NE (231): "I remember a great princess [Sophie], of lofty intelligence, saying one day while walking in her garden that she did not believe there were two leaves perfectly alike. A clever gentleman who was walking with her believed that it would be easy to find some, but search as he might he became convinced by his own eyes that a difference could always be found. One can see from these considerations, which have until now been overlooked, how far people have strayed in philosophy from the most natural notions, and at what a distance from the great principles of true metaphysics they have come to be". When Hegel references this anecdote, he points out that it invites a misunderstanding, namely that PII merely requires an empirical vindication rather than a demonstration of its metaphysical validity: "Happy times for metaphysics those, when it was practiced at court and no greater effort was called for to demonstrate its propositions than to compare the leaves of trees!" (SL 366/11.271) The point I am referring to above however does *not* concern the issue of *proving* PII but rather that of deriving an explanation for numerical diversity from the principle.

the generation of difference among individuals is concerned, accidental features are therefore indeed “indifferent” and “without interest”, as Hegel notes:

Difference [of the qualitative type] is indifferent [*gleichgültig*], it is without interest. One can point out differences anywhere. But that to which I relate something, to this it is not related through itself, it is me who brings it into this relation. In order for the relation to be an interesting one, it is important [*es kommt darauf an*] that the differentiated entities be essentially differentiating [*begrenzend*]. Mere [qualitative] difference, however, is something external. (GW 23,1.351)

I think Hegel is not saying here that relations based on intrinsic, accidental features of things are literally *created* by an observing subject. Instead, he wants to point out that subjects arbitrarily choose relations of unlikeness while conceding that these relations do indeed obtain in virtue of the intrinsic properties of individuals. Hegel may even concede that arbitrarily choosing these relations as an explanation of difference is fine as long as by “explanation” we mean something like pointing out a *sign* of difference. But it is inadequate if the point is to provide a metaphysical explanation. For then we would indeed confuse a mere indicator with the ground of difference. To identify the latter, Hegel argues, we need to disclose those features of individuals through which they differentiate themselves from one another, through which they are “essentially differentiating [*begrenzend*]”.

Against this background, it should be clear what Hegel is getting at in the following remark on Leibniz:

Whether two things are equal or unequal is just a comparison that we make, something that happens within us. [...] The difference must be difference in itself, not for our comparison, but rather the subject must have this determination in itself, as its own; the determination must be immanent to the individual. It is not just us who differentiate the animal by its claws, rather it differentiates itself essentially through them, it fights back, it maintains itself. (TWA 20.241)

Spotting qualitative differences between individuals can indeed help to tell apart one thing from another. This, however, is only how *we* single out objects empirically and in this sense it “happens within us”. However, as Hegel would agree with E. J. Lowe (2005, 75), “individuation in this epistemic sense presupposes individuation in the metaphysical sense. One can only ‘single out’ objects which are there to be singled out, that is, parts of reality which constitute single objects”. Hegel’s reply to Leibniz is that in order for there to be such “single objects”, these things

themselves have to account for their own singling out independently from our minds. And in this context, certain features that have to do with *fighting back* and *maintaining oneself* are relevant in ways that I will explain in due course.

As noted correctly by Southgate (2014, 98), the point of Hegel's argument is that these genuinely differentiating characteristics do not have to make their possessors qualitatively distinct from one another. Indeed, they can be similar and yet constitute difference as long as they contribute to the self-preservation of their bearers. That said, the question that neither Southgate, nor (to the best of my knowledge) anyone else, has answered up to now is what exactly it is that makes characteristics such as having claws or teeth "differentiating". In Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* and in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, there are several mentions of similar examples appealing to the natural defences of animal organisms. However, simply pointing to the examples Hegel draws from the realm of nature is hardly enough to disclose the principles that underlie them. Instead it is required to find the common thread that runs through them and then to show how this relates to Hegel's metaphysics.

### 6.3 Animals, Monads, and the Idea of Causal Independence

In this section I will work towards a reconstruction of Hegel's positive account of numerical difference among individual substances. In order to reach this goal, I will first discuss the examples Hegel takes from the realm of nature and then suggest that the common thread running through them is an appeal to the idea of causal independence. This, as I will then show, is an idea that Hegel – despite his criticism – finds prefigured in Leibniz, although he also modifies it substantially. While Leibnizian monads are causally isolated i.e. shut off from causal interactions with other things, Hegelian individuals achieve causal independence in and through interacting with one another.

#### 6.3.1 Hegel on the Claws of Animals

The passages in which Hegel illustrates the self-differentiation of individual substances focus on animals as paradigmatic cases of individual beings. This hardly comes as a surprise given the



overall Aristotelian background of Hegel's thought. Living beings are not the only individuals but they provide, so to speak, the gold-standard of what it is to be an individual.<sup>85</sup>

A further commonality of these passages is that they all touch upon the issue of observer-relatedness which I have discussed in the context of Hegel's Leibniz-critique. In the passages presented below, Hegel targets not only Leibniz but also then-contemporary approaches within the natural sciences. According to Hegel, the latter follow a similar pattern in as much as they also blur the lines between how natural entities differentiate themselves and what merely makes them distinguishable in the eyes of an observing subject. The other important theme prominent in Hegel's examples is the idea that self-differentiation as an activity is *mediated* through specialised organs of the animal which serve as means of differentiation. Before discussing these ideas in greater detail, let's have a look at the relevant text, beginning with the already familiar passage on Leibniz:

*Lectures on the History of Philosophy (Leibniz Chapter)*

The difference [from other things] must be difference in itself, not for our comparison, but rather the subject must have this determination in itself, as its own; the determination must be immanent to the individual. It is not just us who differentiate the animal by its claws, rather it differentiates itself essentially through them, it fights back, it maintains itself. (TWA 20.241)

*Phenomenology of Spirit (Observing Reason)*

The distinguishing marks of animals, e.g., are taken from their claws and teeth; for in point of fact it is not only cognition that thereby distinguishes one animal from another, but each animal itself *separates* itself from others thereby; by means of these weapons it maintains itself in its independence and in its detachment from the generality. (PS §246/9.140–1)

*Encyclopaedia (Philosophy of Nature)*<sup>86</sup>

[F]or the special determination, a correct instinct has hit upon taking the distinguishing characteristics of the species also from the *teeth, claws*, and the like, i.e. from the animal's *weapons*; for it is through these that the animal itself establishes and preserves itself as an

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<sup>85</sup> It is important to note however, that for Hegel this 'gold-standard' can and must also be analysed in abstraction from its concrete manifestation in biological organisms. For in Hegel's system, life is a *logical* category and nature is only the place where this category becomes realised under conditions of contingency. This is part of why it would be insufficient to focus merely on the example of animal organisms without also consulting Hegel's logic of life.

<sup>86</sup> In the still widely used Moldenhauer/Michel edition (TWA) the two passages below have a paragraph number different from the one listed by Miller. The text of EN §370 in Miller's edition is to be found under §368 in TWA 9.

independent existence, that is, distinguishes itself from others. (EN §370R, p. 416/TWA 9.501)

Further essential classifications have been based on the behaviour of animals as individuals, to other animals: that is, on their teeth, feet, claws, and beaks. It was a correct instinct which led to the choice of these parts, for it is by them that animals themselves distinguish themselves from other animals: if the difference is to be a true one, it must not be simply a sign which we have picked out, but a difference of the animal itself. By opposing itself as an individual to its non-organic nature through its weapons, the animal demonstrates that it is a subject for itself. (EN §370A, p. 426–7/TWA 9.514–5)

### *The Means of Self-Differentiation*

According to the passages quoted above, Hegel thinks that individuals (here individual animals) are active regarding their differentiation from others. It also becomes clear that this activity is not adequately grasped when we focus too much on how an observer can tell individuals apart from one another. At the same time, the passages quoted above also show that such an individuating activity does not immediately bring about numerically distinct entities. There is a structure that pertains to the activity and this structure can be known and analysed in terms of means to end relations: Hegel therefore emphasises that an individual requires *means* in order to perform individuating actions. These means are those bodily parts that allow an animal to differentiate itself from its surroundings. More specifically, Hegel is thinking here of the claws and teeth of animals.

It is no coincidence that these organs have a connection to both *nourishment* (claws serve for hunting, teeth for chewing food) and *fighting*. Both activities have something to do with how an animal maintains its own way of organization: by taking up food an animal ensures that its body maintains its vital functions, that its parts continue to impact each other in precisely the way that allows for maintaining its form of life. At the same time such a structure is subject to the permanent threat of causal impact that is not governed by the self-legislation of the living organism. Therefore, it must have parts that allow to transform this impact in such a way as to make it either beneficial for the purposeful organization or at least not harmful for it. This applies to the skin of an animal which keeps off the otherwise harmful influence of sun and rain, and, *a fortiori*, it applies to its claw-studded paw by means of which it fights back a predator or rival. As

Hegel writes, it is “by means of these weapons” that an individual living being “maintains itself in its independence” (PS §246/9.140).

### *The Nature of Self-Differentiation*

But how exactly should we understand such independence, and especially, how is this a way of being different from other things? In other words, what exactly is the nature of self-differentiation, the purpose for the sake of which an animal deploys these means?

The passages quoted above contain some rather general statements promoting the idea that the goal of individuating activities is that the individual “differentiates itself essentially [...], fights back”, and “maintains itself” (TWA 20.241); that it “*separates* itself from others” (PS §246/9.140) and in doing so “demonstrates that it is a subject for itself” (EN §370A).

However, there are also some more specific hints as to how we should understand the nature of this self-differentiating.

First, as we have already seen via the discussion of the means of individuation, Hegel highlights the relevance of dealing with causal impact which is not as such governed by the form immanent to the individual. In order to be different, it is not enough to have an inner, purposive structure. This structure must also be able to withstand impact which is, in the first place, indifferent to it. This idea is referenced also in a lecture note suggesting that in order to achieve the status of a separate existent, an animal must “oppos[e] itself as an individual to its non-organic nature” (EN § 370A). The expression “non-organic nature” is Hegel’s term for the environment of a living being. This environment is non-organic not because it lacks organic structure, but rather because it is not organized according to the immanent form of the individual. Consequentially, individual difference must have something to do with the relation an individual establishes with what is not subject to its own immanent form or way of organization.

Similarly, in the *Logic*, Hegel points out that purpose (as subjective purpose) has “before it an *objective*, mechanical and chemical world to which its activity is directed” so that “its self-determining activity is”, in one important way, a “reflection outwards” (SL 658/12.161). Thus, in

order to be not just a subjective but a realised purpose, an individual object must limit itself off from an otherwise undifferentiated environment, it must literally make this environment other than itself through the way it interacts with it. What creates the borderline between the individual and its surroundings is that the individual has a capacity to withstand causal impact, to ‘transform’ it in such a way that protects and stabilises its own way of organisation. For Hegel, living beings demonstrate this capacity in an exemplary way because “anything that has an effect on a living thing is independently determined, altered, and transmuted by the latter, *for the living thing will not let the cause come to its effect*, that is, it sublates it as cause” (SL 496/11.400). Positioning oneself as a separate unit against other things thus means to achieve independence from the causal impact of this environment while at the same time, being exposed to it.<sup>87</sup>

Thus, as a preliminary result, one can say that the “detachment from the generality” (PS §246/9.140–1) referenced as the goal of individuation, has to do with an ability to modify the causal impact to which an individual is subjected. Accordingly, an individual is separate, independent, and self-standing because its activity includes the capacity for such transformation, be it in terms of trans-forming food into flesh or in terms of parrying the otherwise fatal blow of an attacker.

More will have to be said about the general metaphysical underpinnings of this account of individuation as self-differentiation when we turn to an analysis of Hegel’s logical category of life. Before doing this, however, I will devote the remaining part of this section to a remark about the role of qualities within Hegel’s account of individuation.

### ***The Role of Qualities***

Hegel is critical of Leibniz’s appeal to qualities not because he thinks that individuals are featureless or that individuation is an unanalysable, brute fact. By contrast, his point is that only some of an individual’s intrinsic qualities are difference-making, while others merely indicate

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<sup>87</sup> A similar passage can be found in the PS (§307/9.171): the “individual either *allows* free play to the stream of the actual world flowing in upon it, or else breaks it off and transforms it”.

difference to an observer. Having now considered Hegel's appeal to animal organisms as paradigmatic examples, we are in a position to say more clearly what characterises the class of qualities that Hegel would indeed count as difference-making.

Those qualities that are relevant for individuation, are connected to how an individual reacts to the causal impact of its environment. This reaction must be such as to transform causal impact so that it becomes beneficial to and cannot harm the inner structure of the individual. This determines how something must be *like* in order to be able to perform such transformations of causal impact. For instance, the teeth of a lion must be sharp because that's what allows for turning the flesh of a gazella into nourishment. Similarly, when the lion fights back against a rival of its own kind, in order to be able to do that, it must be sufficiently strong, have such and such bones, muscles, and claws.

By contrast, for Leibniz, one lion's claw being of a slightly darker shade of black would be part of the reason why this lion is different from others. Hegel, for his part, would reject this type of qualitative difference as "irrelevant" for a metaphysical explanation of difference. The point is that some qualities have little or no connection at all to how an individual maintains itself against its environment while other qualities are essential for it. For instance, it simply doesn't matter what colour a claw has, as long as it helps to execute activities like hunting and fighting. In order to do this, it must be sufficiently hard, and sharp etc. According to Hegel, one must therefore keep apart qualities that help to explain an individual's capacity for self-differentiation, and those that do not.

Hegel's worry is that there is a widespread tendency to blur this distinction and so to



Figure 3: Distinguishing marks for species of birds (Linné 1802, 132–3)

regard *any* quality as relevant for difference. As the quotes listed above show, he also thinks that certain accounts get the distinction right to some extent but then fail to draw the right conclusions and slip back into a purely qualitative approach à la Leibniz. This applies especially to the naturalist Carl von Linné (1707–1778) who endeavoured to create a taxonomy of different genera and species in nature. When Hegel writes that a “a correct instinct has hit upon taking the distinguishing characteristics of the species also from the

*teeth, claws, and the like, i.e. from the animal’s weapons*” (EN §370R, p. 416), he comments on Linné’s decision to classify animals according to the features of their claws and teeth (for mammals) viz. beaks (for birds).<sup>88</sup>

According to Hegel, this decision betrays a “correct instinct”, in as much as it demonstrates attention for how difference arises at an individual level, namely through deploying bodily parts that allow the transformation of causal impact from the individual’s environment. However, Hegel also thinks that Linné does not draw the right conclusions in as much as he references the characteristic qualities of those parts as *distinguishing marks* for *our* comparison. As Hegel would object, it is not simply by displaying those features that individuals differ from one another. What matters instead is the role played by these features for entering relations of opposition:

[I]f the difference is to be a true one, it must not be simply a sign which we have picked out, but a difference of the animal itself. By opposing itself as an individual to its non-organic nature through its weapons, the animal demonstrates that it is a subject for itself. (EN §370A, p. 426–7)

<sup>88</sup> Hegel’s rendition is based indeed on Linné’s actual classification. According to his *General System of Nature* (Linné 1802, 5) mammals “are distributed into 7 Orders, the character of which are taken from the number, situation, and structure of the teeth”; birds (cf. 131–2) are classified into six orders not exclusively but also according to the shapes of their beaks (or “bills”).

Finally, it is important to understand that for Hegel, the qualities which have a connection to the enactment of difference need not be unique to their possessors. On the contrary, two individuals can be similar with respect to their individuating capacities and in principle their teeth and claws could be *perfectly* similar. The reason to mention such qualities is not to reintroduce qualitative difference but instead to explain how, in the *absence* of qualitative difference, individuals can achieve separate existence through their activities.<sup>89</sup> As Hegel maintains against Leibniz, it is therefore “unimportant whether or not there are two equal things” (TWA 20.241).

In this respect I agree with Southgate (2014) that there is no reason why Hegel should not allow for difference *solo numero* – if by that one means the absence of qualitative difference. However, on Hegel’s account, difference between individuals cannot be *only* numerical – if by that one means the absence of mediating factors through which it is achieved. An individual must be able to deploy its “weapons” in order to differ from other things, and in this sense, particularity makes an appearance as the mediating middle between the universal form of an individual and its existence as a singular instance of the latter. The particularity which is relevant for individuation can be described qualitatively in terms of features that are connected to self-differentiating capacities. Or one could do justice to the insight of Objectivity that such features are always tied to causal interactions among material parts and hence speak of the claws, and teeth as *material parts* of the individual. Either way, Hegel wants to emphasise that singularity or the separate existence of an individual is not an immediate result of its universality or membership to a natural kind. There must always be a mediating factor in terms of particularity. This aspect of Hegel’s theory gets lost in Southgate’s suggestion that “Hegel maintains that numerical difference is a *brute fact*” (2014, 86). And it doesn’t make things better to add that for Hegel “being an instantiation of a natural kind itself suffices to individuate an object” (ibid.).

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<sup>89</sup> This also suggests that what Stephen Houlgate identifies as an important insight of the *Doctrine of Being*, namely that “*qualitative difference* from something *else* does not [...] belong to the structure of the one” (Houlgate 2022b, 99), retains validity regarding Hegel’s category of a living individual.

Either way, the idea of mediation gets replaced by a form of *immediate* transition from the individual's kind viz. universal to its singularity – an immediacy which Hegel clearly rejects.

### 6.3.2 Causal Sovereignty – Hegel's Positive Reception of Leibniz

It should have become clear that Hegel's explanation of difference among individual substances has something to do with their causal behaviour and how this makes them independent from causal impact. We have also seen that Hegel criticises Leibniz for blurring the lines between this level of active self-differentiation and qualities that merely make individuals distinguishable for an observer. That being said, Hegel also recognises that there are elements in Leibniz's thinking that already point towards the idea that individual substances are distinct from one another due to the causal independence of their intrinsic activity. Disclosing this positive strand of Hegel's Leibniz reception not only provides a more rounded picture of their relationship, it also helps us to see how exactly Hegel understands the idea of causal independence.

In his more complaisant remarks about Leibniz, Hegel recognises Leibniz's commitment to individuality as an irreducible element of reality: "Leibniz's basic principle is the individual" (TWA 20.233).<sup>90</sup> While Hegel rejects the idea that individuals differ through being qualitatively unlike one another, he shows considerably more sympathy for Leibniz's account of the monad's inner activity. In the latter Hegel recognises the idea that individual substances are not just passive objects waiting for an observer to discriminate them. Instead they are conceived of as active and, very importantly for Hegel's reception, as *self-sufficient* in their activity. Hegel is interested in the idea that the separate existence of each individual substance has something to do with its activity being independent. At the same time, Hegel disagrees with Leibniz regarding the conditions that need to apply for an activity to be independent: while Leibniz treats monads as

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<sup>90</sup> In this respect, Leibniz represents for Hegel an important (although still one-sided) counterpart to what he perceives as Spinoza's anti-individualism. While Spinoza is said to believe in only "*one*, universal substance" Leibniz "brought up the other side" namely "individuality, the being-for-itself, the monad"; however, on Leibniz account, individuality is present "only as thought-of [*die gedachte*], – not as the I, not as the absolute concept. The opposed principles are thrown apart [*auseinandergeworfen*] but they complement each other through each other" (TWA 20.233). Note that Hegel, by suggesting both of these positions to be *complementary*, foreshadows his own account as their synthesis.



self-sufficient because they are causally *isolated*, Hegel argues that this requirement is too strong and opts instead for an account that I will label a *causal sovereignty* view.

### ***Leibniz on Monads as Self-Sufficient Activities***

It is clear that Leibniz considers monads as agents of some sort: the monad is a “being capable of action” (1989, 207) and a “source of action” (NE 216). He also doesn’t hesitate to describe the monad in Aristotelian terms as an “entelechy”: by this he means the activity of realising typical tendencies or goals. In the same spirit he also speaks about a monad’s “appetition” or “endeavour” (NE 170). All these expressions denote the realisation of a goal-directed activity: “Appetitions are like a stone’s endeavour to follow the shortest but not always the best route to the centre of the earth” (NE 189).

Of course a monad is not *literally* like a stone, because a stone has matter and causally affects other material things while being subject to their causal impact. None of this would be true of a monad which is an immaterial entity without causal connection to other things. Instead Leibniz claims that the activity of a monad consists in a steady movement through “perceptions” in which each monad mirrors the universe as a whole from a unique point of view. Although the language of “perceiving” and “mirroring” suggests a passive, or at least receptive, role for the monad, Leibniz emphasises the idea that the movement through these mirror images is the result of the monad’s inner and autonomous activity.

The monad and its self-generated movement through an infinite series of perceptions thus forms the basis from which knowers abstract away when forming concepts and ascribing properties to substances. Therefore, for Leibniz, the foundation for why a monad has the properties by means of which it turns out to be different from other things is tied to the monad’s own, perception-producing activity (cf. McCullough 1996, 149). Consequently, for Leibniz, a monad “can be distinguished from another” because of both, “its internal qualities *and actions* [my italics]” which make it “go from one perception to another” (Leibniz 1989, 207).

In this activity monads are completely autonomous, as they do not and cannot receive any causal impact from one another. As McCullough (1996, 168) remarks, “monads are causally – in the production of their perceptions – self-sufficient”. The important point is that for Leibniz this causal self-sufficiency or independence is based on the causal *isolation* of each monad, for on his view “no created substance exerts a metaphysical action or influx on any other thing” (Leibniz 1989, 33). As he also famously put it, “monads have no windows” (Leibniz 1989, 214) that would allow them to receive anything from without.<sup>91</sup> This makes them independent from one another, although, as we shall see in due course, there may be worries about tying the independence of individual substances to the idea of causal isolation.

### *Hegel on Leibniz’s Account of Causal Independence*

Hegel appreciates the idea that individual substances are causally self-sufficient and that this has a lot to do with what makes them distinct from one another. However, he resists the conclusion that such self-sufficiency requires causal *isolation*. In my view, his appeal to the teeth and claws of animals is an application of a modified theory of causal independence that appeals not to complete *isolation from* but *sovereignty within* causal interactions.

When characterizing Leibniz’s understanding of monads, Hegel picks a quote that defines substance as “a thing capable of activity [*Tätigkeit*]” (TWA 20.239). This is the element of Leibniz’s philosophy Hegel wants to defend against the notion of individuals as defined by predicates. The idea of substance as activity is also praised in this quote: “[m]onads are *substantial forms* [...] they are the entelechies of Aristotle conceived as pure activity” (TWA 20.239).

Furthermore, the interest in activity is present with respect to the diversity of monads. Hegel revealingly quotes Leibniz with a passage showing that monads are not only conceived as having

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<sup>91</sup> What we ordinarily assume to be causal interactions between objects, such as one billiard ball causing another to move, has nothing to do with any direct interaction between these things in Leibniz’s understanding. Instead he argues that what looks to us like an interaction between two billiard balls is in reality causally dependent on God and the pre-established harmony he imposes on the universe. Part of what motivates this perspective is scepticism about the idea that things could pass on properties to one another (which is what Leibniz means by “influx”). For instance, Leibniz would deny that the velocity in the first billiard ball could be transferred to the second.

“certain qualities, as their own determinations” but also “inner actions, through which they are differentiated from others” (TWA 20.241 cf. Leibniz 1989, 207 and above). A similar remark can be found in the *Logic*, where Hegel also points out a connection between the activity of the monad and its differentiation from things (that thereby become) other than itself:

[the monad] has no *passivity* but the alterations and the determinations in it are rather manifestations within it of itself. It is an *entelechy*; to manifest is its distinctive act. – The monad is thereby also *determined, differentiated from others*; the determinateness falls in the particular content and in the way and manner of the manifestation. (SL 475/11.378)

Hegel grants Leibniz a desire to connect the qualities through which a monad can be differentiated from others to its own, intrinsic activity. To be sure, Hegel also thinks that this connection gets lost when Leibniz suggests that each and any property could be difference-making. However, he suspects that underneath this “superficial meaning [of PII], which is not of concern for us” (TWA 20.241), there is more to be learned from Leibniz. This has to do with the idea that an individual, in order to differ from anything at all, must be able to actively differentiate itself rather than just being externally and passively differentiated by an observer: “[w]hat is not different in itself, is not different [at all]” (TWA 20.241). Although the property-related strand of Leibniz’s theory ultimately collapses into a view that Hegel regards as problematic, he recognizes the rudiment of a view of difference as grounded in the individual’s own activity.

However, Leibniz does not adequately develop this approach according to Hegel. The main problem is that a monad’s activity cannot reach beyond its own, inner realm. For part of why monads are autonomous centres of activity is that they lack causal interaction with each other. From Hegel’s point of view, this amounts to an emaciated version of what it is to be truly independent, autonomous, or self-standing: true independence, for Hegel, does not have to shy away from external influence but maintains itself in the face of it. This perspective on causal independence can be further illustrated by using an analogy: it is not a sign of great psychological independence if I cannot bear any exchange with others. If every input from without threatens my own self, I am not *especially strong* but *especially fragile* – just as the man who avoids a party because he takes the opinions, feelings etc. of others to be overpowering and threatening to his

self is not *more* but rather *less independent* as compared to the party guest who enjoys a conversation with a different-minded person and yet remains true to his own views.

In the case of the Leibnizian monad, the issue with isolation is even more severe: for while the party-avoider may freely choose his path to independence via isolation, the monad is, so to speak, *confined* to its own room by the default conditions of Leibniz's system. For it is stipulated from the outset that a monad cannot have any causal interactions with other things so that it neither enacts its independence through interaction with others nor is its retreat from such interactions within the scope of its autonomy.

True independence, for Hegel, cannot be an externally stipulated default condition (such as the monad's causal isolation) and it must be won in a struggle with others. What Hegel finds missing in Leibniz is thus a notion of exclusive actions by which individual substances actively set themselves apart from one another. As he puts it in the Doctrine of Being, this would require us to think of difference as “a *repulsion* of monads”. “Leibnizian idealism [by contrast] takes up *plurality* immediately as *something given*; it does not conceptualize it as a *repulsion* of monads; it has plurality, therefore, only on the side of its abstract externality” (SL 137/21.157).<sup>92</sup> As Hegel also puts it, monads:

are not an other for each other, do not limit each other, have no effect on each other; all relations based on an existence fall away in general. The manifold is such only ideally and internally, the monad persists in it only as referred to itself, alterations unfold within it and entail no references of the one monad to others. (SL 130/21.149)

Later in the *Logic*, in Objectivity, Hegel comes back to this point, stating that:

It does not suffice, in order to gain the freedom of substance, to represent the latter as a totality that, *complete in itself*, would have nothing to receive *from the outside*. On the contrary,

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<sup>92</sup> Houlgate (2022b, 101) makes clear that repulsion, although dialectically derived from the categories of quality, is not as such a matter of having different qualities: “[B]eing one [...] represents the *loss* of qualitative distinctness: for while something is bound to an other, the one has no qualitative other. The one is initially all alone in its own space or ‘void’, and then it is surrounded by other ones *just like it*. Quality [as the predecessor of the category of quantity] thus makes necessary many ones, each of which is just as much one as the others and between which *there is no qualitative difference*. The only difference between them is separateness or “repulsion”: the difference between ones that are all *equally* separate”. This analysis pertains to the Category of Being and its category of the “one”. Although the discourse of later stages in Hegel's *Logic* brings in new levels of complexity, the basic idea that there can be difference without qualitative unlikeness remains important.

a self-reference that grasps nothing conceptually but is only a mirroring is precisely a *passivity* towards the other. (SL 634/12.136–7)

By treating monads as causally isolated, Hegel therefore argues, Leibniz compromises his initially promising idea that their separate existence is rooted in their own activity. For achieving separate existence through one's own activity means to *exclude* other things. But to *exclude* other things is always also a way of *relating* to them. For this reason, Hegel insists from early on and consistently throughout the *Logic* that an individual's self-differentiating activity must not be confused with a complete detachment from what is external to it:

Although negative, repulsion is nonetheless essentially *connection*; the mutual repulsion and flight is not a liberation from what is repelled and fled from; that which is excluded still stands in *connection* with what is excluded from it. (SL 142/21.163)

And to confirm that this view is not only operative in the Doctrine of Being but also at the heart of the Doctrine of the Concept we can point to the fact that Hegel repeats it when characterising the moment of singularity which “is itself repelling separation, *posited abstraction*” and yet remains “precisely in its separation, a positive connection” (SL 549/12.52).

If such a connection is ruled out in the first place, separate existence is either impossible (for the individual's activity cannot reach beyond itself and exclude what is other) – or merely assumed as a given independently from what the individual does. To understand separate existence precisely as the outcome of an individual's active engagement with its surroundings is the goal of Hegel's positive account of self-differentiation.

Such an account incorporates the basic idea that in order to count as a separate unit distinct from others, an individual substance must be causally independent. But it denies that such independence requires causal isolation i.e. having zero interaction with external objects. Instead, Hegel proposes what can be described as a form of causal *sovereignty* rather than isolation, namely the view that an individual substance must be capable of responding to causal impact in such a way as to preserve its inner way or organisation.

Above we have seen that in the realm of biological life Hegel points to the “weapons”, such as for instance, an animal's teeth and claws because these organs allow it to counteract

potentially harmful impact. Having such parts can be seen as concrete manifestations of capacities for causal sovereignty, that is, of the capacity to maintain the form of one's own activity despite being subject to causal interaction from without. This capacity thus is the feature that Hegel would count as genuinely difference-making. So far I have pointed out how this view emerges in passages of the Doctrine of Being and the Objectivity chapter. As I will show in the next section, it is also operative and further developed in the Idea of Life.

#### 6.4 The Idea of Life as Logic of Self-Differentiation

Starting from Hegel's critique of the identity of indiscernibles we have seen how an alternative explanation of difference based on the idea of causal sovereignty emerges in Hegel's thought. Clues towards this view can be derived from Hegel's account of how biological organisms interact with their environment. At the same time, the engagement with nature is linked to an interest in the more general idea that difference among individual substances is explicable in terms of them being autonomous in their activity. Here it is once again Leibniz whose views on the autonomous activity of monads are an important point of departure for Hegel. However, while Leibniz thinks of such autonomy in terms of causal isolation, Hegel claims that individual substances are autonomous in what they do, while at the same time, they interact with one another. The key idea here is that individual substances limit themselves off from one another. To explain why an individual is countably distinct from others thus turns out as a matter of grasping what makes it autonomous in its activity and this, in turns, crucially depends on the fact that the individual has capacities to keep causal impact from altering its inner structure.

As I will show now, this train of thought is further developed in the Idea of Life. My claim is that Hegel's use of the notion of *irritability* is the key to understanding how the structure of life can function as a logic of self-differentiation. In a first step I will show how the discussion of difference relates to our earlier interest in substantial unity. My point here is that Hegel's appeal to self-relating activity and immanent purposiveness is just as relevant for the problem of numerical difference as it is for the problem of unity. In the next section, I will come to speak

once more about Hegel's account of mechanism. The causal behaviour Hegel attributes to the mechanical object contrasts with that of the living individual. Interestingly, he points out that in a thoroughly mechanical world, there could not be distinct individuals precisely because (purely) mechanical objects lack capacities of resistance to causal impact. Against this background I then proceed to a discussion of the so-called moments of life, i.e. the notions of *sensibility*, *irritability*, and *reproduction*. According to my interpretation, these notions come up in the *Logic* in order to explain the causal structure and behaviour pertinent to those objects that Hegel regards as paradigmatic cases of individuality. We are thus meant to grasp what is required for an object to be a self-differentiating individual i.e. an object that creates its own limits rather than being singled out by an observing subject. The account presented by Hegel lends itself especially to an explanation of individuality in biological organisms. However, as I show in the last section of this chapter, its applicability is more widely construed.

#### 6.4.1 *Unity and Difference in the Idea of Life*

Just as much as the category of life explains how many things hang together as one, it also functions as a paradigm for how entities unified in this way can be different from one another. A remark in an early text (the *Systemfragment von 1800*) gives testimony of this conviction. Here Hegel argues that:

[L]ife cannot be regarded as union or relation alone but must be regarded as opposition as well; If I say that life is the union of opposition and relation, this union may be isolated again, and it may be argued that union is opposed to nonunion. Consequently, I would have to say: Life is the union of union and nonunion [*Verbindung von Verbindung und der Nichtverbindung*]. (Hegel 1971, 312/1907, 348)

Not only does Hegel warn against an exclusively unity-focused interpretation of life and highlights the relevance of difference; he also says that both must be understood as connected topics, as he makes clear by stating his preference for the formulation “union of union and nonunion”. The point is that life would not be properly speaking the paradigm of individual being if it was only concerned with unity and not also with difference; and furthermore, that difference would be something external to a unified whole if it was only tacked on to it without

being rooted in the inner structure of that object. Hegel thus argues that the inner order, viz. unity of the individual, also grounds its capacity for self-differentiation.

This train of thought also informs Hegel's account of life in the *Logic*: on the one hand, Life is supposed to explain how the "the concept" figures as the "the soul omnipresent in" the object and constitutes its unity by "remain[ing] one in the manifoldness that accrues to the objective being" (SL 678/12.181). On the other hand, Hegel insists that life is not only about the "the omnipresence of the simple in the manifold" (SL 678/12.181). It also contains the "impulse" through which life becomes "self-referring, life that exists for itself" and thereby turns out to be "essentially a singular that refers to objectivity as to an other" (SL 678/12.181).

Hegel's perspective on the category of life, it appears, has not changed with respect to his earlier view that unity and difference are intimately connected. As I read the passages quoted above, Hegel argues that the inner unity and order of living things is also responsible for their capacity of self-differentiation. In face of this, we are warranted to assume that the Idea of Life contains, besides an account of paradigmatic unity, also a *logic of self-differentiation*.

The topic of difference comes to the forefront of attention when Hegel begins to discuss "the *living individual in its reality*" (SL 682/12.185). Here Hegel explains how a living individual puts its own causal structure into a relation to its surroundings and thereby demarcates the latter as external to itself. As we shall see below, Hegel thinks of individual being as contrasting with something that is continuously integrated within a more or less undifferentiated totality. This more or less undifferentiated totality is the world in as much as it is governed by mechanical and chemical structures, and it is against these that genuinely individual beings differentiate themselves. The point of Hegel's approach is that individuals create this contrast through their own activity, and that they are not just passively acted upon but instead actively respond to whatever has an effect on them.



#### 6.4.2 *Excursus: Mechanism and the Lack of Difference*

As I said above, it is part of Hegel's approach to present the living individual as contrasting with a mechanical object where individuality is not established to the same degree. In order to understand better how Hegel's account of individual difference works in the paradigmatic realm of life, it is therefore helpful to remind ourselves of the more extreme versions of mechanistic thought that Hegel evokes at the beginning of Objectivity. For what these conceptions of the object lack mirrors precisely what Hegel's account of the living will deliver as a positive account of self-differentiating individuals.

On the account of mechanism, we found the object to lack an immanent principle of unity because of the indifference to its form which is, properly speaking, not the object's *own* form. Instead, this form is merely a by-product of how other things act upon the object. Thus, to count any given plurality of things as one, unified whole turned out to be a matter of arbitrary choice rather than something grounded in the object's own being: the mechanical object is therefore "posited in the form of subjective unity" (SL 635/12.137).

Just as Hegel treats the unity of the mechanical object as elusive, so he conceives of its distinction from other objects as not grounded in its own being. On the initial conception of the mechanical object, difference among objects is regarded as an immediate given so that objects appear to be self-enclosed units similar to Leibnizian monads. However, if

objects are regarded only as self-enclosed totalities, they cannot act on one another. Regarded in this way, they are the same as the monads which, precisely for that reason, were thought of as having no influence on each other. (SL 634/12.136)

We see here a recurrent theme of Hegel's critique of Leibniz, namely that it is insufficient to think of difference among individual substances in terms of a lack of interaction. Instead, Hegel suggests that we should grasp how objects turn themselves into countably distinct units precisely by interacting with (what thereby turns out as) other objects.

However, when causal interaction among objects is first introduced (in the Mechanical Process), we are still operating on a conception of the object according to which it does not have any determinations that are strictly speaking *its own*. The mechanical object receives everything,

including its causal powers, from without. Even the fact that “that it is a cause is therefore something accidental to it” (SL 635/12.137). Due to this lack of immanent determination, the mechanical object takes up whatever form is imposed onto it. For Hegel, the consequence of this is that “the interaction of objects” turns out as “the *positing* of their identical connection” and “renders the object indistinct from another object and thus makes interaction at first an unimpeded continuing of the determinateness of the one into the other” (SL 636/12.138).

What interests me about this passage is especially the connection between the receiving of a determination through interaction and the consequent loss of distinctness from other things. Hegel’s point, as I understand it, is that the inability to maintain any form *as its own* is what disqualifies a mechanical object from being, properly speaking, a distinct unit among other such objects. In these initial stages of Mechanism, we are therefore confronted with the hypothetical scenario of a non-individual, a thing that constantly loses itself in “an unimpeded continuing of” determinations, something that receives form while having absolutely no capacity of keeping it.

Within a strictly mechanical world, it is therefore not only a matter of arbitrariness and indifference what we count as *belonging together* in one object but also what we count as *belonging apart from each other*, as *separate* objects. It is because mechanical objects cannot resist each other that there is no way of telling whether two objects are interacting, or a single object is changing. If we follow this line of thought to the end, the world becomes one big, undifferentiated totality. Individuals would then be nothing more than arbitrarily chosen bits of this totality and whatever *we* determine as a separate unit within this world would be indifferent to this determination: there would be no fact of the matter that this ‘object’ is countably distinct from any other.<sup>93</sup> It is true that Hegel’s account of the mechanical object undergoes further development and introduces rudiments of an explanation of numerical difference among individual objects. In fact, the entirety of the Objectivity chapter contributes towards articulating what will turn out as Hegel’s

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<sup>93</sup> A helpful analogy for such a strictly mechanical world is the idea of fire: there can be *more* fire but there is no point in counting the number of flames in a fire. “Fire” is a mass term and as such the idea of numerical unity does not apply to it.

account of a genuinely self-differentiating individual. However, it is no sooner than on the level of the Idea of Life that Hegel presents the paradigm of what it means to be self-differentiating.

#### 6.4.3 *Irritability as a Moment of Life*

The conceptual machinery Hegel deploys in order to introduce the causal structure of the living individual comprises three key notions, namely those of *sensibility*, *irritability* and *reproduction*. These notions correspond to the conceptual moments of universality, particularity, and singularity. This alone shows that it will be important to understand them in their dialectical interrelation, as mutually requiring moments, rather than as isolated features of life.<sup>94</sup>

What is also important to note, is the fact that Hegel derives these notions from then contemporary biology and uses them also in the *Philosophy of Nature* (and the *PS*), chiefly to distinguish the functions of organic systems in living organisms.<sup>95</sup> However, in the Idea of Life, sensibility, irritability and reproduction are used in abstraction from the contingent reality of biological life. As I read them, they address the causal structure and behaviour pertinent to those objects that Hegel regards as paradigmatic cases of individuality. The three moments and their interrelation are thus meant to articulate a paradigm of how an object must be like in order to

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<sup>94</sup> According to Michael Inwood (2018, 393) there is a hierarchy among the moments of life and “Hegel gives priority to sensibility, because it occurs within the organism, regardless of what is happening outside”. However, while there certainly is an order in which these moments are introduced, Hegel tends to emphasise that the relation among them is one of mutual requirement rather than priority: sensibility is a “*universal* moment, which is essentially not divorced or separated from reaction or irritability, and reproduction. For, as reflection into-self, it *eo ipso* contains reaction. Mere reflectedness-into-self is passivity or a dead being, not sensibility; just as action – which is the same as reaction – when not reflected into itself, is not irritability. It is precisely the unity of reflection in action or reaction, and action or reaction in reflection, that constitutes the organism, a unity which is synonymous with organic reproduction” (PS §270/9.152). If anything, priority would have to be granted to the moment of *reproduction* which represents the unity of the other moments.

<sup>95</sup> The notion of irritability was first introduced by the English physician Francis Glisson (1597–1677) in order to describe features of muscular tissue. Albrecht von Haller (1708–77, Swiss by nationality but mainly active at the University of Göttingen) further developed this approach by contrasting the irritability of muscle tissue with the sensibility of nerves. Building on these original contributions, a vast literature emerged throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century in which “[i]rritability and sensibility were taken to be modifications of *reproduction*” (Petry 1970, 303, cf. 02–3). Besides the EN (§354, §354A), Hegel makes use of these terms in both versions of his *Logic* (EL §18–20; SL 332/21.380; 682–3/12.185–6), and in the *PS* (§171/9.106). Hegel’s use of these originally *biological* notions is idiosyncratic in as much as he transfers and integrates them not only into his *Philosophy of Nature* but also into his *Logic* where they acquire ontological significance. On a side note, Albrecht von Haller is also the author of the *Imperfect Poem on Eternity* (1736) quoted by Kant (B 641) and Hegel (SL 194/21.223). He is, however, not to be confused with the Swiss proponent of political conservatism Karl Ludwig von Haller whom Hegel mentions in the *PR* (e.g. §258R).

count as an individual that is numerically distinct from others and has an identity as the very individual it is. The fact that such beings have reality in nature (as animal organisms) and in spirit (as nation states) is situated downstream of their ontological structure, as it finds expression in the *Logic*.

In what follows I will focus on Hegel's use of the idea of irritability and explore to what extent this notion contributes to Hegel's theory of numerical difference among individual substances. As I said above, the significance of any one moment of life is tied to its interrelation with the other moments so that we will also have to address sensibility, and, later on, reproduction too.

The first moment, namely sensibility, can be associated with a perceiver's capacity to receive and process sensuous input. That being said, in the present context, receptivity is not really a matter of seeing or hearing. Instead, the notion of sensibility has the broader significance of describing a specific way in which living individuals can relate to causal impact. On the level of abstraction operative in the *Logic* the appeal to sense-organs can therefore only be an analogy, although, an interesting one: the obvious parallel is that sense perception has something to do with the perceiver being altered according to the object of perception. At the same time, a perceiver does not *turn into* the things he sees or hears but maintains himself despite receiving these impressions.

Aristotle famously used the analogy of a signet ring being stamped into a piece of wax, to illustrate how the soul receives form in perception. Just like the signet ring leaves an impression in the wax, perceivers gather impressions from what they see or hear. However, with respect to this analogy, Hegel insists that the picture is too crude if one conceives of that which receives form (wax viz. the soul of a perceiver) as altogether lacking a form of its own. Wax does not acquire the form of a signet ring as its *substantial* form i.e. its essence: "[i]f this form became the form of its essence, it would cease to be wax" (TWA 19.209). Thus, a perceiver too must maintain their essence or substantial form despite receiving some alteration through the impact

of an object. In Hegel's words, the soul of a perceiver "transforms the form of the external body into its own [form]"; however, in doing so, it becomes "identical only with the abstract quality, because it itself [the perceiver's soul] is the universal" (TWA 19.209). Thus for Hegel, receiving form does not automatically mean losing the fundamental characteristics of one's *own* form. Just as wax does not cease to be wax when a signet is stamped into it, a perceiver does not turn into a rose by seeing one.<sup>96</sup>

Now, what does this tell us in terms of the more general problem of how an object must be like in order to count as an individual, distinct from others? As I understand it, Hegel's discourse on sensibility articulates a counter-model to the passivity pertinent to the mechanical object. As we have seen above, the latter is subject to causal interactions but it cannot maintain itself within them. The mechanical object is exclusively determined by the effects other things have on it; it does not have any determination of its own other than getting constantly washed away by the flux of the world. This is, of course, a hypothetical scenario, meant to illustrate where we end up when we attempt to think of objects in strictly mechanical terms. That granted, we can learn something from this scenario, in as much as it provides a contrast to the receptivity of life. For living things do *not* get washed away when they are acted upon. They do have an internal structure as their own and they maintain this structure within interactions:

anything that has an effect on a living thing is independently determined, altered, and transmuted by the latter, *for the living thing will not let the cause come to its effect*, that is, it sublates it as cause. Thus it is inadmissible to say that nourishment is the *cause* of blood, or that such and such a dish, or chill and humidity, are the *causes* of fever or of what have you (SL 496/11.400).

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<sup>96</sup> In *De an.* (424a15–25) Aristotle writes the following: "By a 'sense' is meant what has the power of receiving into itself the sensible forms of things without the matter. This must be conceived of as taking place in the way in which a piece of wax takes on the impress of a signet-ring without the iron or gold; we say that what produces the impression is a signet of bronze or gold, but its particular metallic constitution makes no difference: in a similar way the sense is affected by what is coloured or flavoured or sounding, but it is indifferent what in each case the substance is; what alone matters is what quality it has, i.e. in what ratio its constituents are combined". Aristotle emphasises that in perception the soul only takes up the form, *not* the matter of the object. Although the comparison with wax may seem to suggest that the soul itself plays the role of a material receiving form, Hegel criticizes this interpretation (cf. Dangel 2013, 197).

In the words of the PS (which, in this case, could indeed be programmatic also for the *Logic*): the living “individual either *allows* free play to the stream of the actual world flowing in upon it, or else breaks it off and transforms it” (PS §307/9.171). Thus the type of relation to causal impact described by Hegel as sensibility must reflect this sturdiness.

Similarly, Hegel argues that having the capacity of sensibility does not mean that the living individual is compromised regarding its own form by allowing external impact to take an effect on it. To the contrary, in perceiving, Hegel argues, the individual affirms its own, inner structure and becomes aware of it in terms of a “*self-feeling*” (SL 682/12.185). While the living individual *qua* being sensible “takes in all externality” it also “reduces it to the complete simplicity of self-equal universality” (SL 682/12.185) which is just Hegel’s way of saying that it maintains its (substantial) form.<sup>97</sup>

The question then arises, how an individual achieves this i.e. what enables it to be receptive in the mode of sensibility rather than in the way of a mechanical object. Hegel’s answer is that the idea of life entails a further capacity, namely that of irritability. For in order for sensibility to be non-corrupting to the individual’s form, its relation to causal impact cannot be *just* receptive. As a receptive capacity, sensibility therefore proves to have a presupposition, namely that the individual is also able to keep causal impact from changing its own form in a compromising way. A sensibility-style relation to causal impact is possible only because there is always already a further capacity, namely a “vital power of resistance” (SL 683/12.186) which Hegel calls *irritability* and which he associates with the conceptual moment of particularity:

The second determination of the concept is *particularity*. This is the moment of *posited* difference, the opening up of the negativity otherwise locked up in simple self-feeling or present in it as abstractly ideal, not yet concretely real determinateness. It is *irritability*. Because of the abstraction of its negativity, feeling is impulse; it *determines* itself; the self-determination of the living being is its judgment or the self-limiting whereby it refers to the

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<sup>97</sup> As Hegel adds, an external object “can affect” the living individual “mechanically, but without in this way affecting it as a living thing” (SL 685/12.188): what a living individual is in essence (namely “a living thing”), remains unaltered even when it is acted upon. In as much as a living individual does react to external influence, it does so in it ways determined by its own, inner structure and not by external causes. Where the latter affect the living, they are “immediately interrupted and the externality [gets] transformed into interiority” (ibid.).

outside as to a *presupposed* objectivity with which it is in reciprocal activity. (SL 682–3/12.185–6)

According to this passage, the way an individual “refers to the outside” cannot be just receptive or else it would get washed away in the flux of causal impact to which it is exposed. As we have seen above, this was the fate of the purely mechanical object where interaction “renders the object indistinct from another object” (SL 636/12.138).

The point Hegel makes in *Life* is that living beings, as individuals, protect their form from disintegration. This requires them to relate to causal impact in a way that is not merely receptive but also allows for preventing impact from compromising their structure. As we have seen already vis à vis the example of animal individuals, Hegel regards this aspect of living beings as crucial for their self-differentiation. In the *Logic*'s discussion of life, he confirms this standpoint and calls irritability the “moment of *posited* difference” and the “opening up of the negativity otherwise locked up in simple self-feeling” (SL 682/12.185).

What determines that an individual is countably distinct from other things? As I understand Hegel's account, the fact that something counts as a distinct unit within the world is determined by its causal behaviour. Numerical unity applies to an object if and only if it has the capacity to maintain its structure when it is acted upon. Irritability thus denotes this capacity to counteract harmful causal impact and having this capacity is what makes an individual countably distinct from others. The joints of the world's ontological skeleton are thus marked off by the limits between such spheres of causally independent activity. Therefore, for Hegel, what makes an individual different from other things has nothing to do with qualitative unlikeness (as Leibniz would have it). By contrast, two individuals can be exactly alike and yet differ in number. What determines the separate existence of each is that they are able to preserve the form of their inner activity against each other.

Importantly, this model can apply to objects that agree in form. Callias and Socrates share the same human form. But having such a form is impossible without also being irritable. If we want to know what determines that they are two human beings, we have to point to their

capacities to repel each other. In an interesting way, this makes Hegel's account compatible with Michael Loux's view that natural kinds are intrinsically individuating. Loux argues that it is in the nature of a universal such as *human being* to have countably distinct instances, so that *large amounts* of human beings, unlike large amounts of fire, can be analysed in terms of *so and so many* rather than just in terms of *more or less*: “[f]or the kind *human being* to be instantiated twice is for two human beings to exist” (Loux 2006b, 113) – not just for ‘more humanity’ (as in ‘more fire’ or ‘more wine’). Hegel could say the same thing but he would add that we can also explain *why* this is so, namely because a universal such as *human being* entails that its instances have the capacity of irritability, that they exclude everything but themselves, even that which agrees with them in type.

#### 6.4.4 *The Scope of Hegel's Account of Difference*

As we have seen, Hegel's account of life expounds irritability as an essential characteristic of paradigmatically individual beings, namely that they have the capacity to maintain their inner way of organisation in the face of causal interactions. This characteristic determines what counts as one individual, distinct from others including other members of its own kind. Before concluding my analysis of Hegel's account of numerical difference among individuals I should like to address two further issues concerning the scope of his account, namely its applicability to a) non-biological instances of life and b) to inanimate objects.

On the high level of abstraction operative in the *Logic* it is clear that Hegel is not only talking about biological individuals when he speaks of living individuals. Instead, the logic of life makes a more general contribution to the metaphysics of individuality that applies to all paradigmatic cases of individuality, including, for instance, social institutions such as states. The logical concept of life is therefore meant to expound the ontological principles governing not only biological organisms but also manifestations of “spiritual” life. For Hegel explicitly “differentiate[s] logical life as idea from natural life as treated in the *philosophy of nature*, and from life in so far as it is bound to *spirit*” (SL 677/12.180). The point is that the logic of life is situated



upstream of its finite manifestations in nature and spirit and thus delivers the ontological principles that apply to both of them.

Although this cannot be discussed here at length, it is worth noting that Hegel explains the individuality of the state in much the same terms that apply to biological organisms, namely in terms of capacities to exclude external influence: “the state is an individual, unique and exclusive, and therefore related to others” while this exclusive relation to other states rests on its capacity to direct “its differentiating activity outward” (PR §271). As Hegel suggests, in the corresponding lecture note (PR §271A), the “irritability in the living organism” is analogous to the state’s capacity of constituting itself as an individual in opposition to other states. By the same token, there is an equivalent to the teeth and claws grounding numerical diversity among animal organisms, namely the state’s “military power”. Although of course, one may have worries<sup>98</sup> about treating social institutions as individuals in this way, it is clear that Hegel does not hesitate to apply his theory of individual difference to a realm much broader than that of animal organisms.

That being said, a further worry may be that while Hegel evidently has a broad conception of life, this still only allows us to include paradigmatic cases of individuals, excluding below-paradigm cases, such as artefacts or natural aggregates. While Hegel may be able to explain what precipitates difference among individual trees, horses, and even states, it might be felt that he fails to account for our plausible intuition that there also are individual houses and stars. However, this need not be the case, as there can be objects which do not fully meet but *approximate* the standard of causal sovereignty defined by appeal to living beings.

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<sup>98</sup> One worry might be that if the state is an individual substance, then its members cannot also be individual substances. However, this presupposes that Hegel entertains the Aristotelian belief that “no substance is composed of substances” (Met. VII.16, 1041a4–5). Whether Hegel holds this view is unclear (to me); if he does, it may still be interesting to treat individual citizens as *potential* individuals, i.e. entities that become actual individuals when a state ceases to exist. (Another alternative might be to argue that the state is not a unity of individuals at all but merely of their *wills*.) Another reason for hesitation is the fact that for Hegel, the individuality of states is related to the possibility of war among them (cf. PR §334). However, this as such should not be mistaken for a positive evaluation of violent conflict. It might just be the articulation of a sadly realistic view on international relations.

For instance, Hegel attributes a primitive form of causal sovereignty to mechanical objects. Although, on a radical conception of mechanism, each “object [is] indistinct from another object” (SL 636/12.138), this only describes the hypothetical extreme of a purely mechanistic universe. On the more moderate position discussed in the “mechanical process”, mechanical objects are capable of reacting to one another in a mutually exclusive manner: their “reaction is a *wholly negative action* in so far as each object [...] repels within it the positedness of an other and retains its self-reference” (SL 637/12.139).

In the realm of nature the manifestation of such a primitive capacity to withstand external impact is present in aggregates of physical matter. Even in two chunks of physical matter there is a “being-for-self of each against the other” for in interacting with one another these “bodies offer resistance to each other” (EN §265). For Hegel, therefore, phenomena such as, for instance, “the thrust of two bodies on each other” have a competitive structure in terms of a “struggle for one and the same place” (EN §265A). In such phenomena Hegel recognizes a “first appearance of the being-for-self of matter, through which it asserts itself [...] in opposition to its externality, which means here a being-for-other, that is, the being of an Other in it” (EN §265A).

Thus, Hegel seems to accept that even those things he characterises as “mechanical objects” have at least some, although an undeveloped, version of the capacity for causal sovereignty which we have found to ground difference among individual living beings. Therefore he maintains that physical bodies, such as, for instance, “celestial bodies are also differentiated from one another,” although “their tacit differentiation [*stumme Differenz*]” (Hegel 2008a, 205/GW 23,2.791)<sup>99</sup> retains a less sophisticated structure as compared to, for instance, that of animal individuals or even persons: while mere physical bodies use their individuating capacities to create a system of spatially differentiated units, higher-level individuals deploy their respective

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<sup>99</sup> Clark Butler renders “stumme Differenz” with “scarcely detectable self-differentiation”. The word “detectable” suggests that Hegel is making an epistemic point about how well a perceiver can detect such difference. However, there is no such connotation in the German text. Literally, “stumm” means “mute”, “voiceless”, or “silent” which suggests that something is not expressed or articulated although it may well be there. This idea, I think, is best captured in the English word “tacit” with which one associates both a lack of expression as well as implicit presence.

powers to create more interesting systems of differentiated interrelation. Animals use their teeth and claws to become differentiated units in a natural habitat, while persons use arguments in order to occupy differentiated positions in intellectual discourse. These latter ways of differing are governed by infinitely more complex principles than the jealousy for space Hegel attests to physical objects. At the same time, the basic idea of sovereignty in the face of mutual interaction constitutes a red thread running through all possible levels of what Hegel's philosophy allows us to count as separately existing individuals.

In summary, Hegel's approach does not commit him to the view that biological organisms are the only things that differentiate themselves into countably distinct individuals. Instead we have seen a) that the notion of life as the paradigm for individual difference has a much broader significance and b) that this paradigm also provides a standard for addressing the self-differentiation of those objects that occupy the lower ranks in Hegel's ontology. Having thus reconstructed how Hegel approaches the problem of numerical difference, it remains to be discussed how his approach fares with regards to the problem of unique distinction.

#### 6.5 A Solution to the Problem of Unique Distinction?

At the beginning of this chapter we have seen that the idea of singling out comprises more than just an explanation of what makes something a differentiated element within a plurality, i.e. one among many others. In addition to being numerically distinct from others, an individual substance also is uniquely distinct from them; it is not merely one of many but indeed *this* one and no other. Thus, it has been argued, there is a further *problem of unique distinction*.

As we have also noted, it is not always the case that an account of numerical difference among individuals also explains what makes an individual uniquely distinct i.e. the very individual it is. Remember, for instance, Aristotle's claim that matter makes individuals distinct. Even if one accepts this solution to the problem of difference, it remains unclear how matter could make anything the very individual it is. Marengo, the horse, is composed of matter but this matter is

not destined to make up this very individual – it could make up other things as well. Therefore it does not raise what it arguably differentiates to the status of a unique individual.

The question I would like to address now is whether or not Hegel's solution to the problem of numerical difference suffers the same fate of being unproductive with regards to the issue of unique distinction. As a side note, I should say that for those who believe that Hegel accepts the identity of indiscernibles the matter is clear: if numerical difference is explained in terms of a unique qualitative makeup for each individual, this also explains what makes any one individual the very thing it is. However, I hope to have shown that Hegel makes an important move away from Leibniz's metaphysics in as much as he denies that difference in character explains difference in number. On the interpretation that I have suggested instead, Hegel opts for the view that individuals differ from one another in virtue of their capacities for self-maintenance in interaction. While these capacities certainly are properties, they do not necessarily make their bearers qualitatively unlike one another. Instead, two individuals differ precisely because both of them exemplify such properties and there is no implication to these features being unique in each case. While this unconventional account of numerical diversity among individual substances avoids appeal to the identity of indiscernibles, it raises the question to what extent Hegel can provide a solution to the problem of unique distinction. For if qualitative uniqueness is not granted, as in Leibniz's system, what (if anything) grounds the unique identity of an individual?

I begin by discussing to what extent Hegel's account of irritability can deliver a solution for the problem of unique distinction. Although my conclusion is that it cannot, I highlight in a subsequent excursus on Andrew Seth's critique of Hegel, that we should not prematurely assume that Hegel would be content with this result. As I then point out, it is the notion of reproduction which Hegel associates most with the conceptual moment of singularity and the identity of a living individual. However, the analysis of Hegel's use of this idea reveals that his account ultimately fails to explain what makes an individual the very individual it is. To rule out the

possibility that this is achieved independently from the idea of reproduction, I discuss Karen Ng's view that uniqueness or non-substitutability is a matter of self-alienation.

### 6.5.1 *Irritability and Uniqueness*

Starting from the instructive clues of the *Philosophy of Nature*, we have found that Hegel develops the idea of difference through defensive capacities in the dialectic of Life. What becomes manifest in the teeth and claws of animal organisms turned out as reliant on the more general principle of irritability as discussed in Hegel's account of life as an ontological category. The core idea of this notion has been identified with that of causal sovereignty; that is, a specific form of causal independence based not on causal isolation but rather on capacities to maintain one's inner structure in the interaction with others. The criterion for counting anything as a single object, numerically distinct from others, is the presence of capacities for self-maintenance in face of causal impact.

This view addresses capacities to enter into a specific type of relation that can be described as resisting, withstanding or excluding something that thereby turns out as other. An animal, such as Marengo, the horse, is distinct from its environment because it has the necessary powers of maintaining its own, inner structure within this environment. These powers become manifest, for instance, in the hardness of Marengo's hoofs allowing him to gallop on solid ground or to fight back an attacker. Moreover, we have seen that Hegel's account is not limited to biological organisms but also applies to social entities like states. Thus, for Hegel, Napoleon's Grand Armée plays a similar role for the French Empire, as teeth and claws do for an animal, because it grounds its capacities to withstand what attacks it, say the Austrian forces in the battle of Austerlitz. We have also discussed the possibility of extending this account to objects of lesser complexity such as physical bodies.

Now, we can say that whatever has such capacities is a distinct element of reality, e.g. one of many horses or one state among others. However, there doesn't seem to be a way of inferring from such capacities a unique content pertinent to one, single horse or one single state. The

capacities that make an individual distinct from others are characteristics that apply to many individuals, and where these individuals belong to the same kind, it seems, these characteristics can be identical in type. The way Marengo keeps off harmful influence may be perfectly similar to how other horses, such as Copenhagen fulfil this function. Thus, the account that Hegel offers regarding the explanation of numerical difference among individual's does not establish what makes an individual this one and no other.

### 6.5.2 *Excursus: Andrew Seth's Interpretation*

One might be tempted to think that the difficulty of conceptualising individual uniqueness is something Hegel faces with acquiescence or perhaps even celebrates. For instance, one of Hegel's early critics in the Anglophone world, Andrew Seth (later named Seth Pringle-Pattison), argued that while Hegel was “not denying the individual character of existence, he yet adroitly contrives to insinuate that, because it is indefinable, the individual is therefore a valueless abstraction” (Seth 1887, 128–9). The idea here would be that Hegel admits that we cannot fully account for individuality within pure thought but then also tells us that this is acceptable because individuality is an unimportant dimension of the actual. Interestingly, the passages Seth quotes from the *Encyclopaedia* (EL §20R) seem to suggest that while a conceptual analysis of individuals can deliver us the notion of an entity (e.g. the ego) that excludes everything else, such exclusive capacities are always a *common* property of many such entities:

When I say ‘the *individual*’, ‘*this individual*’, ‘here’, ‘now’, then these are all universalities. *Anything* and *everything* is an individual, a *this*, even when it is sensory, just as much as a *here*, *now*. Similarly, when I say ‘I’ I *mean* to refer to myself *as this one* individual, excluding everyone else. But what I say (namely, ‘I’) is precisely each and every one, the I excluding everyone else. (EL §20R)

For Seth this statement is proof that Hegel buries individuality within a metaphysics aiming exclusively at universals and that such a metaphysics can only reveal the general structure of “each and every one” but of no one in particular. Part of Seth's concern is that on Hegel's account the “qualitative existence of things is being spirited away from us” (1887, 128) i.e. that Hegel abstracts too much from the contingent, qualitative richness of actual individuals.

Hegel is indeed uninterested in the contingent features of individual objects. This however, is not really an objection Hegel would find very troubling. For how exactly individuals turn out to be like is not the concern of metaphysics.<sup>100</sup> What is of concern, though, is the principle according to which any individual constitutes itself as the unique individual that it is. It is one thing to deduce the contingent qualities of an individual from pure thought and quite another to offer an explanation of what makes it an individual, distinct from others and the very one it is.

That being said, the passage quoted by Seth does seem to raise a difficulty also for this latter project. For, it remains true that it is difficult to see how appeal to “universalities” can determine what makes any individual the very one it is. Even if we do not ask, say, why Socrates was in fact snub-nosed, it is still difficult to come to terms with how his humanity could make him Socrates and not Callias. We may have seen how such a universal contributes to making such beings as Socrates and Callias numerically distinct units – but by answering this how-many-question we are not necessarily in a position to also answer questions of the which-is-which variety. This is precisely what we have seen regarding Hegel’s appeal to intrinsically difference-making characteristics through which individuals exclude one-another: these features can be the same in “each and every” individual that has them.

The spirit of Seth’s analysis is that such an outcome is something like a calculated collateral damage of Hegel’s metaphysics but nothing to mourn about because the “disparagement of the individual” is “insinuated” (1887, 129) by Hegel: all there really is are universals and these are common to many and by their very definition not unique to any individual. Individuality in the demanding sense of uniqueness may have got lost on the way, but the *Logic* will teach us that this really isn’t a problem after all. Thus, on Seth’s (1887, 134) view, Hegel “seems to think that by naming the difficulty he has got rid of it”.

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<sup>100</sup> Cf. my note (fn. 20 in subsection 1.3.2) regarding Hegel’s reaction to Wilhelm Traugott Krug.

However, we shouldn't assume that Hegel in fact is content with such an outcome. While agreeing that Hegel may ultimately find himself at an impasse regarding his metaphysics of individuality, I do not think that he is ultimately uninterested in the issue. In particular, I do not think that he regards the unique identity of individuals a negligible aspect of actuality. Unlike Seth, I thus argue that when Hegel seems to identify the individual with a universal in EL §20R, he is not saying that only universals are real and that individuality is obsolete. To the contrary, he means to say that an overly stark opposition between individuality and universals (assumed e.g. by philosophers of an empiricist bent) is misleading.

What Hegel hopes to offer instead, is an account of grasping conceptually what it means to be an individual and that his doctrine of concrete universality is the key to that.<sup>101</sup> For the point of this doctrine is precisely *not* that individuality is trivial but instead that it can be understood in terms of the inner dynamics of the concrete universal which is *not* opposed to but productive of individual existents. And that is also what Hegel says in the very paragraph quoted by Seth: “[i]n the logic, it will be shown that thought and the universal are just this, namely to be itself as well as its other, that its reach extends over the other, and that nothing escapes from it” (EL §20R). The goal for Hegel thus is not to trivialize individuality in metaphysics but to demonstrate that the passage from universality to singularity can be achieved within pure thought, that it does not require any pre-logical addendum to the object as it can be conceived in thought.

Nonetheless, this still leaves open whether Hegel succeeds at explaining individuality within the metaphysics of the concept. We should not, however, succumb to the temptation of reading Hegel as uninterested in this explanation. In the present context this means especially

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<sup>101</sup> Although I have a different view both on the nature and the success of Hegel's solution of the problem of individuation, I agree with Robert Stern (2009a, 157) that for Hegel “it must be possible to exemplify a universal like ‘man’ [...] such that each of us can be a man uniquely, in a way that constitutes our individuality” and that “Hegel's way of drawing a distinction between abstract and concrete universals” is the key to his account. What I deny is that Hegel appeals to the “particular set of properties that make me into an individual” for this purpose and I also think that none of the alternatives which we have discussed above and will continue to discuss in this chapter are ultimately convincing.



that we should not give up prematurely in our efforts to identify an element in his metaphysics that can function as a solution also to the problem of unique distinction. The fact that Hegel's account of irritability fails to do this may be nothing more than a reminder that, at the present point of our investigation, we have not yet considered an important aspect of his logic of life: namely the idea of *reproduction* which Hegel associates with the conceptual moment of singularity. Thus, before concluding that Hegel's theory of life fails to explain what makes an individual the very one it is, we have to complete our discussion of the moments of life and also address the idea of reproduction.

### 6.5.3 *Reproduction and Uniqueness*

The notion of irritability is key to Hegel's understanding of how individuals enter into relations of opposition to each other and thereby turn out as numerically distinct units. At the same time, however, Hegel's discussion of what makes an individual a single thing, distinct from all others, doesn't seem to be complete at this stage. For as we know already, Hegel does not think of individuals merely in terms of countably distinct elements of reality: "the individual is more than just restrictions on all sides" (SL 87/21.101). Consistently with this programmatic statement, Hegel rejects the view that an individual is wholly constituted by opposition to other things. An individual also has what Hegel calls a "being for itself" constituting an "identity of the individual with itself" (SL 683/12.186). In one passage Hegel furthermore concedes that an individual, such as, for instance, an individual human being, is "infinitely unique [*unendlich eigenthümlich*]" (SL 16/21.15)<sup>102</sup>. In light of this I have argued that there is a further problem, namely the problem of unique distinction, which presents itself to Hegel. I will now investigate to what extent Hegel's account of life provides a solution also for this problem.

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<sup>102</sup> "[U]nendlich eigenthümlich" (21.15) translates to "infinitely unique" (rather than "universally unique" as DiGiovanni puts it in SL 16). Appeal to the *Eigentümlichkeit* or uniqueness of the individual is not the same as just demanding an explanation for why any two individuals are numerically distinct, especially if the uniqueness is meant to be "infinite", indicating a maximal contraction of being to a single individual.

In the context of Hegel's analysis of life, Karen Ng has pointed out that difference from other things matters to a living individual in several ways. One of these ways of differing is described by Ng in terms of being "not substitutable" for another individual, which indicates a commitment to differing from others as a unique individual, not simply as a numerically distinct unit:

Individuality is immediately manifest in the living being, or the living being immediately posits itself as an individual, dividing itself from what it is not, because it *matters* to the living being that it is itself and not something else: first, that it is itself and not a piece of inert, dead matter; *second, that it is itself and not substitutable for another member of the same species (that I am an alpha and not a beta in my wolfpack, that I am Karen and not Isabel)* [my italics]; third, that it is itself and not a member of another species (that I am a human being and not a wolf). (Ng 2020, 226)

What is particularly relevant for our current discussion is the idea of "non-substitutability" because it addresses the fact that an individual is unique and irreplaceable, this one and no other, such as, for instance, "Karen and not Isabel". Granted that this fact matters for Hegel's account of the individual, we should expect that he also offers an explanation as to what grounds it.<sup>103</sup>

According to my interpretation, Hegel comes closest to offering such an explanation where he points out that the individual's capacities of limiting itself off against others presuppose a priorly established "identity of the individual with itself" (SL 683/12.186), which he associates with the conceptual moment of singularity and its manifestation in life as the moment of "reproduction". In what follows I will discuss what Hegel has to say in relation to this idea and to what extent he thereby offers a solution to the *problem of unique distinction*, so that the individual becomes explicable not only as one of many but also as the very thing it is, as this one and no other.

Although this has to be vindicated by the subsequent analysis, I will already lay my cards on the table and confess that I do not think that Hegel succeeds in this project. As we shall see further on in the next chapter, this worry also plays an important role for Schelling's critique of

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<sup>103</sup> For a discussion of Ng's interpretation of what grounds non-substitutability according to Hegel see below subsection 6.5.4.

Hegel. For now, however, our next task is to properly understand what Hegel is saying regarding the idea of the “identity of the individual with itself” (SL 683/12.186) and how this can be conceptualised as “reproduction”.

### ***Reproduction as Identity***

On a commonsensical level the word “reproduction” chiefly evokes the association of sexual reproduction, i.e. a way of creating offspring from biological organisms. It is in this sense that we normally speak of “reproductive medicine”, “reproductive organs”, or “reproductive behaviour”. In a somewhat less obvious sense however, each individual organism also reproduces *itself* through the mutual dependencies among the organism as a whole and its parts. Both of these senses address that, in the activity of a living organism, that which initiates the activity is identical with that which results from it. The activity is therefore *reproductive* in the sense that the outcome or product is a re-occurrence of that which initiated the activity in the first place.

When living organisms produce offspring, a new individual comes to be, but the latter is identical *in type* with the former. As Aristotle famously put it, the individuals which produces offspring and the individuals that result from this are identical regarding their “nature, which is specifically the same (though this is in another individual); for man begets man” (Met. 1032a25). However, there can also be reproduction *by token*, where a single individual organism maintains itself, for instance in growth or nourishment. Within the German idealist background to Hegel’s philosophy, most notably in Kant’s *Third Critique*, this line of thought plays an important role. For Kant, as well as for Hegel, there is a close connection between the ideas of reproduction by type and by token which are treated as variations over the common theme of reproduction.

In his case, Kant illustrates reproductive processes in his discussion of “natural ends” using the example of a tree: on the one hand, the activity of a tree can “generat[e] another tree” which is a case of reproduction by type because “the tree that it generates is of the same species and so it generates itself as far as the species is concerned” (AA V:371). In this case it is the species or type which is both cause and effect of a process through which it “unceasingly

produces itself, and [...] continuously preserves itself? (AA V:371). At the same time, a further instance of reproduction (now by token) occurs on the level of each individual member of a species, for instance, each individual tree reproduces ‘more of itself’ when it grows: a bigger oak tree results from a previous state of the very *same* plant so that here too there is a case of identity of cause and effect. Finally, Kant observes that each part of an organism is a product of the overall activity of the whole organism. Trees grow leaves while, at the same time, each leaf also contributes to the activity of the tree as a whole: “the leaves are certainly products of the tree, yet they preserve it in turn, for repeated defoliation would kill it, and its growth depends upon their effect on the stem” (AA V:372).

Turning now to Hegel, we have seen how the idea of a process where “the end is the beginning” (SL 664/12.167) plays an important role for the *unity* of the object as discussed in Teleology and Life. However, Hegel also thinks that reproduction is furthermore relevant for understanding the identity of an individual. In this respect, Hegel’s own account of reproduction as the moment of singularity in a living individual is the main point of reference.

When Hegel mentions the theme of reproduction as a moment of life in the PS, he discusses both reproduction *by type* and *by token*:

Reproduction is the action of this whole introreflected organism, its activity as in itself an End, or as *genus*, in which the individual repels itself from itself, and in the procreative act reproduces either its organic members or the whole individual. Reproduction, taken in the sense of *self-preservation in general*, expresses the formal Notion of the organism, or Sensibility; but it is, strictly speaking, the real organic Notion or the whole, which returns into itself, either qua individual by producing single parts of itself, or, qua genus, by bringing forth individuals. (PS §266/9.150)

We can see here an important aspect of Hegel’s theory of life, namely that the moments of sensibility (and also irritability) receive their fully significance only when they are related to the third moment of reproduction which makes for the “real organic Notion”.<sup>104</sup> More importantly

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. the following passage from the *Logic*: “The two first moments, sensibility and irritability, are abstract determinations; in reproduction life is *something concrete* and vital; in it alone does it also have feeling and power of resistance. Reproduction is the negativity as simple moment of sensibility, and irritability is only a vital power of resistance, so that the relation to the external is reproduction and identity of the individual with itself” (SL 683/12.186).

for our current discussion, though, the passage also confirms that for Hegel this third moment has the double significance of reproduction *by type* and *by token*.

In the *Logic*, Hegel will come to speak about reproduction by type in terms of the “genus process” (SL 686–8/12.190–1). However, when he first introduces the idea of reproduction as a moment of life, he is speaking of the sense in which an individual produces itself *as an individual*: “[w]ith reproduction as a moment of singularity, the living being posits itself as actual individuality, a self-referring being-for-itself” (SL 683/12.186). The question that I consider most important here is how this contributes to the establishment of a unique identity of the individual. Thus I will now take a closer look at what Hegel says about reproduction by token and then evaluate where this leaves us with regards to the problem of unique distinction.

Hegel draws attention to the fact that the parts (or rather *members*) of an organism can be distinguished from the organism as a whole, while at the same time, whole and members are just two ways of looking at the very same individual being. This is a distinction that *we* can make, when we distinguish the head and legs of, say an individual horse. But for Hegel, this distinction is not just something *we* attribute to a living individual. Instead it also corresponds to a division operative in the individual itself: the latter, Hegel writes, “divides itself in itself and makes its corporal condition [*Leiblichkeit*] its object, its *inorganic* nature. For its part, this inorganic side, as the relatively external, enters into the difference and opposition of its moments” (EL §218).

Thus, when Hegel writes that the living individual “repels itself from itself” (PS §266/9.150), “divides itself in itself” (EL §218) or that it is “the externality of itself as against itself” (SL 683/12.186), he points towards the relation between the organism as a whole and its division into manifold members. At the same time however, these two sides turn out as sides of the very same thing in as much as the manifold members do not act indifferently upon each other but “reciprocally surrender themselves, the one assimilating the other to itself, and preserve themselves in the process of producing themselves” (EL §218). The relation of the organic whole to its parts thus turns out as a relation of identity because the “activity of the members” is “only

one activity of the subject, the activity into which its productions go back, so that through that activity only the subject is produced, i.e. it merely reproduces itself' (EL §218). It is in this identity of the whole and the activity of the parts which underpins Hegel's description of the living individual as "life that exists for itself", as a "self-referring" (SL 678/12.181) that establishes the "identity of the individual with itself" (SL 683/12.186).

### *Evaluation*

The task that we set for ourselves was to scrutinise Hegel's take of the living individual's identity regarding its contribution to the problem of unique distinction. Does it or does it not deliver an explanation of the peculiar fact that makes an individual the very one it is and no other?

To begin with, Hegel's point about the identity of the individual focusses on the relation of its internal complexity in terms of members and their unity in an organic whole. Thus, in contrast to the discussion of irritability, this part of Hegel's theory is exclusively concerned with what is internal to the individual. For with regards to irritability we have discussed those characteristics of an individual that explain why it differs from others. Here, by contrast, we are dealing with those characteristics that explain what makes the activity of its parts identical to its existence as a single whole.

This certainly means highlighting an aspect of the individual that goes beyond its characterisation in terms of opposition to others or "restrictions on all sides" (SL 87/21.101). And it also serves as a clarification for what needs to be going on within an individual in order for it to have those characteristics that ground its difference from other things in as much as irritability turns out as presupposing reproduction: it is only possible to resist others, if there is a self in the first place, something that can enter relations of opposition.

At the same time however, I do not see how the idea of reproduction is meant to create an identity that makes the individual non-substitutable for another, a being that is uniquely distinct from all others, this one and no other. For within one species, the reproductive activity is something many individuals share, it is common to them. Further to this, it suspiciously looks

like Hegel's account of what establishes unity within an individual substance and his way of explaining its identity fall into one. For in both cases the explanation crucially depends on the idea that the activity of the individual's parts figures as an immanent goal structure turning these parts into members of a whole. Hegel recycles this idea which is meant to explain paradigmatic cases of substantial unity in order to also explain what makes each individual identical with itself. In the first case our attention is drawn to the idea that the form of the individual's activity makes it *one* thing (as opposed to many), in the latter we are meant to see that this very form constitutes its identity.

What Hegel is telling us, then, effectively amounts to the idea that the form or universal immanent to an individual both makes it a unified whole *and* identical with itself as an individual. We are meant to recognise the universal as the substantial basis of the individual; we are meant to see that if we consequently follow the determination of the universal, we really arrive at the level of a fully determined individual with a particular, and ultimately singular existence. In a way, it seems, Hegel has indeed gone full cycle and fulfilled the “stupendous task of exhibiting Form as active in determining not merely specific differentiations, but the particular being of the separate instances of the species” (Foster 1931, 2).

However, in my view, this cycle does not close, for the identity of the individual it arrives at is not the identity of anything in particular but indeed something pertaining to many individuals. There does not seem to be a way of denying that form (if understood as a universal) is a collective property of all members belonging to a given kind.<sup>105</sup> Marengo's activity has the

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<sup>105</sup> There is a longstanding debate on the question whether it is right to conceive of Aristotelian forms as universals and therefore as literally the same entity in many instances. The opposing view holds that “the form that is present in each matter-form compound is numerically distinct from the form that is present in every other matter-form compound, even when these matter-form compounds belong to a single species and their individual forms therefore closely resemble one another” (Koslicki 2018, 21 cf. *ibid.* for an overview of positions within this debate). What plays the role of form in Hegel's account is the universal and where he directly refers to Aristotle's notion of form, he translates “καὶ εἶδος” with “das Allgemeine” (TWA 19.200 cf. García 2011, 154 fn. 19); Hegel clearly belongs in the forms-as-universals camp. At the same time, Hegel's universals are concrete i.e. they are “not merely something common to” (EL §175A cf. SL 549/12.52) their instances. This could invite the interpretation that, for Hegel, forms – even though they are universals – are distinct entities in each instance. However, I do not think that this is salient: “not *merely* common” does not mean “not common at all”. A further piece of evidence for this interpretation is the fact that Hegel also identifies the universal with the genus: “substantial universality [...] is the genus” (SL 619/12.120). A genus, like animal, however is that to which an individual belongs *together* with other individuals of the *same* kind so that it is common to all of them – even if there is more to the picture than just that. As we will

same form as that of Copenhagen, because both are horses. Likewise, Karen, Isabell, and Napoleon share the very same human activity as their form of life. In each of these individuals there is an identity of the activity of their parts and what they are as a whole. However, this is not something that applies uniquely to any single individual, it cannot be what makes an individual the very one it is. It makes each single individual a member of a kind, a whole, and in as much as the activity includes capacities of resistance to external influences, it may make the individual a distinct unit within its species. But what makes each of these units a non-substitutable being, the sort of thing worthy of a name by which it is called for as the very thing it is – this does not surface in Hegel’s theory.

#### 6.5.4 Karen Ng on Self-Alienation and Singularity

Of course it remains a possibility that the notion of reproduction is the wrong place to look in terms of Hegel’s account of unique distinction. One alternative has been put forth by Karen Ng who suggests that the point of Hegel’s account is that:

Without the ability to oppose its genus, the ability to be self-alienated with respect to its genus, the object is not, strictly speaking, an individual (it remains a mere particular, a token of its type entirely interchangeable with other tokens of the same type). (2020, 232)

On this account, it is “the power to oppose, contradict, and transform the genus by means of the genus’s own power as manifest in the determinateness of an individual” (ibid.) which constitutes its uniqueness viz. non-substitutability. According to Ng, individuality in this demanding sense becomes relevant on the level of self-conscious individuals which are free to oppose their immanent universality. In this context, Ng refers to the following passage from the *Logic*:

Only self-consciousness has fate in a strict sense, because it is *free*, and therefore in the *singularity* of its “I” it absolutely exists *in and for itself* and can oppose itself to its objective universality and *alienate* itself from it. (SL 639/12.141–2)

These lines are part of an excursus (SL 639–40/12.141–2) within Hegel’s discussion of mechanism. The topic of the excursus is the various forms in which an individual object can

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see in section 9.3, Schelling will criticise Hegel precisely for his identification of form and universal and opt for a different reading of Aristotle.



relate to the universal. Mechanical objects “communicate” universality to each other by means of causal interactions and the resulting alteration of form in the object which is acted upon. In more advanced objects, namely living beings, the universal is not merely received from without but present as an immanent genus-universal. This immanence, however, also means that the universal plays the role of a superior, fate-like power to which the individual is subjected and which governs its existence. For Hegel, this power of the universal becomes manifest precisely when an individual becomes alienated from it: when its health is bad and it fails to adequately realise what it ought to be according to its genus, the individual suffers; even when it dies, the power of the genus is reaffirmed in as much as individual death is compatible with the continuation of the genus in other individuals.<sup>106</sup>

On the even further advanced level of *self-conscious* individuals the relation between these individuals and the universal becomes less one-sided. According to Hegel, their freedom partly consists in the possibility to oppose the universal, perhaps in the sense of what he calls (in the PR) an “absolute possibility of *abstraction* from every determination” (PR §5R) which remains a possibility even if ethical life has determined that “the individual’s destiny is to live a universal life” (PR §258R). A self-conscious individual is not bound to its universal in the same way as a turnspit is bound to turn or a horse is bound to live the life pertinent to its kind. For the life pertinent to a self-conscious individual involves freedom, including the freedom to reject its flourishing in community with others and even the freedom to end this very life (cf. PR §5A).

Now, according to Ng, this is the context in which we should look for a surplus of individuality that goes beyond being merely a token of a type or a substitutable unit within a plurality of other such units. While I agree that Hegel’s point about the freedom of self-conscious individuals raises an interesting issue regarding their specific relation to the universal, I fail to see how this could make them non-substitutable or unique. I agree that Callias can act against the

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<sup>106</sup> As Hegel also puts it: “with the death of the individual the genus comes to its own self and thus becomes its own object” (EN §367A cf. §§368–9).

*polis* of which he is a member and that this is a way of opposing universal structures to which he is otherwise bound. But then again, so can Socrates, and Antigone. My reply to Ng's account is thus that many individuals can be alienated or self-alienate in exactly the *same* way and that it is hard to see how that could make them non-substitutable or unique in a significant way.<sup>107</sup>

#### 6.5.5 *Limits of Hegel's Approach*

Throughout our analysis of Hegel's metaphysics we have seen how he deploys his basic idea that the concept of things comprises their entire being for solutions of the problems of individuality. Key to Hegel's account is the idea that the universal is not opposed to individuality but rather the immanent principle through which individuals come to be at all. Most notably, Hegel's view that the concept turns out to be purpose enables him to articulate innovative and convincing solutions to the *problems of unity* and *numerical difference*. We have also seen that while Hegel develops these solutions in terms of a logic of life, they are not exclusive to biological individuals but rather present paradigms which are also informative for other realms of reality such as artefacts and natural aggregates.

At the same time however, all efforts of Hegel to account for individuality in the sense addressed by the *problem of unique distinction* have ultimately proven unsuccessful. If I am right to assume that Hegel does want to account for this dimension of individuality, his difficulties with doing so present a serious challenge to his idea that individuality is an aspect of the conceptual rather than something that goes beyond it. If we thus stick with the idea of unique distinction, we have to admit that it presents a serious challenge to Hegel's project of explaining how the individuality of things can be explained in terms of their concept. This means to acknowledge that this project ultimately has limits and that – pace Hegel – at least some aspects of individual existence cannot be accounted for within a metaphysics of the concept.

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<sup>107</sup> Another issue is that according to Ng (2020, 232) “the ability to oppose its genus” is what frees self-conscious individuals from being “a mere particular” which she associates in turns with being “entirely interchangeable with other tokens of the same type”. However it is not clear if Hegel really has in mind such a move beyond mere particularity. In fact, he seems to suggest the opposite when he states that in exercising opposition to its genus, “[s]elf-consciousness has thereby made itself into a *particular* [!]” (SL 640/12.142).

In the remaining chapters of this thesis I will discuss a proponent of this latter strategy, namely Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, in particular his later period. The reason to engage with Schelling in face of Hegel's difficulties regarding the *problem of unique distinction* are both philosophical and historical. Philosophically, Schelling's infamous appeal to a pre-conceptual dimension of reality (the "unprethinkable") offers a way of dealing with the individual's uniqueness beyond the Hegelian project. At the same time, Schelling is by no means the radical anti-idealist which some would like to make of him.<sup>108</sup> While indeed demanding that we should accept a pre-conceptual aspect of reality Schelling never gave up the idealist core conviction that reality is in an important respect mind-like and, at the same time, mind-independent.

Engaging with the relevance of individuality for Schelling also has the benefit of shedding new light on his opposition to Hegel, which is notoriously difficult to understand. For as I will show, the problem of individuality is a key aspect of Schelling's disagreement with Hegel. While better understanding this disagreement is interesting in its own light, it is also relevant for understanding the origins of continental philosophy which – in the guise of thinkers like Kierkegaard, or Heidegger – was heavily influenced by Schelling.<sup>109</sup>

At the same time, I am well aware of the difficulties of bringing Schelling into the discussion. In particular, I acknowledge that there are good reasons to be sceptical of his philosophical methods as well as his often barely restrained tendency for polemics. Before engaging with the details of his approach, I will therefore consider these obstacles in approaching

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<sup>108</sup> Interpretations emphasising distance between Schelling and his idealist background often walk in the footsteps of Horst Fuhrmans for whom Schelling was especially concerned with counteracting Hegel on theological grounds, to use Fuhrmans' words: of fighting Hegel's "betrayal of God" (1957, 307). This way of presenting Schelling as a religiously motivated anti-idealist holds sway also in more recent scholarship; for instance in terms of the questionable assessment that Schelling's later insights "led him to smash his way out of the mould of German idealism" (Laughland 2007, 37).

<sup>109</sup> Although I have no room to investigate this here, it is plausible to assume that Schelling also played a role in the Hegel-critical tendencies emerging in Britain during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, it would be interesting to find out more regarding the extent to which Andrew Seth drew from Schelling in his reckoning with British idealism (cf. Seth 1887) and to what extent this had an impact on the views of early analytic philosophers such as, for instance, Russell.

this difficult, but also fascinating thinker (Chapter 7). This will facilitate first a reconstruction of his ontological core ideas (Chapter 8) and then lead to an appreciation of their merits for the problem of individuality (Chapters 9–10) – or so I hope to show.

## 7 Schelling: Approaching a Difficult Thinker

Schelling's so-called *Spätphilosophie* is known for three things: 1) its passionate anti-Hegelianism, 2) the appeal to a “positive philosophy” of the divine over and above the “negative” doctrines of *a priori* metaphysics, and 3) its extreme complexity verging towards the opaque. In what follows, I will not say much about 2) but I will make an attempt at elucidating an aspect of 1) – despite and by decidedly working against 3). As I will show, a so far underexplored aspect of Schelling's opposition to Hegel is closely connected to the problem of individuality, especially to what I have called above the *problem of unique distinction*.

With this I hope to achieve two things. First, it is my aim to complete the train of thought that has led us from the broad topic of individuality to discussions of the subproblems of *unity*, *numerical difference*, and *unique distinction*. For while Hegel's metaphysics offers strong solutions to the first and the second of these problems, we have found his treatment of the third unsatisfactory. Schelling offers an account of the latter, but it has not been sufficiently explored in existing literature.<sup>110</sup> Secondly, by reconstructing Schelling's solution to this problem, I also hope to shed fresh light on his relation to Hegel and the prospects of the Hegel-critical traits of his thought. As we shall see, Schelling claims that the key to engaging with the issue of unique distinction is admitting a pre-conceptual aspect of reality which is overtly at odds with Hegel's

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<sup>110</sup> In terms of studies dedicated specifically to Schelling's views on individuation there are Whistler (2016) who analyses the development of Schelling's account of individuation between 1799 to 1806, and Sandkaulen (2004) who addresses the topic in the context of the *Freedom Essay*. Schelling's later period, however, remains rarely discussed specifically regarding the issue of individuation. This is also true regarding the scholarship on the relation between Schelling and Hegel. The later too, tends to focus on other issues: Bowie (1993) explains the disagreement between both authors in terms of “assumptions concerning the relationship of abstract philosophical concepts [...] to what they are concepts of” (128). Gabriel (2011, 2015) points out differences between Hegel and Schelling regarding the modal status of ontological categories. Dews (2023) identifies “the status of potentiality” as “the core of the metaphysical dispute between Schelling and Hegel” (13) which then paves the ground for more specific comparisons regarding the ontological argument, mythology and religion, as well as the respective conceptions of freedom. None of these studies however make individuality the central point of their analysis. A helpful exception to the rule are two papers by Marcela García who mentions Schelling's endorsement of the individual form hypothesis in Aristotle (2011, 154; fn. 19) and discusses the therewith related concepts of *energeia* and *entelechia* (2016).

claim that we can come to terms with the problem of individuality *within* a metaphysics of the concept.

The tension between Hegel and Schelling is not just related to philosophical differences, but also to a long history of polemic attacks between both philosophers that have affected scholarly debates about their relation. In face of this, I take it to be important to show what the merits of Schelling's approach are from the perspective of an Hegelian reader, while at the same time openly admitting problematic aspects of Schelling's thinking. I will therefore address relevant background information on Schelling's final writing period with special consideration of Hegelian concerns with his project.

Chapter 7 will therefore proceed as follows: after providing some general information about Schelling's later period (section 7.1), I will discuss what I take to be legitimate worries about Schelling's methods in general and about his critique of Hegel in particular (section 7.2). However, despite these worries, I argue that there is a promising way of approaching Schelling's project (section 7.3). This is by beginning with his final and official account of the negative philosophy and by reconstructing the philosophical disagreement between Schelling and Hegel as concerned with an issue in general metaphysics, namely the problem of individuality. While of course my aim is not to missionize anyone into a Schellingian, I do hope to show that there are good reasons to take him seriously. To facilitate the further discussion of Schelling's ideas, I conclude the chapter with a note on terminology and issues of translation (section 7.4).

### 7.1 What is Schelling's *Spätphilosophie*?

Between Schelling's earliest writings (such as the 1795 *On the I as a Principle*) and his last ones (such as the 1850 *On the Source of Eternal Truths*) lie 55 years of philosophy. Traditionally the *Spätphilosophie* has been conceived of as a block which comprises the works from Schelling's (second) Munich period (1827–1840) and his final years (1841–1854) in Berlin (cf. Schmied-Kowarzik 2015, 291). While it is true that in Berlin, Schelling systematizes ideas that have been on his philosophical agenda since at least 1827, there have also been significant developments

during his final writing period (1846–50). Some caution regarding what should count as key sources for understanding what Schelling ultimately wanted to say and what has a more historical value for understanding his development is therefore important. In what follows I will clarify which texts I use for my analysis of Schelling.

The main source for Schelling's later period remains the *Sämmtliche Werke* (SW) edited by K.F.A. Schelling. Unfortunately this edition is compiled in a confusing manner and partly against Schelling's explicit and written advice.<sup>111</sup> Things are relatively clear regarding the main texts of the positive philosophy, namely the *Philosophy of Mythology* (XII.133–685) and *Revelation* (Part 1: XIII.1–530; Part 2: XIV.3–334) where the SW offer one version in each case.<sup>112</sup>

However, matters are more complicated regarding the other strand of Schelling's thinking which comprises his negative philosophy. This element in Schelling's final system is of great importance for (among other things) it is meant to provide insight into the limits of a priori metaphysics and to thereby legitimize the endeavour of anything like a positive philosophy in the first place.

However, during his days in Munich, Schelling had not invested much energy in developing the negative strand of his thinking, perhaps in part because his audience did not demand this. In Berlin, things stood differently. After all, Schelling's chair used to be Hegel's, and it goes without saying that appeal to the "unprethinkable" is a hard sell to Hegelians. After critical reactions to his initial mode of presentation in Berlin, Schelling struggles to provide a definitive formulation of the negative philosophy. At the same time, he understands that it is necessary to make the case for his project *by argument* and that he could not simply assume sympathy from his (often Hegelian) listeners. This has led to there being several versions of his account of the negative philosophy and its relation to its positive counterpart.

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<sup>111</sup> Schelling's son, K.F.H. Schelling, did not always follow his father's advice for preparing his literary estate for publication (cf. Fuhrmans and Schelling 1959; Müller-Bergen and Egidio Sartori 2007). As a result, texts have been included that Schelling did not want to be published. To make things worse, the editions normally available today are later reproductions of the original SW in which the order of texts has been rearranged while it remains customary to quote the pagination of the original.

<sup>112</sup> The origins of these texts date back to lectures from Schelling's second Munich (1826–40) and Berlin period (1841–54).

Today, many researchers work with the so-called *Berliner Einleitung* (XIII.1–174) which has been translated into English under the title *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*.<sup>113</sup> However, this text is not Schelling's last word on the matter. Contrary to their translator's suggestion, these lectures are *not* "the final version of the first phase of his lecture series, in which Schelling seeks to provide us with the foundation [*Begründung*] for positive philosophy" (Matthews 2007, 31). As we know from Schelling's instructions (cf. Fuhrmans and Schelling 1959, 17) regarding the publication of his literary estate, he wanted these texts to be replaced by a new account which he began to formulate in 1846 (cf. Müller-Bergen and Egidio Sartori 2007; Buchheim and Hermanni forthcoming).

After an unauthorized publication of an early version of his Berlin lectures on philosophy of revelation by H.E.G. Paulus in 1843 (cf. Schmied-Kowarzik 2015, 289), Schelling refused to lecture publicly at the university of Berlin. Instead, he continued to develop his ideas in front of a more restricted audience at the *Berlin Academy of Sciences*. These talks (known as *Akademievorträge*) form the basis for what Schelling himself wanted to be published as his final account of the negative philosophy, namely the *Presentation of the Purely Rational Philosophy* (PRP) and the shorter essay *On the Source of Eternal Truths* (SET).<sup>114</sup>

## 7.2 Why to be Sceptical of Schelling

In what follows I will mainly deal with Schelling's negative philosophy because this is where he develops his argument against the exhaustively conceptual character of being. While I will occasionally draw from other sources, I will focus on those texts that Schelling himself recommended, namely the PRP and the SET. In these works, Schelling does a lot more to

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<sup>113</sup> The full name of the original text is *Einleitung in die Philosophie der Offenbarung oder Begründung der positiven Philosophie*. It is not to be confused with Horst Fuhrmans' edition of Schelling's Munich lectures from 1832/33 which is published under the name *Grundlegung der positiven Philosophie* (Schelling 1972).

<sup>114</sup> The PRP and the SET form the negative, while the *Philosophy of Revelation* and the *Philosophy of Mythology* constitute the positive strand of Schelling's final account. In addition to this there are two further texts, the so-called *Historisch-kritische Einleitung* to the *Philosophy of Mythology* and an essay called *Der Monotheismus*, which is situated between the negative and the positive. For an overview and discussion of the philosophical function of these works cf. Buchheim and Hermanni (forthcoming).



convince the reader by argument (rather than command) that we cannot avoid having to accept certain limits to a metaphysics of pure thought. This is remarkable given that Schelling had a reputation for intellectual arrogance that often stood in the way of appreciating his views. In my opinion, it is best to openly admit these problematic traits of Schelling, and to also admit that they constitute good reasons to be sceptical of his philosophy. However, I also hope to show that Schelling's attitude changed towards the end of his life, and that his final critique of a priori metaphysics deserves our attention. To pave the ground for such appreciation, I will now discuss two general worries with Schelling's approach, and I will do so from an Hegelian perspective. These concern Schelling's general method in terms of argumentation as well as his direct critique of Hegel.

### 7.2.1 *General Concerns with Schelling's Method*

In an essay defending existentialism against critics, Simone de Beauvoir (2004) gives a rationale for being an existentialist. The critics, as she sees them, weigh the options of accepting a philosophy on balance of its usefulness, of what is gained and what is lost by accepting it. They thus ask: "what does one gain by being an existentialist?" (214) De Beauvoir's reply is refreshingly bold:

The question will seem strange to any philosopher. Neither Kant nor Hegel ever asked himself what one would gain by being Kantian or Hegelian. They said what they thought was the truth, nothing more. They had no other goal but the truth itself. (de Beauvoir 2004, 214)

On de Beauvoir's view, there is no reason to adhere to a theory other than its truth. What we gain or lose by accepting it, whether it appeals to us or not, in short *whether we like it*, is simply beside the point. What matters is that we can support it by argument and so convince others of its truth.

In my view, any attempt to introduce Schelling as a serious alternative to an Hegelian account should follow de Beauvoir's advice and demonstrate that Schelling's account is true by supporting it with arguments. This, however, is not an easy thing to do. Neither Schelling's style nor the editorial state in which his writings are currently accessible are very helpful.

In the most basic terms, the key feature of Schelling's later philosophy is the idea that being is not in every respect conceptual and that, in as much as it is intelligible, it has a basis in pre-conceptual i.e. "unprethinkable" being. Being a Schellingian in this respect means to entertain belief in unprethinkable being i.e. a non-conceptual foundation of conceptually graspable reality. This, of course, is precisely what all Hegelian thinking is designed to avoid and to rule out as a romantic fiction by demonstrating the superior problem-solving power of a metaphysics of the concept. Why then, will any self-respecting Hegelian ask, should I even bother with Schelling?

In answering this question, Schelling did not always follow de Beauvoir's advice. In fact, he was notorious for commanding belief without argument, for instance when defending his appeal to intellectual intuition against the charge of mysticism:

Why this intuition should have been taken to be something mysterious – a special sense that only a few pretend to – is explicable only on the assumption that many people actually lack it; though this is undoubtedly no more curious than their lack of numerous other senses, whose reality is equally beyond dispute. (Schelling 1978, 28/III.370)

Whatever the merits of the idea of intellectual intuition, Schelling is not arguing for it here. Even worse, he plainly rejects the need to argue for it and instead attacks those in doubt by – again without an argument – questioning their capacities: either you get it or you don't! To such a strategy Hegelians will reply as Hegel did himself, namely by demanding arguments for the truth of proposed claims and by rejecting appeal to mere assertions:

In philosophy, one demands proofs for what is being proposed. However, if the start is made by appeal to intellectual intuition, this is an assertion, an oracle saying, to which one has to acquiesce [just] because it has been demanded that one ought to intuit intellectually. (TWA 20.428)<sup>115</sup>

This little skirmish from the heyday of German idealism is informative for how Hegelians have reacted to the writings of Schelling's later period, namely with frustration. And there is indeed no shortage of passages legitimizing this attitude. For instance, instead of arguing for the need of a positive philosophy over and above the metaphysics of pure thought, Schelling turns its acceptance into a matter of personal preference:

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<sup>115</sup> I am indebted here to Kreines (2015, 141–2) who discusses Hegel's critique of Schelling along similar lines.

The positive philosophy is the truly free philosophy; whoever does not want it should just as well leave it alone. I propose it to everyone freely. I only maintain that if one wants the actual chain of events, if he wants a freely created world, and so on, he can have all of this only via the path of such a philosophy. (GPP 182/XIII.132)

Gestures towards “the actual chain of events” and “a freely created world” are hardly enough to convince anyone of the need for a philosophy that undermines the priority of the conceptual. For why should these things not be addressable within, for instance, an Hegelian framework? We see here a recurring pattern: Schelling has certain intuitions to which he attributes great importance, but he is either unable or unwilling to explain why we should follow his account rather than another. The strategy of appealing to preference or talent is, in the end, a way of avoiding argument rather than standing one’s ground in an intellectual confrontation.

### 7.2.2 *Schelling’s Critique of Hegel*

To be sure, Schelling also engaged with his philosophical opponents directly. At least since 1807, one of them was Hegel. While tensions between both thinkers may have earlier roots, they materialized in the final letter that Schelling wrote to Hegel (on 3 November 1807). Hegel had previously sent him a copy of the *Phenomenology* and for Schelling there was no way to overlook that the polemics contained in the Preface were aimed in his direction. Even at this early stage, the disagreement between the two thinkers circles around the question: to what extent does the conceptual provide an exhaustive access to actuality?<sup>116</sup>

While Hegel published the *Science of Logic* from 1812 onwards, Schelling developed his interest in what he would call in 1809 “the incomprehensible base of reality in things, the indivisible remainder, that which with the greatest exertion cannot be resolved in understanding but rather remains eternally in the ground” (FE 29/VII.159–60). The subsequent work on several

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<sup>116</sup> On 3 November 1807 Schelling (1975, 471–2) writes to Hegel in reply to a copy of the *Phenomenology* which Hegel had sent him. In its preface, Schelling was sure not to overlook the passage where Hegel criticises the attempt “to palm off” the “Absolute as the night in which, as the saying goes, all cows are black” as “cognition naively reduced to vacuity” (PS §16/9.17). While Schelling officially invites Hegel to continue their correspondence, these polemics were obviously enough to make this Schelling’s last letter to Hegel. In his reply, Schelling does not go into philosophical details, but he does note that he is worried about Hegel account of the concept. The broad topic of conceptuality and its relation to being should become a, if not *the*, dominant topic in Schelling’s subsequent philosophical development. For a detailed analysis of the development of the relationship between Hegel and Schelling prior to 1807 also cf. Krings (1977).

versions of the *Ages of the World* (1811, 1812, and 1815) meant a consolidation of Schelling's interest in what goes beyond the conceptual, which is also true of his talk of the "ecstasy of reason" in the so-called *Erlangen Lectures* (1820–1826). It is during that time, namely in 1821, that Schelling began to present lectures *On the History of Modern Philosophy* which were published in a version from 1834 and which contain a sharp critique of Hegel (cf. Schmied-Kowarzik 2015, 262).

These lectures are often quoted in order to elucidate the philosophical differences between Schelling and Hegel. However, I agree with Dews (2023, xii) that the criticism Schelling develops there is not very helpful; neither for understanding Hegel, nor for understanding how Schelling ultimately came to justify his move away from him. As Rush (2014, 225) puts it, Schelling rarely succeeds in "constructing an argument from premises that Hegel would accept to a conclusion that he cannot". In the end, Schelling's direct critique of Hegel confirms legitimate doubts about Schelling's engagement with philosophical opponents. It is for this very reason, though, that I find it important to take at least a brief look at them.

From the perspective of Schelling's lectures *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, Hegel's project of a metaphysics of pure thought looks like this: Hegel begins with the notion of a merely logical being and claims that it undergoes a development in the course of which it acquires actuality and thus transcends the realm of what is merely logical on its own, "via a moving force inherent in itself" (HMP 142/X.136). As such, what started out as a mere concept gets transformed into an actual being which ultimately (as absolute idea) turns out to be the creator of a world of finite reality, just like the God of the Christian tradition.

To make no mistake, the philosophical program outlined above is *not* Hegel's. It is what Schelling (at a certain point of his own development) considered to be Hegel's project.<sup>117</sup> To *this* (perceived Hegelian) project, Schelling has three main objections which concern the following:<sup>118</sup>

1. *The opening of Hegel's Logic*: It is unclear how being as something just logical can undergo a development without the help of something that is more than just logical, i.e. actual.
2. *The Method of Hegel's Logic*: The dialectic proceeds from less to more contentful accounts of being which undermines the grounding of the supposedly richer accounts.
3. *The ending of Hegel's Logic*: It is unclear how an initially just logical being can transform itself into something actual and ultimately account for the existence of nature.

The first objection targets the initial thought determination of pure being through which the project of a metaphysics of pure thought is first established. On Schelling's analysis, the category of pure being is the "most abstract and most empty thing of all" (HMP 138/X.131) while at the same time it is supposed to have "an immanent movement" that gives rise to the long series of subsequent determination outlined in the *Logic*. For Schelling, it is clear that such a movement cannot really come from a mere concept, so that the movement which we observe throughout the course of the *Logic* must originate from something other than the concept of pure being itself. The latter neither has the power (for it is considered a *mere* concept) nor any reason to go beyond itself and on to further, richer notions. What is required to explain such a movement is a being which is a) not a mere concept but something actual and b) has familiarity with a "being more full of content" so that there is a reason for it not to "be satisfied with that meagre diet of pure being". Schelling infers from this that in truth, it is the philosopher thinking the *Logic's* categories

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<sup>117</sup> Schelling also thinks that Hegel's project is a misguided radicalization of his own, earlier approach in the *Natur- and Identitätsphilosophie* (cf. HMP 142–3/X.137–8).

<sup>118</sup> Although Schelling's argument is ultimately more complex, these are what I take to be the main objections. For a detailed reconstruction of these and further objections contained in the HMP cf. Brinkmann (1976), for a comprehensive overview in English cf. Rush (2014). For charitable takes on Schelling's objections see Gabriel (2015) and Bowie (1993); for a Hegelian reply to the latter cf. Houlgate (1999).

who gives rise to this movement.<sup>119</sup> For in contrast to pure being, the thinking philosopher is something actual and, since he is a “thinking spirit”, he is an actual being of infinitely richer content as compared to the radically abstract pure being.

The objection to the opening of Hegel’s *Logic* also provides the basis for Schelling’s second concern with its overall method. Just like Schelling calls into question how a progress can be made from pure being, so he casts doubt on the entire course of the dialectic. The *Logic* proceeds “from those first determinations which are empty and devoid of content to determinations which are ever more full of content” (HMP 142/X.136–7). Schelling asks how such progress is possible given that it apparently proceeds from emptiness to amplex and ultimately to the abundant perfection of the absolute idea. If all this really was to be grounded in deficient manifestations of being as being thought, then the whole series of categories is deficient including its result, namely the absolute idea (cf. Brinkmann 1976, 155). For Schelling, only what is itself actual and rich in content can motivate a progression and he thinks that by reversing this order, Hegel entangles himself in ever more illusory accounts of reality.

This then leads to Schelling’s third objection against the *Logic*’s conclusion in the absolute idea, in particular against the claim that there can be a transition from the absolute idea to nature. According to the concluding passages of the SL, this “transition is to be grasped [...] in the sense that the idea *freely discharges* [*entläßt*] itself, absolutely certain of itself and internally at rest” (SL 753/12.253); and in the EL (§244), Hegel writes that the absolute idea “in the absolute truth of itself, *resolves to release* *freely from itself* the moment of its particularity [...], itself as *nature*”. For Schelling, this language implies that the absolute idea has some sort of agency, that it makes decisions in the manner an agent would. Schelling infers from this that the absolute idea must itself be endowed with actuality “for that which is supposed freely to decide must be something which really exists, something that is just a concept cannot decide” (HMP 155/X.53). However,

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<sup>119</sup> Schelling assumes that “the concept for its own part would lie completely immobile if it were not the concept of a thinking subject” (HMP 138/X.132).

in light of the first two objections, this actuality rests on the illusion that the concept could acquire actuality by its own devices. Hence, Schelling concludes, the whole project culminates in the fiction of a creative concept and thereby attributes the role traditionally reserved for a personal God to a phantasma arising merely from our own thoughts.

A common theme of these objections is that Schelling tries to drive a wedge between what Hegel officially says and what he ‘actually’ does according to Schelling’s analysis. For instance, in terms of objection 1), Schelling thinks that Hegel tries to show how a dialectical development immanently arises from the initial thought of pure being – but actually (on Schelling’s judgment), he only shows us a movement that we ourselves, as thinking subjects, initiate. However, such a psychological explanation of the opening (and, with an eye towards objection 2), also the *course* of Hegel’s *Logic* is clearly not what its author had in mind.<sup>120</sup> It is thus puzzling why Schelling insists that Hegel is relying on a psychological explanation where he clearly denies it. Similar issues also apply to objection 3). Here Schelling suggests that for Hegel the absolute idea is capable of giving rise to finite reality while, ‘in fact’, it turns out as an impotent fiction that cannot figure as a sufficient condition for the existence of anything. However, Hegel himself never claimed that the absolute idea, nor indeed *any* level of the dialectic of pure thought, was detached from reality or lacked a reality of its own.<sup>121</sup>

Why then, does Schelling, in each case, assume that Hegel was actually committed to a distorted and self-undermining version of what he says? To use Rolf Peter Horstmann’s words:

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<sup>120</sup> Houlgate has emphasised especially that Hegel does not work with some implicit anticipation of a richer, more determinate sense of being at its beginning: “The idea of determinacy arises in the *Logic* for no other reason than that being in its purity turns out to be a vanishing purity and that very vanishing itself collapses into the unity of being and nothing that constitutes determinate being. Determinacy emerges, in other words, only because pure being is lost. This is the point I wish to emphasise above all but that is missed by readers such as Schelling. Speculative logic does not move from being and becoming to determinacy because the philosopher is unable to live with the indeterminacy of being or the restlessness of becoming: there is no nostalgia for the concrete and the living, no desire for permanence, order, and stability, at work in Hegel’s *Logic*” (Houlgate 2005, 195–6; cf. 1999, 113–5; 2022a, 138–43).

<sup>121</sup> Further to this, it is by no means clear that Hegel even wants us to understand the transition from the absolute idea to nature as something analogous to the Christian doctrine of creation. The Hegelian defence can thus be executed in two ways: either a) by showing that the idea is not opposed to reality and therefore can be its sufficient condition (Horstmann 1986, 305) or b) by rejecting the interpretation of the transition from idea to nature as an act of creating finite reality in the first place (Brinkmann 1976, 202).

[O]ne is left quite puzzled regarding Schelling's presentation of Hegel's approach because one just cannot assume that Schelling merely misunderstood Hegel's conception of philosophy. This assumption would inadequately simplify the matter. Taking into consideration that the fundamental views characteristic for Hegel's mature system stem from a discourse in which Schelling himself played a decisive role, it becomes implausible to assume a mere misunderstanding or rather, a hardly obvious interpretative mistake as the basis of Schelling's Hegel-critique. (Horstmann 1986)

One explanation for why Schelling presents Hegel as he does is that he "passes judgment on Hegel's system on the basis of certain assumptions about thought and existence that Hegel does not share" (Houlgate 1999, 100). The main assumption here is the view that the realm of thought has no actuality of its own, that it stands in need of something that actualises it, and that this something must itself be wholly external to thought, namely pre-conceptual, "unprethinkable" being.

Schelling wrongly assumes that Hegel's talk of "pure" thought and metaphysics as "logic" implies commitment to his own assumption about the indebtedness of thought to pre-conceptual being.<sup>122</sup> From this angle it then appears that Hegel proceeds to inconsistently claiming that the supposedly *pure* forms of thought are yet endowed with actuality: the "concept does not have the meaning here of just the concept [...] but instead the meaning of the *thing itself* [*Sache selbst*]" (HMP 135/X.127). As a result, what begins with pure i.e. unactualized, merely possible thought surreptitiously ends up with the richly developed, fully self-sufficient actuality of the absolute idea.

The deep trouble for Schelling's critique however is that Hegel never committed himself (neither explicitly nor implicitly) to the view that thought is devoid of actuality. In fact, this supposition concerning thought is a proposition Hegel wholeheartedly rejects. Therefore,

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<sup>122</sup> Schelling credits Hegel with having improved his (Schelling's) own previous account by separating the metaphysics of pure thought from its application to nature: "he revealed *as logical relationships* the logical relationships which the previous philosophy concealed in the Real" (OMP 136/X.128). However, the further inference that Hegel's distinction between metaphysics and *Realphilosophie* commits him to the indebtedness of thought to being is not warranted. It might be argued, though, that a conceptual scheme reading of Hegel is more vulnerable to Schelling's objection. For if Hegel's categories are treated merely as the conceptual scheme through which *we* approach reality, it will appear strange indeed how "our scheme" can move on its own, or give rise to finite reality. Of course, it would require further elaboration to validate this suspicion. For the conceptual realist interpretation (which informs the reading of Hegel proposed in this thesis) however, the relevant issue does not arise in the first place.



Schelling's explicit objections hardly count as a philosophically fruitful basis for taking Schelling's own project seriously, nor for endorsing his opposition to Hegel.

### 7.3 Why to Take Schelling Seriously

At the same time, we should not reduce Schelling to these direct criticisms. As Bowie (1993, 128) has pointed out, Hegelians have chiefly focussed on what they rightly reveal as inadequacies in these criticisms. However, much less effort has been made to investigate to what extent Schelling's own philosophical claims are convincing or not. In my view, what Schelling should have done is to admit that he, and not Hegel, entertains belief in a pre-conceptual basis of reality, and to demonstrate by argument why one should take this assumption seriously. For only on the basis of establishing that this belief is well-founded does it make sense to engage with the consequences that Schelling ties to it; most of all with Schelling's project of a "positive" philosophy which investigates the traces left by reality's unprethinkable ground in the mythological consciousness of mankind.

#### 7.3.1 *The Argument from Existence*

So if we are looking for an argument along these lines, what will first come to the mind of most Schelling researchers is the *Berlin Introduction*, also known as *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*. This work is not itself part of the positive philosophy but purports views on the relation of negative and positive philosophy.

A seemingly promising candidate for supporting the belief in unprethinkable being is (what I call) Schelling's *argument from existence*. Schelling famously raises the "the final desperate question: Why is there anything at all? Why is there not nothing?" (GPP 94/XIII.7). What Schelling wants to show here is not so much the possibility of there being nothing at all, but rather that the fact *that* there is a world of existing things cannot be accounted for by grounds derived from conceptual thought.<sup>123</sup> This puts the metaphysician in the tragic role of someone

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<sup>123</sup> Houlgate (1999, 105–6) helpfully points this out in his paper on Schelling's critique: "In asking this question Schelling appears to suggest that logically there could just as easily be (or could just as easily have been) nothing rather than being. Yet that is by no means the principal point of the question. For as we have seen, Schelling thinks that existence as such is actually necessary; the logical possibility of nothing is thus not really a possibility after all."

desperately yearning for answers while at the same time these answers cannot be given through rational inquiry. For thought can only ever give us insight into *what* things are, i.e. their intelligible and universal structure, but we are unable to derive from this any insight into *why* such things actually exist:

Admittedly, if I have grasped the essence, the *whatness* of something, for example, of a plant, then I have grasped something that is real, for the plant is not something that does not exist, a chimera, but is rather something that does exist [*etwas Existirendes*]. In this sense, it is true that what is real does not stand in opposition to our thinking as something foreign, inaccessible, and unreachable, but that the concept and the being are one: that the being does not have the concept outside itself, but rather has it within itself. Nonetheless, in all this the discussion was only about the *content* of what is real, but regarding this content, the fact *that* it exists is something purely contingent: the circumstance of whether it exists or not does not change my concept of the content in the least. (GPP 130/XIII.60–1)

The argument from existence then works as follows:

1. There is something.
2. This fact needs to be explained.
3. Thought cannot explain why there is something.
4. Therefore, whatever accounts for the fact that there is something rather than nothing must be external to thought.

This may count as an argument supporting belief in a pre-conceptual ground of reality. However, the argument will only convince someone who accepts its second premise, namely that the existence of things needs an explanation in the first place. Hegelians can thus easily get out of the trouble Schelling hoped to cause them by rejecting the relevance of explaining that things exist.

This is especially straightforward on a deflationist reading of Hegel, according to which thought determinations are merely the conditions for the *intelligibility* of things. Clearly one can clarify our conceptual scheme independently from explaining why there are objects to which it applies.

However, also conceptual realist readers who think of thought determinations as determinations of reality (rather than just our minds) do not have to engage in the sort of explanation of

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The main point of Schelling's question, therefore, is not to raise the purely logical possibility of nothing, but to make us aware that no reason can be given for the existence that actually and necessarily is. In asking his question Schelling is thus actually giving expression to the fact that existence is groundlessly necessary. Why is there something rather than nothing? Schelling asks. The answer is that there is no reason; there is simply the sheer necessity of existence itself--the fact that existence as such must be".

existence Schelling has in mind. In fact, it can seem to be a category mistake to apply notions which elucidate structures *within* reality, *to* reality as a totality. As Robert Stern puts it,

to see that while concepts like ‘cause’, or ‘ground’, or ‘essence’, and so on make sense when applied to matters within it [reality], they do not make sense when applied to it as a totality – so that in this way, the question of why there is being and not nothing drops away [...]. (Stern 2009e, 34)

The argument of existence underpins Schelling’s insistence on a pre-conceptual dimension of being – but it will only work on someone who shares Schelling’s interest in giving an existential explanation for there to be anything at all. Hegelians will typically deemphasise the relevance of this issue and with it the relevance of pre-conceptual being.

### 7.3.2 *The Argument from Individuality*

That being said, Schelling’s treatment of the negative philosophy does not stop in the 1840s. In fact, he struggles to provide better and more elaborate reasons for accepting his intuition that we should concede a pre-conceptual foundation for the intelligible being we encounter in pure thought. In my view, a better place (than the GPP) to begin our search for such reasons is the lecture series Schelling produced towards the end of his life, namely the *Presentation of Purely Rational Philosophy*. It is here that Schelling begins to take seriously the option that thought might indeed grant access into being as something actual and self-standing without simply assuming that it cannot. Rather than taking the indebtedness of thought to being for granted, Schelling now thinks of it as something that has to be discovered in the course of a “great interrogation [Verhör]” (PRP 320) i.e. a critical self-evaluation of reason. While Schelling will arrive at the result which he had promoted all along, namely that being as being thought requires a foundation in unprethinkable, purely factual and pre-conceptual being, he now no longer takes this as an indisputable default.

As I hope to show, an important role in this “interrogation” is played by the problem of individuality. More precisely, I think that in drawing attention to the question how a purely rational account of being can account for individuality, Schelling develops an argument in support of the claim that a pre-conceptual dimension of being is required – or else there cannot

be individual being. The advantage of this strategy is twofold. First of all, it addresses a matter situated within general metaphysics i.e. ontology, rather than referring us to thorny and highly controversial issues in special metaphysics and theology. Secondly, the specific topic of accounting for individuality is a matter of deep concern for Hegel and not something that he would easily cast aside as irrelevant – or so I hope to have shown in the extensive analysis of Hegel’s metaphysics of individuality provided earlier in this thesis.

The specific issue I have in mind concerns the third problem, namely the question what accounts for unique distinction i.e. what makes an individual the very individual it is. On Schelling’s view, this is something that we cannot explain if we insist that the core being of an individual, its substance, is a universal. Instead, he argues, it must be being in a sense that is unique in each case. Such uniqueness, however, cannot be derived from a being the substance of which is sharable and in this sense universal, so that we cannot simply do without an aspect of being which is, as such, not universal and instead is pre-conceptual.

This approach is of course not immune to counter attacks. First, Hegel can point to the fact that for him universality is not mere commonality but indeed an activity that manifests itself in individual existents. However, the fact that Hegel does think of the universal as not *merely* common to many (cf. EL §175A) does not mean that for him universals are *not* common to their instances. But then the question arises what constitutes the uniqueness of the individual and makes it the very individual it is.

Indeed, this is a question taken seriously by some of Hegel’s sternest defenders. In her analysis of how Hegel’s notion of individuality gets articulated within the idea of life, Karen Ng, for instance, takes it to be of great importance that the individual “is itself and not something else: [...] that it is itself and not substitutable for another member of the same species” (Ng 2020, 226). Likewise, Robert Stern finds it important to show that Hegel’s account of concrete universality includes the “differentiation of a substance-universal, whereby it constitutes an individual (it is qua man that I have the properties which distinguish me from other men)” (Stern

2009d, 358). At the same time, we have seen that Hegel struggles to cash in these expectations with regard to the problem of unique distinction.

Of course, it could still be that I am (together with these interpreters) wrong to assume that Hegel himself finds it necessary to account for individuality in this sense. However, we have seen that for Hegel “the individual is more than just restrictions on all sides” (SL 87/21.101) and that he would not be satisfied with an account of individuals as merely countably distinct units within a plurality.

In face of this, the topic of individuality proves to be an interesting candidate for Schelling to show that after all, the appeal to a pre-conceptual dimension of being is not as superfluous as it might initially seem, and that even those who take Hegel’s approach seriously should engage with this challenge. However, to appreciate Schelling’s point there is no way around the complicated and intricate train of thought which is the *Presentation of the Purely Rational Philosophy* (PRP). In what follows I hope to elucidate the latter and to thereby pave the ground for understanding Schelling’s argument from individuality. However, before proceeding to an interpretation of the text, some remarks on issues of terminology and translation are in order; I will therefore now provide a brief discussion of Schelling’s terminology so that these difficulties won’t stand in the way of a philosophical interpretation of his views.

#### 7.4 Terminology

Schelling uses a number of unusual expressions that require introduction, and which sometimes generate difficulties of translation. Below, I will briefly discuss his use of the terms “Seyn”/“Seyendes” and “Was”/“Daß”. To avoid an overly long terminological excursus, further unusual expressions, such as Schelling’s use of the word “Potenzen”, will be discussed as they come up.

##### 7.4.1 *Das Seyn vs. das Seyende*

The German words “das Seyn” and “das Seyende” are at risk of getting conflated by the English word “being”. “Das Seyn” is a term Schelling uses for being in a rather untechnical sense. It

carries the connotation of being real, actual, of existing. Whatever has *Seyn* is fully real. This is also the sense in which we encounter the being of objects in a pre-philosophical sense. Everyday objects, as we experience them through our senses, have *Seyn*. However, we can also raise the philosophical question regarding what it is to have being at all. And here Schelling appeals to being in the more technical and restricted sense of “das Seyende”: namely as denoting the basic ontological structure of being as it gets revealed by thought.<sup>124</sup>

Peter Dews has recently suggested translating “das Seyende” with “beingness” in order to highlight that any specific thing somehow requires to have this ontological structure in order to be at all. In Dews’ sense this means, things are endowed with being by beingness/*das Seyende*:

Just as, in German, “*das Überzeugende an etwas*”—for example—is what is convincing about something, what endows it with convincingness, so “*das Seyende*,” in Schelling’s thought, is *what endows any specific thing with being* at all. (Dews 2023, xviii)

This approach is very helpful for avoiding the conflation of “Seyn” and “Seyendes”, and it rightly underscores the importance Schelling ascribes to the ontological structure of being as *das Seyende*. However, in my view, there is a risk of overemphasising its role. For Schelling’s point will ultimately be that *das Seyende* is itself in need of an “endowment” with being. According to Schelling, there is something that *gives being to das Seyende*. For instance, *das Seyende* requires a “cause of being [*Ursache des Seyns*]” (PRP 391 cf. 313; 406), something that provides it with *Seyn* so that it really becomes the ontological structure of the actual, rather than the mere possibility thereof. In face of this, I think that we should keep both terms apart while also making transparent that “das Seyende” will come to acquire the significance of something secondary and dependent, and as such, something that requires *Seyn* rather than providing it. My solution is to capitalize “Being” when Schelling speaks of “das Seyn” and to use the standard lower case “being” for his mentions of “das Seyende”.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> The philosophical question for Schelling is then to what extent being as *das Seyende* exhausts what it takes to have being in the sense of *das Seyn*. His conclusion will be that there is something left that we cannot account for but only intimate within thought, namely a pre-conceptual aspect of being.

<sup>125</sup> As with any solution, this one too creates new problems. One of them is that other translators inverse the use of Being and being, for instance García (2011, 147 fn. 7) translates “*das Seyende*” with the capitalized ‘Being,’ and [...] ‘*das Seyn*’ just as the infinitive ‘being’’. However I find it counterintuitive to capitalize (and thereby emphasise) a term

Schelling's way of referring to that which actualises being [das Seyende] is another instance of his idiosyncratic use of language. In order to address this, he would use phrases like "das, was das Seyende *ist*" (PRP 316) i.e. "that which *is* being". The (often) italicised copula "*is*" does not denote here an identity i.e. that which = das Seyende. Rather, it is used transitively in the sense of "giving being to" or "actualising". As a pragmatic strategy, it is usually helpful to read "actualises" where Schelling uses "*is*" in the way described above.

#### 7.4.2 *Was vs. Daß*

We have seen that for Schelling there is a distinction between the ontological structure of being, being as *das Seyende*, and that which actualises, i.e. gives Being [*Seyn*] to this structure. This is closely related to another dichotomy Schelling makes between the "What/Whatness" [*das Was*] and the "That/Thatness" [*das Daß*] of things.<sup>126</sup> While these terms are neologisms they have a pedigree in classical philosophy. Aristotle, for instance speaks of "the 'what' [τὸ τί ἔστιν], which indicates the substance of the thing" (Met. 1028a14). As we shall see later on, Schelling will make a lot of the question how exactly the What relates to the substance of things. For now, however, it is more important to note that he opposes the What of things to the *That*. While the What indicates the essence of things, the *That* refers to the fact that a thing with such and such an essence actually exists, that it has Being in the sense of *das Seyn*. For Schelling these are two distinct matters and where we point towards the *That*, we refer to something that is no longer conceptual but prior to the realm of what can be grasped through concepts.

Although the distinction is by no means just confined to the divine, the following phrase concerning the relation of What and *That* in God nicely illustrates Schelling's use of these expressions: "In *himself* [God] there is no 'whatness' [*kein Was*], he is the pure 'thatness' [*das reine*

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referring to being in an insufficient and dependent sense. An alternative avoiding the problems stated above is to always indicate the German expression in brackets, as done by the translators of Schelling's GPP (Schelling 2007). However, this solution bloats sentences in a way that can make them hard to read. In face of this, I will stick to rendering "das Seyende" as "being" and "das Seyn" as "Being".

<sup>126</sup> Both "What/That" and "Whatness/Thatness" are customary in English translations of Schelling. For reasons of stylistic liberty I use both pairs of terms interchangeably.

*Das*” (SET 64/XI.586). Here and elsewhere, Schelling uses the What/That distinction to keep apart two aspects of being, namely its intelligible or conceptual structure on the one hand, and its existence on the other, which is, as such, pre-conceptual on his account. In the GPP, Schelling also suggests that it is through *thought* that we learn about the What of things, while we require *experience* in order to know *that* they exist.<sup>127</sup> This epistemic issue is less prominent in the PRP and SET. Where Schelling uses the What/That distinction in these works, it usually relates to the being of things which (on Schelling’s account) has aspects that are conceptual and also aspects that are pre-conceptual.

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<sup>127</sup> “Here we should note that in everything that is real there are two things to be known: it is two entirely different things to know what a being is, *quid sit*, and that it is, *quod sit*. The former – the answer to the question *what* it is—accords me insight into the *essence* of the thing, or it provides that I understand the thing, that I have an understanding or a concept of it, or have it *itself* within the concept. The other insight however, *that* it is, does not accord me just the concept, but rather something that goes beyond just the concept, which is existence [*Existenz*]. [...] [I]nsofar as the question is of the *whatness* of a thing, this question directs itself to *reason*, whereas – *that* something is, even if it is some-thing realized by reason from itself, *that* this is – that is, *that* it exists – can only be taught by experience” (GPP 128–9/XI.57–8).



## 8 Fundamentals of Schelling's Ontology

In this chapter, I will introduce what makes Schelling's approach respectable despite the problems conceded above. This is the ontology developed in the PRP and the argument it contains for pre-conceptual being. As I have stated already, I think that this argument crucially depends on Schelling's account of the individual. However, rather than jumping into a direct discussion of Schelling's treatment of individuality in this work, I will stick to the method I have used above and first explain his overall approach while keeping an eye on how this relates to an Hegelian perspective on metaphysical thinking.

Section 8.1 discusses the PRP in terms of a metaphysics of being that operates within pure thought. In this context, I will address both Schelling's relation to the Kantian doctrine of the transcendental idea, as well as the role of the Aristotelian question "What is being?" for Schelling's project. Next, I will explain Schelling's basic conceptual device for elucidating the structure of being, namely his doctrine of "potencies". Following Schelling's own procedure, I will do so by first discussing the potencies as more or less static principles of being (section 8.2) and then proceed to their role as dynamic principles of generation (section 8.3).

### 8.1 Schelling's Metaphysics of Pure Thought

Schelling's PRP aims to clarify the nature of being and to do this, as far as possible, without involving special metaphysics, most notably the notion of God.<sup>128</sup> As such, much of what Schelling has to say is in fact a form of ontology or *metaphysica generalis* that aims at clarifying the basic structures that govern reality. This project is not unfamiliar to Hegelians and it deserves to

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<sup>128</sup> "This doctrine is purely rational [*reine Vernunftwissenschaft*] both in terms of its sources as well as its creative principle. For while its movement is understood as a movement of being, being is only that wherein reason has grasped and materialised itself, the immediate idea, so to speak, the form [*Figur und Gestalt*] of reason itself. This movement of being is therefore at the same time a movement of reason; it is determined neither by a will nor by anything accidental. [To be sure,] God, or that which is being, is the aim it strives for. However, God is not that which wills or causes the movement. The purely rational philosophy will thus be all the more adequate to its concept, the farther it keeps its aim (namely God) away from itself and the more it strives to understand everything, as far as possible, *without* [reference to] *God*, that is, as they say, just naturally or rather according to purely logical necessity" (PRP 375).

be taken seriously by them. However, there are a number of philosophical moves that will raise the suspicion of an Hegelian reader. In what follows, I will do my best to make the case for Schelling's project with special regards to what I anticipate as Hegelian worries about his approach. After discussing Schelling's relation to Kant's doctrine of the transcendental ideal and his appeal to the question "What is being?", I will explain the method used by Schelling to answer this question.

### *8.1.1 Two Prima Facie Problematic Ideas at the Opening of the PRP*

The first issue that an Hegelian will take with Schelling, is that he begins his project with a discussion of Kant's doctrine of the transcendental ideal. The transcendental ideal is Kant's name for the philosophical notion of a being that comprises all reality (both extensionally and intensionally). The function of the transcendental ideal is to guarantee that (mind-independent) reality is in principle open to conceptual inquiry, that it follows what Kant calls the "principle of thoroughgoing determination" (B 601–10). From an Hegelian vantage point this background is suspicious because Kant uses the transcendental ideal in order to demonstrate that we are ultimately unable to account for the conceptual accessibility of mind-independent reality. The relevant discussion here is Kant's critique of the ontological proof, which is said to be impossible because we are unable to verify the actual existence of an object that corresponds to the notion of the transcendental ideal.<sup>129</sup>

The Hegelian reply to this is that the transcendental ideal fails not because it is impossible to demonstrate that reality is open to conceptual inquiry, but because it entertains a problematic account of the conceptual, namely one that ignores the self-determination of the universal and replaces it instead with the abstract notion of a mere collection of predicates:

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<sup>129</sup> For Kant, any claim to the actuality of the transcendental ideal "would already be over stepping the boundaries of its vocation and its permissibility. For on it, as the concept of all reality, reason only grounded the thoroughgoing determination of things in general, without demanding that this reality should be given objectively, and itself constitute a thing. This latter is a mere fiction, through which we encompass and realize the manifold of our idea in an ideal, as a particular being; for this we have no warrant, not even for directly assuming the possibility of such a hypothesis, just as none of the consequences flowing from such an ideal have any bearing, nor even the least influence, on the thoroughgoing determination of things in general, on behalf of which alone the idea was necessary" (B 608).

[T]he mere determination of a subject matter through predicates, without this determination being at the same time the realization and objectification of the concept, remains something so subjective that it is not even a true cognition and *determination of the concept* of the subject matter – “subjective” in the sense of abstract reflection and non-conceptual representation. (SL 626/12.128)

In face of this, it might seem that Schelling is merely reproducing Kant’s emaciated account of the conceptual, an account that Hegel never endorsed so that any criticism based upon it is, again, beside the point.

Schelling does indeed develop his account of being in dialogue with Kant’s doctrine of the transcendental ideal and he admires Kant’s insight that being, as we encounter it in thought, is not actual in its own right but requires something that endows it with actuality: “This is where, in as much as Kant was interested in actual Being and not mere representation, the remark had to be made that such a sum total of possibilities is not something that has the ability to *be* for itself [*nichts für sich seyn Könnendes*]” (PRP 284). While Schelling thus sides with Kant that the intelligible structure of reality is not existentially self-sufficient, he also notes well that there is a tragic subtone to this insight. Indeed, Kant would be the first to admit that the search for something that exists in a truly self-standing way is legitimate. In fact, human reason cannot help but search for an ultimately self-standing i.e. unconditioned level of reality precisely because it is faced with the ubiquitous conditionedness of the empirical world. The fact that

the existence of appearances, [is] not grounded in the least within itself but always conditioned, demands that we look around us for something different from all appearances, hence for an intelligible object, with which this contingency would stop. (B 594)

At the same time however, in Kant’s eyes, it is beyond doubt that this search is ill-fated and only yields the *fiction* of an ultimate and intelligible ground of reality, not the actual object that is desired (cf. B 661).

Schelling understands this double-layeredness of Kant’s thinking well. He clearly sees how the transcendental dialectic penetrates through the thin veneer of an account of being or actuality as empirically conditioned, and takes seriously the idea of being in an unconditioned sense which is accessible through thought instead of empirical givenness. Schelling does agree with Kant that this brave endeavour will ultimately come to an impasse and that we cannot fully determine what

being is via thought. At the same time, however, he does not think that Kant succeeded in demonstrating this convincingly.

Schelling is aware that Kant is too quick to discard the option that we may be able to unveil being itself within thought. For instance, while Kant does engage with the idea of being as being thought in the dialectic, he can seem to ultimately take it for granted that actuality is a mode of empirical givenness<sup>130</sup> and that “[b]eing is obviously not a real predicate” (B 672). Schelling does not treat such claims as “obvious”, and seriously considers the possibility that actual being can be accounted for within an account of being as being thought. If there is to be a true critique of the identity of being and thought, the possibility that pure thought can indeed demonstrate such an identity must be taken seriously. Even though Schelling will ultimately come to the conclusion that being as being thought lacks “the ability to be for itself”, he also thinks that we cannot bracket (or give up prematurely) the onto-logical conception of being. Instead, Schelling’s radicalized critique of pure reason requires that we confront ourselves with this account and subject it to an immanent critique. A key concern of Schelling’s *Spätphilosophie* therefore is to “come to terms with the ontic deficits of Kant’s transcendental philosophy” (Hogrebe 1989, 70; cf. Müller-Bergen 2006, 273–5).

As a consequence, I think it would be wrong to say that Schelling adopts Kant’s doctrine of the transcendental ideal. He does think that Kant has raised an important issue, namely the question to what extent thought can arrive at an adequate account of being as self-standing and actual in its own right. However, he does not think that Kant has sufficiently discussed this question: “the mere sum total of all possibilities is still much too broad as a concept in order for us to do anything with it and to arrive at anything determinate thereby” (PRP 288). Schelling thus

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<sup>130</sup> I am referring here to Kant’s definition of actuality as a modal category: “That which is connected with the material conditions of experience (of sensation) is *actual*” (B 266).

argues that the idea of a sum total of possibilities lacks the level of specification that would allow for the development of ontological claims about the structure of being from it. Consequentially, the task of exploring being as it is encountered in thought presents itself to Schelling as a task to be addressed anew, not as something he could simply import from Kant.

As a first step, Schelling discusses the option to derive a more specific account of being from “actually existing things”, which would mean, empirically, from the determinate things we find in the world:

The next best thing would be this: to take actually existing things as the correlates of these possibilities and to explain the possibility of such things in terms of the different ways of being that find expression in them; for the inorganic has a way of being and the organic has another one, and within this realm, plants have a way of being that is different from that of animals. (PRP 288)

As we shall soon find out, Schelling will come to reject this method; but it is still worth our while to discuss what associations it evokes. One might assume, for instance, that Schelling flirts with the idea that we could import the pre-given determinateness of empirical reality into our metaphysical and non-empirical account of being. The fact that Schelling repeatedly (cf. PRP 291) frames his project in terms of the question “What is being?” further confirms this suspicion. For, this way of putting things can be seen as presupposing the determinateness of empirical reality as a pre-given standard for the metaphysical thought of being. This is, of course, certain to raise Hegelian suspicion once again. For there is the risk of prematurely assuming that “being” denotes something determinate and of thereby unwarrantedly ruling out that being could be grasped in the absolutely indeterminate thought of *pure* being.

Someone like Stephen Houlgate might worry here that what Schelling suggests confirms Hegelian concerns about the method of approaching the thought of being in the mode of asking “What is being?”. For this question

risks distorting the very thing it asks after, for it presupposes in its very form that being is not sheer indeterminacy but rather something determinate. Now, to point to this presupposition in the question “what?” is not to say that the question should never be posed; that question is, as I have suggested, perfectly natural. But it is to urge self-critical caution on those who pose this question and to enjoin them to bracket out in their minds the assumption the question contains. In other words, it is to enjoin them to ask the

question “what?” without automatically assuming that what is asked after is necessarily a “what” itself. (Houlgate 2005, 40)

However, I think that in fact Schelling is following Houlgate’s advice and does apply a respectable level of caution. For right after bringing up the above discussed suggestion to derive the determination of being from empirically given objects, he rejects it:

Who does not feel that these ways of being [which we might derive from empirically given objects] cannot be original ones? One would assume, by contrast, that these empirically derived ways, through some chain of mediating links, can be derived from original differentiations that are no longer accidental but belong to the nature of *being* itself. (PRP 288)

Schelling’s idea is thus that we ought to clarify the meaning of “being”, that we ought to do this non-empirically within pure thought, and that we ought to begin the whole endeavour with being itself – not with the being of anything in particular (cf. Müller-Bergen 2006, 286). The structure of determinate objects is something that we may (or may not) arrive at by disclosing the nature of being itself; it is definitely not a presupposed starting point for Schelling.

#### 8.1.2 *Schelling’s Method: Experience in Pure Thought*

As we have seen, Schelling is aware that we need to avoid pre-given opinions on being in order to find out what it is. Consequently, neither empirical objects, nor the very idea that being has anything to do with empirical givenness in the first place, can play a role in the inquiry. Instead, Schelling argues, we must derive the notion of being independently from external constraints, that is, from the *thought* of being: “[i]n order to know what being is, we must try to think it” (PRP 302). This leads us into a realm where thought itself is the only arbiter for what is (and what is not) an adequate account of being. Not unlike Hegel, Schelling thus insists that we can only get to know being if we enter “a realm where the laws of thought are laws of being” and that these laws “concern not, as one has generally assumed after Kant, the mere form but indeed the content of cognition” (PRP 303).

Schelling emphasises that the thinking of being does not follow a deductive method, because this would mean to presuppose a pre-given “principle” of being from which we could infer subsequent insights. Instead, he argues, in trying to think being, we become witnesses to a

dynamic development of the thought of being. Rather than deducing the structure of being from a pre-given principle, we thus encounter it in the development of the thought of being. This is why Schelling also calls his method an “experience in thought” and even a form of “induction”, although of course, this is not to be confused with the empirical knowledge as we derive it from our senses:

Indeed, the method we have followed thus far can only be described in the following way: it is not the deductive method, for the latter presupposes the principle. Since it is not deductive it will be inductive; and indeed this movement through presuppositions which contain as possibilities what is posited as actuality only in the principle, this movement is to be called an induction, although, not in the usual sense of the word; from the method which is usually referred to as inductive our method differs in as much as the possibilities it uses, so to speak, as premises, are found in pure thought and therefore, at the same time, in such a way that we can be assured of their completeness, which is not the case in empirical induction. (PRP 321)

Admittedly, the idea of an experience in thought sounds oxymoronic. However, it is clear that Schelling is not thinking here of empirical knowledge (in the usual sense of the word).

Nonetheless, he does want to stress that the relevant sort of knowledge is also not simply analytic, for it has to do with processes of learning and gaining new insights that are not deduced from an initially given principle. At the same time, these new insights do not enter into our attempt to think being from external sources (such as tradition, religion, sense-experience), but they emerge from the autonomy of thought itself: we rely on the self-determination of being as being thought in order to arrive at richer and more adequate conceptions of it. The process of the dialectical unfolding of these conceptions is what Schelling presents in his so-called *Doctrine of Potencies*. The latter thus deserves closer consideration in the subsequent section.

## 8.2 From the Potencies to the Figure of Being

From early on in his philosophical development, Schelling used the term “potencies [*Potenzen*]” to describe fundamental traits of reality. While he sticks to the notion of potencies until his final writing period, there is considerable heterogeneity in the use of this concept both throughout the diachronic development of Schelling’s works and regarding the systematic context in which it is used. For instance, potencies can be basic traits of nature, but they are also used to describe the

process of divine creation as well as different aspects of mythological consciousness (cf. Förster 2017). In face of this heterogeneity, it is best to abstain from global interpretations and to clarify instead the specific philosophical function acquired by the notion of potencies in a particular work. In our case, the relevant context is the PRP where the potencies represent a set of three basic categories meant to describe fundamental traits of being. We are thus dealing here with fundamental *ontological* categories.<sup>131</sup>

For Schelling, it is of great importance to leave open whether or not the attempt to grasp being in pure thought can ultimately succeed. Unlike Hegel, he will come to the conclusion that there is an irresolvable gulf between the being we encounter in pure thought and the being we encounter in the actual world. However, it would be a mistake to assume that this judgment informed Schelling's account from the outset as a fixed expectation towards its result. Instead, we should see the doctrine of potencies as an experiment where the outcome is open. The hypothesis to be tested is that the logical conception of being delivers a fully satisfying and adequate account of being. Whether or not this hypothesis can be confirmed is to be shown by the actual execution of the experiment and cannot be assumed as a presupposition.<sup>132</sup>

The doctrine of potencies is a gradually evolving procedure that begins with an initial attempt to grasp being in thought and then develops this idea. The initial attempt to think being leads thought to categories that grasp further dimensions or aspects of what it means to be. In each case it is then asked if the proposal is satisfying. Where it is not, we move on to further categories and ask again to what extent they remedy the deficiencies of the previous stage.

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<sup>131</sup> Gabriel (2006, 122–3) helpfully points out that Schelling's potencies are not meant to theorize the structure of an epistemic subject but should be seen instead as categories of being: "For subjectivity is itself just one instance of being (even if, to be sure, an eminent one); subjectivity always already presupposes being as its unassailable beginning". In a letter from 1852, Schelling (1870, 241) confirms "that the doctrine of the principles i.e. the potencies is my [Schelling's] metaphysics".

<sup>132</sup> On the experiment-like character of Schelling's approach and its relation to Kant's comparison of the *Critique* with the experimental method of the natural sciences e.g. in B xii (cf. the notes on xxi and xviii) cf. Müller-Bergen (2006, 285).



This method prompts the question about the criteria for adequacy. We need an account of which outcome of the experiment warrants confirmation of the hypothesis and which does not. What makes a notion of being adequate or, if it is not, deficient? At times, Schelling seems to reject this question altogether and appeals to a form of immediate knowing that is neither capable nor in need of further warrant:

This is why this inquiry (into the principle and the principles [of being]) can only be for the few, since most people want to be overwhelmed or at least persuaded by proofs. However, also the latter is not possible [...] where everything depends on simple *intuition* of the thinking mind [*einfache geistige Wahrnehmung*]. (PRP 355)

Schelling insists here, once again, on a peculiar talent for something like intellectual intuition.

This certainly is problematic, for, if it lies in the eye of the beholder whether or not the attempt to think being succeeds, then the evaluation of Schelling's great experiment becomes a matter of personal caprice rather than objective insight.

However, while Schelling says this, he does offer a rationale for evaluating the different stages of the dialectic of potencies. For when he reaches the third potency, he states a reason why it provides a more adequate characterisation of being in comparison to its predecessors:

This [potency] which, [...] possesses itself and has power over itself (and thereby is different from the two previous ones which can only be thought as completely selfless [...]) – [...] this one has the highest claim to be being [*das Seyende zu sein*]. (PRP 290)

According to this passage, what makes the third potency a more *adequate* characterisation of being is its greater *self-sufficiency*. Although this criterion is not explicit when we enter the "experience" of pure thinking, it becomes explicit in its course. The point is thus, that being is fundamental and that anything that requires a further ground in something other than itself can at best represent an approximation to what it is to be. The endeavour of thinking being thus strives to articulate that which is absolutely *in its own right*. Again, this is not simply an external presupposition but part of what we find out by engaging with the thought of being. The experience in thought thus develops its standards for adequacy in its own course.

That being said, there is a sense in which we should take seriously Schelling's point that certain ideas cannot really be subject to arguments. For when we make the initial steps in the

realm of pure thought, we can neither infer the ideas we encounter from yet prior principles, nor do we already possess criteria for evaluating these ideas. In a certain sense, their fundamentality must therefore be acknowledged. We may be able to develop criteria for evaluating certain ideas within pure thought as we move through its dialectical development. However, at some point, we have to accept an initial content as a legitimate starting point for the dialectic and here we are indeed unable to give reasons. This, however, should not irritate us when we look at Schelling's work through the Hegelian lens that has guided our inquiry so far: for Hegel would certainly agree that there cannot be an argument for or against the initial notion of pure being, at least not in a way that is independent from the series of thought determinations that subsequently emerges from the entry point of pure being.<sup>133</sup> With these considerations in mind, we are now in a position to approach the evolution of Schelling's basic ontological categories – even if we are not gifted with intellectual intuition or similar *Zauberkünste*.

### 8.2.1 *The first Potency (– A)*

For Schelling, it is clear that we are not normally engaged with the thought of being because normally, we think about things that are given to us through sense experience. While it is not at our liberty to decide whether or not we like to engage with the sensuous world, no one can drag us into the light of pure thinking where the 'object' is not this or that being (this book on that shelf) but being *as such*.<sup>134</sup> However, if we choose to engage with being in this way, we are not in a frictionless void where we could capriciously choose what to think. By contrast, on Schelling's account, thought itself determines the order as well as the content of what we encounter in pure thought:

[I]f one asks "What is being?", it is not a matter of our preference what we posit first and what follows later in terms of that which has a claim to be being. In order to know what

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<sup>133</sup> In the context of the above quoted passage (PRP 355), Schelling also notes that the structure of sentences would be inadequate for constructing an argument for the most fundamental categories of being. This too resonates with Hegel's account. After all, the beginning of the *Logic* is not a sentence but the grammatically incomplete utterance: "*Being, pure being* – without further determination" (SL 59/21.68).

<sup>134</sup> Although we can abstain from such an inquiry, Schelling points out that it is a deeply felt "need" of "human spirit" to engage with being metaphysically, to get, so to speak, "to the bottom of being [*hinter das Seyn*]" (GPP 142/XIII.75).

being is, we must try to think it (to which, of course, no one can be compelled in the same way that he is compelled to represent what he faces with his senses). (PRP 302)

Thinking being is thus not a matter of what you or I think, but of what is thinkable *in principle*.

Schelling then suggests that the first idea that occupies us in pure thought, the “subject of Being”, is not a determination of being as this or that object but rather the absence of any such determination:

Whoever does try it [to think being] though, will soon come to notice that only the pure subject of Being has the first claim to be being and that thought refuses to posit anything prior to that. The first thinkable (*primum cogitabile*) is *exclusively* that. (PRP 302)

Schelling’s use of the word “subject” may invite the association of an epistemic subject that could figure as an in itself indeterminate basis for the determination of empirical objects. However, as Markus Gabriel helpfully points out, Schelling’s potencies are not meant to theorize the structure of an epistemic subject. Instead they should be seen as ontological notions because for Schelling, “subjectivity is itself just one case of being (even though, to be sure, an eminent one); subjectivity always already presupposes being as its unassailable beginning” (Gabriel 2006, 122–3).

Equally, it would be misleading to think of the “subject of Being” in terms of the contemporary constituent ontologist’s bare substratum, i.e. a particular that lacks determination while offering support for the determinations of a substance it is a ‘part’ of. Schelling is not so much trying to describe building blocks for substances but instead “formal elements” (Buchheim 1992, 14) of what it is to be in the first place.

In the initial conception of being as first potency, we thus think being “not in the objective sense [*nicht im gegenständlichen Sinn*]” (PRP 302) and that means, as indeterminate. Had we begun otherwise, with the idea of what makes being object-like, i.e. determinate, we would have had to admit that for there to be a determination there must always already be something not yet determinate which is capable of determination: “whatever is objective [*alles Gegenständliche*] presupposes something against which it is so” (PRP 302).

In a way we have thus succeeded in thinking being by using a category that appears to be non-derivative and therefore adequate to the self-sufficiency of being. And yet, Schelling argues,

the experience we have just made in thought also brings about a lingering sense of lack, incompleteness, and “privation” (PRP 288 cf. 292):

It [the first potency] is not what we want, it is being only in *one* sense. We therefore have to concede that it *is* and *is not* being, the former in one sense, the latter in another. We thus have to concede that it therefore only has the *ability to be* being, that it is a potency of being in as much as it contains something indispensably belonging to it [being], while not containing what else belongs to consummate Being. (PRP 289)

What warrants this sense of privation? Why is the first potency “not what we want”? My interpretative suggestion is that the first potency turns out as only *seemingly* self-sufficient.<sup>135</sup> For the thought of indeterminacy can only be meaningfully expressed as a lack of determination. Where there is lack, there is always already an implicit awareness of the positive presence of that which is lacking. In this case, what is missing is the idea of determination, which is required in order to make sense of the idea of indeterminacy in the first place.

### 8.2.2 *The second Potency (+ A)*

The thought of being as indeterminacy has thus revealed its insufficiency by presupposing the idea of a determination. However, this does not mean that it was a mistake to begin with it. According to Schelling, the first potency as pure indeterminacy is a necessary first step and remains a part of the thought-immanent account of being. Thus, although the first potency turns out as insufficient,

we cannot therefore cast it aside, [even if we were to start our endeavour to think being anew] we would always have to make the beginning with it. In thought, nothing can be posited prior to it, it is quite simply the first thinkable (*primum cogitabile*); therefore we must keep it, as a step [on the staircase leading] to consummate being [*zum vollendet Seyenden*], at first to that being in which there is nothing of the subject (+A) and which therefore could not even be for itself (just as a predicate cannot be without a subject by which it is supported), that for which the former [the first potency ...] is the subject. (PRP 289)

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<sup>135</sup> Similarly, Aristotle notes that his account of the determinable, namely matter, has an initial claim to be substance because it is predicated of nothing, which is (one part of) Aristotle’s definition of substance in the *Categories* (cf. Cat. 2a10). Initially it seems that from this it “follows that matter is substance” (Met. 1029a25–30). However, Aristotle then rejects this option on the grounds that matter lacks “separability and individuality” (ibid.). Schelling’s reason to not stick with the first potency is different. He points to the fact that the thought of it is not fully self-sufficient and requires a contrast provided by the thought of determinateness. However, there is a kinship between his and Aristotle’s train of thought in as much as they both recognise the initial claim being viz. substance of the determinable and then proceed to show that this initial claim turns out as insufficient.

The dialectic of potencies is therefore not a matter of mere trial and error where an erroneous first attempt is overruled by a new and better one, but rather a procedure that develops the thought of being in stages. Like in an actual staircase, the lower steps remain important for the overall structure even though they themselves do not lead us directly to the upper floor.

As we have seen, the reason to make the next step was that the idea of indeterminacy remains incomplete without a counterpart, which motivates an attempt to think being in terms of determinateness. This is the second potency which now becomes a further “stepping stone, or the path leading towards [...] Being” (PRP 289). Determinateness is brought about, for instance, by the positive traits of an object, its being *such and such*. In this sense Schelling also speaks of +A in terms of being in a “predicative” sense, i.e. in terms of what can be predicated or said of something: “that which is predicatively [*aussaglich*], i.e. affirmatively” (PRP 289 cf. Buchheim 2015, 47).

However, if we think of the second potency in terms of positive traits, predicates or properties of an object, we have to think of these in complete abstraction from an underlying realm of determinability which has been the content of –A. For the latter would require at least some room for *further* determination, a lack of determinateness that is yet to be filled. The second potency, however, is meant to express the thought of *absolute* determinateness that is so radically definite that it excludes even the slightest possibility of being otherwise: “pure Being *without any ability* [*ohne alles Können*]” (PRP 292).

What *can* be, has the ability to be, say, round or square, or triangular; as mere *ability to be*, it is undecided with respect to its determinateness in terms of a particular shape.<sup>136</sup> An actual thing, by contrast, say a sheet of paper, is determined regarding its shape. However, this does not mean that the possibility of altering this shape is excluded. (A square piece of paper can be turned into

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<sup>136</sup> We know this type of first-potency, determinable being, for instance, from fictional entities, such as Sherlock Holmes. How many pipes Sherlock Holmes has smoked in total is and remains unsettled because the fictional world in which he appears does not determine this fact. However, there is a definite number of pipes smoked by Bertrand Russell and Jean-Paul Sartre, for they are (or were) part of the actual world where things do not, so to speak, get stuck in the first potency. They are, to use Kant’s expression, *thoroughgoingly determined*, and that means, the idea of determinateness (to which Schelling refers as +A) is a moment of their being.

two triangular ones.) However, the idea Schelling wants us to grasp at this stage is to detach the idea of determinateness from the possibility of being otherwise. We are meant to think *pure* determinateness and as such the counter-concept to the pure possibility expressed as indeterminacy in the first potency. As Beach (1994, 122) nicely summarises, “[t]his Potency contains no portion of the infinitely variable potentiality (*potentia pura*) allocated to  $[-]A^1$ , but is instead a fullness of being so completely determinate that it can be nothing other than precisely what it is”.

The first potency, by contrast, is isolated potentiality without any determination. As such,  $-A$  is nothing in particular, for it remains an incomplete side of a particular thing, its being capable of determination without having any. This idea then, so to speak, collapses into an account of determinateness which is equally radicalised as utterly isolated from any ability of development, change, and further determination.

I find it helpful to think of the first two potencies as broadly akin to the notions of matter and form which, as Kant’s rendition of these Aristotelian notions helpfully highlights, express the ideas of determinability and determination:

Matter and form. These are two concepts that ground all other reflection, so inseparably are they bound up with every use of the understanding. The former signifies the determinable in general, the latter its determination (both in the transcendental sense, since one abstracts from all differences in what is given and from the way in which that is determined). (B 322)

Interestingly, Kant speaks here of matter immediately in terms of the determinable. This provides me with an occasion to point out that Schelling (unlike Kant) does *not* immediately introduce the first potency as the *determinable* i.e. that which is possibly determinate. It is introduced as radical *indeterminacy* which only later, through the contrast of  $+A$ , turns out as the possibility of becoming determinate. Schelling emphasises that when we move from one level of the dialectic of potencies to the next, the lower level turns out as a possible realisation of the subsequent stage: “[i]n this whole gradation it is the nature of each idea to find its fulfilment in the next higher level and to thus have in itself as mere possibility what is as actuality in this higher level” (PRP 411). In face

of this modal development, it is important to note that the first potency gets revealed as the determinable only when the contrast with determinateness has become explicit.

A further difference is that for Schelling, the potencies have ontological significance in a way that is not intended in Kant. They do not only ground “all reflection” but, indeed all *being*. At the same time, Schelling also shows that in order to fulfil this foundational role for being, the mere opposition of the determinable and the determinate is again insufficient. Both of these ideas represent extremes in which being can manifest itself in thought, but they are only thinkable in terms of each other and therefore not fully self-sufficient: “[e]ach of the first two Potencies [...] is incomplete by itself in that it requires the cooperative influence of the other in order to be what it is” (Beach 1994, 124). It is impossible to think indeterminacy without being immediately driven to its opposite, just as any attempt of thinking pure determinacy requires the contrast of an indeterminate background against which it is determined, or so Schelling hopes to show.

### 8.2.3 *The third Potency ( $\pm A$ )*

Both  $-A$  and  $+A$  have proven to be one-sided and dependent accounts of being, so that we still haven’t found a notion of being that is complete in itself. This pushes the dialectic on to make a further step, namely to the third potency  $\pm A$ . At the same time, it is natural to ask why such completeness is not already achieved,<sup>137</sup> given that  $-A$  and  $+A$  seem to *jointly* exhaust the thought of being. Being would then appear to thought as a composite of the determinable and the determinate so that a third potency is either superfluous or nothing other than a name for the composite of the preceding ones. However, Schelling resists the idea that the third potency could be anything like a conjunction of pre-given building blocks; it is “nothing composite” (PRP 394 cf. 289–90). For if it was a composite, it would have to combine  $-A$  and  $+A$  in one idea. These principles, however, are mutually exclusive opposites. They can be thought successively but not at the same time:

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<sup>137</sup> Fuhrmans (1965, 14) goes as far as to claim that the third potency was philosophically redundant and that Schelling only introduced it “in order to facilitate trinitarian thinking” in the Christian sense of the term.

We cannot posit the mere subject and its opposite (that which *just* is, i.e. without a subject), as they say, in one breath. We have to posit this one (–A) first, that one (+A) thereafter, that is, we have to posit both as *moments* of being. (PRP 289)

Existing literature points out that Schelling states both the difficulty and the need of synthesizing the first two potencies. For instance, according to Buchheim (2015, 47),

Schelling claims, and this is [...] quite plausible indeed, that we cannot think both potencies of being in one single train of thought. Instead we have to do this in several, distinct steps by thinking that which exists [*das Existierende*] as subject in the first place, and as object in the second. Nonetheless, and this is essential for the third potency, it is precisely in the accord of these two trains of thought that we grasp that which exists in thought.

But why exactly is it impossible to think both ideas in one single train of thought, and, if this is impossible, how can we then proceed to nonetheless grasp both ideas in some sort of unity?<sup>138</sup>

The predicament is that the conjunction of the two previously established potencies would yield a unity of incompatible ideas, the notion of being as absolutely determinate, and, at the same time, utterly indeterminate. Despite this difficulty, Schelling insists that our conceptual grasp of being remains incomplete unless we find some type of synthesis of the determinable and the determinate. So how do we get around the issue of combining incompatible ideas in a composite?

Unfortunately Schelling's remarks on the third potency are sparse. One lead we can follow, however, is the modal structure of the dialectic of potencies. As we have seen, the subsequent level always expresses the actuality of what on the previous level is just possible: what is indeterminate (–A) is *possibly* determinate. +A, by contrast, is *actually* determinate so that it is *actually* what –A is only *possibly*. Now we are looking for something that is *actually* what both –A *and* +A are just possibly. This way, we do not have to claim at any point the joint actuality of

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<sup>138</sup> Beach (1994, 127–8) makes some effort to explain this *per impossibile* success by appeal to the successive structure of the dialectic of potencies which “provides the ideal matrix for a synthesis of moments that logic by itself could never completely explain or justify”. However, he admits that this alone is not sufficient for making the doctrine of potencies respectable: “[m]ore compelling reasons for accepting the *Potenzlehre* may be forthcoming, and until then the best that his readers can do is to withhold judgment”. Gabriel (2006, 133–4) suggests that the third potency is “nothing other than the relation of subject [–A] and object [+A], to which we have already appealed the moment we differentiated subject and object, for difference is a relation”. However, it is unclear how the relation of difference as such could explain the unity of –A and +A. Neither Gabriel's appeal to Hölderlin's notion of “Ur-Teilung” (135) nor the rather opaque statement that the third potency “is, for Schelling, possible already because it is excluded as impossible” (137) do much towards clarifying the issue.



mutually exclusive notions but only their joint possibility. To give an example, nothing can be *actually* round and square at the same time and in the same respect. However, what is actually triangular has the potential to be turned into other shapes including round, and also square ones. In the modal exile of possibility, it seems, the problem regarding the incompatibility of contraries drops away.<sup>139</sup> We can thus rephrase the quest for the third potency in terms of that which has both +A and –A as possibilities, while being itself is *actually* what they are only *in potentia*. This can neither be mere determinability (for that is what –A is actually) nor mere determinateness (for that is what +A is actually).

So what then is  $\pm A$ ? In the initial outline of the potencies,  $\pm A$  is described as “that which levitates between Being and non-Being” (PRP 396) and as “that which is not in [its] Being [*das im Seyn nicht seyende*] (potentiality) and is in [its] non-Being [*im nicht Seyn seyende*]” (PRP 390).<sup>140</sup> In my view, these expressions hint at the idea of a processual or dynamic category that has so far remained in the background. My interpretative suggestion is thus to think of  $\pm A$  in terms of the movement from the merely determinable first potency to the merely determinate second potency.

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<sup>139</sup> Schelling also writes that  $\pm A$  is “that which is excluded by each of the others [+A and –A] (by each in its own right)” (PRP 292). If the relation between +A and –A was akin to a logical contradiction, the exclusion of a third option would mean that this third option is impossible. Schelling, however, is quick to add that by exclusion he means something “positive” and that he is thinking here of *contraries* (cf. XI 290) rather than a contradiction. For while contraries like “All horses are white” and “All horses are brown” cannot be *both true*, they can be *both false*, in which case a third option (e.g. “All horses are black.”) is true. This corresponds nicely to the modal solution for a third potency I have suggested: for if all horses are *actually* black, they are still *potentially* white or brown, both are possible in relation to the actual colour of all horses. Similarly,  $\pm A$  can be thought of as actually what the opposing ideas of +A and –A are only possibly.

<sup>140</sup> Especially the talk of something levitating or wavering is analogous to how Schelling formulated a related issue in his early work *The System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800): using the same terms of subject, object, and subject-object that would later come to serve as expressions for the potencies of the negative philosophy, Schelling discusses here how opposing tendencies in the notion of self-consciousness can be synthesized into a unity. According to Schelling, the unity of subject and object can only be achieved in a mediating third, namely the subject-object: “The highest of which we are conscious is the identity of subject and object, yet this is in itself impossible, and can be such only through a third, mediating factor. Since self-consciousness is a duality of directions, the mediating factor must be an activity that wavers between opposing directions” (Schelling 1978, 45/III.292–3). Like in the PPR, Schelling is interested in a unity of opposites that cannot be achieved through a simple conjunction but requires unity in a third. Müller-Bergen (2006, 294) has pointed out however, that Schelling gestures towards a related account of the unity of opposites also in *Philosophy and Religion* (1804) cf. SW VI.24. What seems to be less explicit in these passages from earlier works, though, is the distinction between contrary and contradictory opposites which plays an important role in the PPR (cf. XI 290) as well as the related modal structure governing the dialectic of potencies.

To illustrate this, let us apply these formal ontological principles to a concrete example. Think, for instance, of a holiday trip. In its initial phase the whole trip is a mere possible: destination and duration have not been determined yet, we have chosen neither a specific hotel nor have we decided whether we go there by train or by car. At this stage, the whole trip is all first potency, nothing is determinate, and everything awaits determination. Now think of the same trip from the perspective of its completion, i.e. as it will have been documented in a photo album, say, a month after it has ended. Now everything is determinate, there is a definite answer to the question where we went, how we got there, and where we stayed. From this perspective our holiday trip appears in the mode of the second potency: everything is settled and (since we are speaking of past events) nothing could be otherwise. Determinability and determinateness thus emerge as modes in which one and the same being (in this case, that of a holiday trip) can be understood.

Now what fits neither of these modes of thinking concerning the holiday trip is the *actual process* of making the trip. In realising the trip we, so to speak, move what was initially just possible into a state of determinate and no longer determinable reality. This process itself, however, is neither mere possibility nor mere determinateness; rather, it has (at every point) both of these modes as options, for on each step of our journey we can make decisions or change plans while at the same time we do not get stuck in complete indeterminacy.

In a similar way, we can think the third potency as being in as much as it is becoming, even though Schelling has not made this explicit. In fact, my view is that the opaqueness of Schelling's descriptions of the third potency is an effect of the attempt to include this intrinsically processual mode of being in an overall static conceptual framework. Both  $-A$  and  $+A$  are static notions that do not as such imply any movement. In the ideas of determinability and determinateness as such there is no awareness of the dynamic process of becoming determinate. Describing the third potency as "that which levitates between Being and non-Being" (PRP 396)

thus turns out as a compromise between not anticipating a dynamic ontology (which Schelling reserves for a later stage) and yet providing a characterisation for the synthesis of  $-A$  and  $+A$ .

#### 8.2.4 *The Figure of Being and the Preliminary Result of the Doctrine of Potencies*

One result of Schelling's ontological investigation is thus that being is best understood neither as mere indeterminateness nor as mere determinateness, but as a dynamic self-unfolding in which potential determination continuously gets translated into actual determination. This primacy of the third potency however does not mean that the initial steps of the dialectic drop away. By contrast, they remain indispensable steps for grasping the idea of a self-unfolding reality. Thus, on the one hand, being in the guise of the third potency is praised by Schelling as the most complete and self-sufficient account of being:

This [potency] which, [...] possesses itself and has power over itself (and thereby is different from the two previous ones which can only be thought as completely selfless [...]) – [...] this one has the highest claim to be being [*das Seyende zu sein*]. (PRP 290)

On the other hand, however, it is not *totally* self-sufficient in as much as it still has the first and the second potency as its presuppositions. Also the third potency

is not what it is all by itself but only in community with the others, we can only say about this third [potency] that it is a moment or a potency of being; however, with this [idea] all possibility has been exhausted and consequentially we still would not have anything of which we could say that it is being. (PRP 290)

Of course, it is tempting to suggest that while none of the potencies adequately represents being on its own, their conjunction might still be sufficient for this purpose. Schelling does address the conjunction of the three potencies as the “figure of being”, but he is clear that the whole series of potencies still cannot overcome the lack of representing merely the capacity to be rather than actuality itself:

But what about the whole which has necessarily constituted itself in thought, this latter will surely be being? Indeed, but [it is that] merely as a draft [*im bloßen Entwurf*], only in the idea, not actually. Just like each single element only has the capacity to be being, so the whole is being only in such a way that it Is not and merely has the capacity to be. It is the figure of being, not It itself [...]. It gets raised to actuality only if there Is Something [*Eines oder Etwas*] that is [i.e. actualises] these potentialities [*Möglichkeiten*]. Thus far, they exist only in thought as pure noemata. (PRP 313)

I admit that it is somewhat unclear why exactly Schelling thinks that the potencies are not jointly sufficient for the role of that which actualises being. In particular, one may wonder that if their deficiency has something to do with presupposing or depending on each other, their joint presence should do away with this lack. However, the issue of jointness might just be what Schelling is driving at. For we have not yet made explicit what it is that unites the potencies. We have encountered them successively, one by one, but we have not really addressed in virtue of what they belong together. Of course, we have encountered all three potencies in thought, so that in this respect our thinking mind could count as a unifying bond for the threefold figure of being. This, however, would be only a psychological unity brought about by us, not by the subject matter itself. In this respect, Schelling argues, the figure of being is still incomplete and therefore cannot itself be that which actualises the intelligible structure of being:

“In the idea everything is at once”. But this “at once” does not change the fact that one moment is noetically prior to the other. According to their nature (and that just means to say: in thought) it is still the case that the first is the first and the third is the third[.] (PRP 312)

Schelling’s point here seems to be that all three potencies are essential to being and that they can only fully exhaust what being is in their unity. However, their unity is, at the current point of the analysis, only a matter of how we think the potencies and this lack must be overcome.

Whatever would make the potencies more than just a “capacity to be” or being as a “draft” will have to account for their unity. Because of this lack of a unifying principle, Schelling can argue that what we have encountered in pure thought so far still requires a realiser, i.e. something that actualises (or *is*) being as it has revealed itself to pure thought. According to Schelling, the question “What is being?” therefore still has not received a fully satisfying answer because we have not found something that is being in a self-sufficient and independent way.

Does that mean that the experiment which was supposed to establish to what extent being really is being thought has a negative outcome? In a way, Schelling has made it clear that he thinks that the intelligible principles of being (i.e. the potencies) are not actual in their own right but require a realiser. However, this does not automatically rule out that this realiser could be a

thought-immanent principle. At least it is not immediately evident that we could not make further “experiences” in pure thought that might reveal to us what actualises the potencies. The need to test this hypothesis drives the inquiry into a new stage of its development, and Schelling now suggests considering the three-partite structure of the potencies as endowed with an internal principle of actuality. The new approach thus is to assume (for the sake of the argument) that there is something that actualises the potencies so that they can really be principles of actual and not just possible being, and to then check if we are able to grasp this actualiser within thought as something still conceptual. In Schelling’s understanding, to regard the potencies as (by hypothesis) actualised, means to treat them as principles of generation and thus as something akin to Aristotle’s four causes. I will now consider this step of Schelling’s project in some detail.

### 8.3 The Potencies as Principles of Generation

The potencies are now shifted to a new level of analysis under the assumption of their actuality. As such, they are no longer merely principles of possible being but they have, so to speak, received an upgrade to causally relevant principles that govern a world in which things come into being, a world of becoming and generation. The point is to clarify how anything can come to be and how much of this we are able to grasp within the categorical schemes of the potencies.<sup>141</sup> In this role, the potencies are now explicitly treated as principles of generation.

#### 8.3.1 *The Relation to Aristotle’s Four Causes*

Schelling leaves no doubt that this new inquiry is meant to be roughly equivalent to Aristotle’s inquiry into the four causes: “[t]here is no significant difference between the principles we have derived and the well-known principles of Aristotle which are also four in number” (PRP 409). This makes sense in as much as the general character of the (now actualized) potencies is concerned. They are meant to explain how things come to be and this is indeed a key concern of Aristotle’s account too (cf. Höffe 2014, 116). However, Schelling makes it difficult to directly

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<sup>141</sup> Schelling is echoing here Aristotle’s claim that knowledge of things is complete no sooner than it also includes knowledge of their causes: “men do not think they know a thing till they have grasped the ‘why’ of it (which is to grasp its primary cause)” (Phys. II.3 194b15–20).

match the potencies with Aristotle's four causes. In *Physics* II.3 (Phys. 194b20–35) the latter are introduced as follows:

1. *Material cause*: “that out of which things come to be [...] e.g. the bronze of the statue”
2. *Formal cause*: “the form of the archetype [...] e.g. of the octave the relation of 2 : 1”
3. *Efficient cause*: “the primary source of change or coming to rest; e.g. the man who has advice”
4. *Final cause*: “that for the sake of which’ a thing is done, e.g. health is the [final] cause of walking about”

Schelling explicitly addresses the material cause and identifies it with the first potency. According to Beach's (1994, 122) interpretation,<sup>142</sup> the second potency can be interpreted as a version of the formal cause even though Schelling does not explicitly state this. He does, however, use the term “actus purus” in relation to the second potency. This cannot mean here pure act in the sense Aristotle associates with the prime mover and which Schelling reserves for the pre-conceptual facticity of (God's) being. In the present context, the term “pure act” creates instead a contrast to the pure potentiality of the first potency and this makes it plausible indeed to treat this as a version of the formal cause.

The efficient (Aristotle's third) cause is only mentioned in passing by Schelling.<sup>143</sup> Instead, Schelling identifies his notion of third potency with Aristotle's final cause. This brings about the confusing situation that what Schelling calls the *third* cause is equivalent to the *fourth* cause in Aristotle's framework. Schelling also knows a fourth cause which he identifies, however, with the notion of soul and attributes to it the role of providing unity to the causal principles expressed in terms of the potencies. Despite the confusing mismatch regarding the numbering of causes, the

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<sup>142</sup> Unfortunately there is generally very little discussion of the relation between Aristotle's four causes and Schelling's account of the actualised potencies in the literature. Leinkauf (2004), otherwise a reliable resource for Schelling's reception of the classics, is surprisingly silent regarding the issue I am discussing above.

<sup>143</sup> While this is not explicit in the text, one may suspect that Schelling runs the efficient cause together with the first and second potency. One reason to make this assumption is that when Schelling introduces the potencies as causes, he suggests that –A (the material cause) and +A (arguably the formal cause) have effects on each other in as much as they limit each other's tendencies to move being into more or less determinate states (cf. XI 389). At the same time, Schelling suggests in one passage (PRP 390) that the only the second potency could be interpreted as “*efficient cause [wirkende Ursache]*”. Overall it remains unclear if and how the idea of an efficient cause plays a role in Schelling's rendition of the doctrine of causes.

idea of soul as unifying causal principles itself is not against the spirit of Aristotle's thinking: for according to *De Anima*, the soul is indeed equipped with causal powers as a unity of *formal*, *efficient*, and *final cause*.<sup>144</sup>

For Schelling, this unifying of causal principles is tantamount to the idea that soul is itself a cause in addition to the three causes assigned to the potencies. In this respect, soul acts as a realiser for the otherwise merely possible collaboration of distinct causes. This means that the causal principles expressed in terms of the potencies are as such insufficient for a full account of the actual. In Schelling's understanding, this requires a further realiser which he identifies with the idea of the soul. Importantly, this version of the realiser still comes as tied to the intelligible structure it actualises. Ultimately, Schelling's claim will be that even this account of the cause of being is only preliminary. For reasons that have to do with the problems of individuality, he comes to argue that we cannot stick to such an 'integrated' realiser and are forced to admit a principle of actuality that is completely independent from any thinkable determination of being.

### 8.3.2 Schelling's Teleological Account of Generation

Before discussing these far-reaching points of Schelling, we have to come to terms with his account of the potencies as causes. In their actualized guises, the potencies are no longer static principles. Instead, they now represent movements from and towards being. The first potency thus appears as the movement from indeterminacy towards determinate being. It now figures as "the ground and origin of all becoming" (PRP 388) and "rais[es] itself into being" (PRP 389) i.e. into determinateness. In our first encounter with the potencies, we witnessed how thought was bound to move from  $-A$  to  $+A$ . This movement, however, was a property of the successive process of *thinking* the potencies, it occurred "because our thoughts of them are successive" (PRP 312). While we of course continue to think in successive stages of the dialectic, movement has now turned out explicitly as a property of the potencies themselves. They are no longer static

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<sup>144</sup> Cf. *De Anim.* (415b10): "The soul is the cause or source of the living body. The terms cause and source have many senses. But the soul is the cause of its body alike in all three senses which we explicitly recognize. It is the source of movement, it is the end, it is the essence of the whole living body".

ideas that merely occur in the successive activity of thought. Instead, we now encounter them as in themselves dynamic. The first potency has thus turned out as more than just a step on the path towards being (cf. PRP 289) but literally *as this path or transition itself*.

The second potency, by contrast, figures as the transition from determinate being back into indeterminacy. As such, the first two potencies represent tendencies of moving into opposite directions which are, according to Schelling, essential for the very idea of generation:

The first thing [necessary] for [any] generation is the transition from potency into act [*von Potenz zum Actus*], the first thing which must be presupposed therefore is pure potency. This principle, however, would be useless, a lost cause so to speak, if it could not also transition back from act into potency, that is, into itself. Likewise, it would serve me little, if I could only raise my arm without the ability to take it back by putting to rest the muscles that had helped to raise it in the first place. (PRP 409–10)

On Schelling's account, becoming and generation thus require not just the transition towards determinate being but also the opposite movement from determinate being into a state of potentiality and determinability.

If we think of this in hylomorphic terms, we can grasp these opposed tendencies in terms of the information of matter on the one hand, and the materialisation of form on the other. The coming to be of a hylomorphic compound requires movement in both directions: in order to make a cabin, for instance, timber must be organised in a certain way so that it acquires the shape and basic structure of a cabin. In this sense, we are dealing with a transition from lesser to greater determinateness, a movement from raw materials towards cabin parts. At the same time, the form of the cabin, as it might be present in a draft, also undergoes a transition in as much as it becomes endowed with the potentiality of matter. On the drafting table, so to speak, form is set in a definite way. In the actual cabin, however, it is realised in a medium that is not merely definite but also alterable and malleable. In being materialised, form or the determinateness of the second potency is thus moved "in potentiam", as Schelling puts it:

[B]eing which just is [*das rein Seyende = +A*] receives a negation, that is, it receives potentiality [*eine Potenz*], a self [i.e. determinability] within itself. That which previously was without a



self is handed over to itself, it is posited *ex actu puro*, which it was, in *potentiam*[.] (PRP 389)<sup>145</sup>

Thus far, we have assembled the means to grasp generation in terms of opposed principles of moving to and from determinate being. Schelling now invites the thought of a world where these principles are allowed free play by consistently counteracting each other. The result would be a world of flux in which ever new determinations come to be, while at the same time none of them would have the sturdiness to last, as any determination is always also subject to the opposite pull towards potentiality.

To think the generation of something with a definite and lasting structure, it is therefore not enough to think only in terms of an unguided back and forth movement between determinability and determinateness. For instance, in our example of the cabin, we have tacitly assumed that the processes of organizing timber and of materialising form within it are not a random push and pull but involve an order that defines how exactly form is implemented in matter. What is furthermore required therefore are rules that govern processes of becoming so that a stable balance between determinability and determinateness can be achieved:

This shows that a third [principle] is required for conceptually grasping a becoming; not something that is itself the result of a becoming but something that is itself a *cause*. For in both of the two others, there is an in itself boundless desire [*Wollen*]: the first one only wants to maintain itself in Being, the second one only wants to lead it back into non-Being. The third one alone, as the, so to speak, in itself passionless one, can determine at all times i.e. for each moment of the process, to what extent Being shall be overcome [*überwunden*]. (PRP 396)

The third potency thus reoccurs here as a principle of regulation and moderation that mediates between the opposed tendencies that move being back and forth between determinability and determinateness. This third cause on Schelling's list comes into play when becoming is not merely a random process but a purposive and goal directed activity. In this respect, Schelling associates the third potency with the idea of purposiveness as final causation: it "is that which

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<sup>145</sup> Note how Schelling's use of the Latin expressions *ex actu puro* and *in potentiam* supports my interpretation of a movement or transition. For while the preposition *ex* and the corresponding ablativ (*actu*) usually stand for a place from which someone or something departs, the preposition *in* used with the accusative *potentiam* stresses the direction of the movement.

brings about everything purposive from within and is at the same time a purpose itself' (PRP 397 cf. *ibid.* 390, 410). The causal power of this principle is conceived by Schelling in terms of a "*final cause*" (PRP 390) that directs the otherwise chaotic interplay of matter and form towards definite and lasting results.

## 9 What Actualises the Potencies?

We have seen how Schelling develops the theme of the potencies as basic ontological categories in terms of the idea of causal principles. They are thus presented as explainers for how things come to be. This approach stands in the tradition of Aristotle's claim that knowledge of being requires knowledge of its causes i.e. that which explains their generation (cf. *Met.* I.3, 983a20–30). In Schelling's understanding this level of analysis continues the project of grasping what being is through the three potencies; but they are, on this new level, treated as actualised principles i.e. principles that are not just the structure of possible being but also tell us how this structure unfolds within actuality.

This leads us back to the question where the potencies derive their actuality from. One option would be to argue that the three potencies are themselves identical to being so that a further actualiser over and above them is not required. However, Schelling claims that we cannot derive that which provides the potencies with actuality through an analysis of the potencies themselves. Instead, he suggests, we will find that our understanding of their actuality remains incomplete unless we allow for a further principle which has the dedicated function of endowing the potencies with actuality. The all-important question then is to what extent this fourth principle can still be grasped within a metaphysics of pure thought. On Schelling's view, this will ultimately turn out to be impossible because a purely thought-immanent interpretation of the principle is incompatible with the individuality of the things it endows with being.

The task of the rest of the chapter is to reconstruct the argument that leads Schelling to endorse this claim. In a first step, Schelling elaborates on the idea that whatever actualises the potencies must unify them so that their causal powers can collaboratively give rise to an individual thing. In this sense, the actualiser is considered by Schelling as a version of Aristotle's notion of soul and I will begin by explaining Schelling's appropriation of this concept in section 9.1.

For Schelling, the fact that the threefold structure of the potencies requires such a principle that unifies and thereby actualises them shows that this principle represents a more fundamental aspect of the being of things, one which has not become transparent so far. While the potencies have helped us to grasp important *ways of being*, we are now engaging with a more *central way of being* which Schelling associates with Aristotle's notion of substance. As we shall see in section 9.2, Schelling is especially interested in the view that we could grasp this substantial being in terms of the notions of *essence* and *form*.

This background then finally puts us into a position to reconstruct Schelling's argument for a pre-conceptual aspect of being and its relation to the *problem of unique distinction* (section 9.3). For while Schelling accepts an interpretation of substance as *substantial form*, he argues that it is a mistake to interpret such forms as universals. For if the substantial core being of things was a universal, then, on Schelling's view, it would be common to *many* things in a way that undermines them having a unique being that belongs exclusively to the individual. This ultimately leads Schelling to endorse the view that the substance of things cannot be some version of the universal but rather being in a radically pre-conceptual sense. While the former is, on Schelling's view, always a sharable entity, the latter represents being in an intrinsically unique and unsharable sense.

### 9.1 Schelling's Notion of Soul

After establishing the potencies as causal principles, Schelling takes stock and suggests evaluating how far these principles take us in our endeavour to answer the question "What is being?" (cf. PRP 398). Each of them represents a necessary requirement for there to be things or objects at all. In Schelling's understanding, nothing could be or come to be that is not somehow explicable as originating from the threefold causal network of the potencies. Whatever is must

have some connection to this intelligible structure of being and thus be explicable as emerging from the cooperation of material, formal, and final cause.<sup>146</sup>

That being said, we have so far thought of these principles as *distinct* causes so that their unity has not been made explicit. According to Schelling, this is an important blank spot on our map of being. For if the potencies are meant to figure as causes of individual objects i.e. “*things* in the proper sense of the word” (PRP 399), their powers must somehow be bundled together in order to provide being to anything in particular. This is not an altogether implausible idea, for in an individual object, such as a tree, then the matter, form, and the goal to which they serve must be present *at once* and jointly contribute to the generation of an individual tree. In face of this, Schelling raises the question concerning what brings about this jointness of causes, and apparently he thinks that the three potencies taken one by one do not, as such, explain what holds them together and unites them to a joint activity. Some explanation must be given for this unity so that Schelling argues that we need a fourth principle, a fourth cause, in order to complete our understanding of what gives being to things. Thus,

to understand collaboration [*Zusammenwirkung*] among them [the potencies], that is, to understand them as a composite, we had to tacitly presuppose a unity through which the three causes are held together and unified towards a joint effect. [...] This unity, since it has an effect, can only emerge from a cause. It therefore seems that we must proceed to a *fourth* cause. (PRP 399)

Schelling thus introduces a fourth causal principle over and above the three potencies in order to account for their unity. In our discussion of Hegel, we have seen that his basic ontological principles, namely the moments of the concept, are introduced without a further ground of their unity. What accounts for the unity of the concept is not something over and above the relation of mutual requirement among the moments themselves. One may thus raise the question if Schelling’s demand for a fourth cause unifying the threefold structure of the potencies is justified? Schelling himself sets aside any worries about the fourth cause in a rather blunt way,

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<sup>146</sup> As Schelling also puts it “whatever *Is* must also have a relation to the *concept*” and what “has no relation to thought, also does not *truly exist* [nicht *wahrhaft Ist*]” (SET 65/XI.587).

namely by stating that it was “unobjectionable” because “we are familiar with it from Aristotle” (PRP 399). While this appeal to authority hardly counts as an argument for a *fourth* cause, we can use Schelling’s hint in order to learn more about the nature of that which unifies the causal principles discussed so far. For ultimately, the philosophically interesting point is not so much *how many* principles there are, but the nature of the unifying principle itself.

On Aristotle’s account, it is in living beings that the unity of causes becomes manifest. For living things do not depend on external causes in the same way as do objects of lesser ontological esteem, such as for instance, a rock. Most notably in animal life, there is an *internal* principle in which several of the causes relevant for their being are united i.e. “fall in one”:

The soul is the cause or source of the living body. The terms cause and source have many senses. But the soul is the cause of its body alike in all three senses which we explicitly recognize. It is the source of movement, it is the end, it is the essence of the whole living body. (De Anim. 415b10)

Now, we have seen already that the senses of cause explicitly recognized by Schelling are not exactly the same as in Aristotle. Schelling seeks a principle of unity for the material, formal, and final cause and remains vague regarding the efficient cause. The basic idea, however, is the same, namely that the notion of soul has the function of explaining unity among causal principles.

In Schelling’s understanding, providing such unity is tantamount to endowing the potencies with actuality, so that understanding what unifies them would mean to understand what actualises them. At the same time however, this means that as long as we have not developed an account of their unity, we are still unable to grasp that which actualises the potencies. We find ourselves, therefore, once more confronted with the question concerning what unifies and thereby actualises the potencies. Even though we have now considered the possibility that they are endowed with actuality, we have still not made explicit what it is that accounts for this fact. As, so far, we were unable to identify this actualiser, Schelling argues that being as we have grasped it in pure thought remains incomplete and dependent. Lacking self-sufficiency in this way, it is therefore not “*being proper*” (PRP 401).

Our hope, or rather hypothesis, was to find this “being proper”, the being of being, within the sequence of the potencies. This hope, however, has been disappointed by the outcome of the dialectic. Since the potencies themselves have turned out to be insufficient for this purpose, they are no longer candidates for the ‘honourable title’ of that which *is* being. They merely represent what being *can* be, i.e. the *potentiality* of being, not its actuality. To express this lack of actuality of the potencies as a whole, Schelling uses once more hylomorphic language and calls the potencies the *matter of being*. The idea behind this rather idiosyncratic expression is that like matter requires form in order to be actual, the potencies require something that actualises them:

The *being* in being [*das Seyende im Seyenden*] was not [identical with] the three causes as such, that is, in their differentiation and opposition. Here, none of them was something by itself, and [precisely in this] their not-being-for-themselves they were being; as they emerge one by one, they are no longer being but *only the matter, the stuff of being* [my emphasis, LW]. This being, which they were, however, cannot get lost, for also within thought, this was the solely *actual*. The three potencies in their dispersal are, however, merely the possible[.] (PRP 400)

This “matter” is of course *not* to be confused with the materiality of the first potency. Instead we are now dealing with something like a second-order materiality, upstream, that is, of the matter from which cabins and trees originate.<sup>147</sup> Like any matter, however, this second-order matter requires a form that actualises it. Again, this form is not identical with the mere determinateness expressed in the second potency. It is not just some shape that occurs to the matter of a thing, but rather its *substantial form* that governs its entire being. In Schelling’s understanding, this form or actualiser is what we will be talking about when we now consider more closely the notion of soul.

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<sup>147</sup> Schelling also associates this type of matter with Kant’s notion of the “the material of all possibility, which is supposed to contain *a priori* the data for the particular possibility of every thing” (B 600–1). The assumption of such a matter constitutes the starting point for Kant’s doctrine of the transcendental ideal. The tragic of speculative thought then lies in the fact that while we cannot get around thinking this stock of material as necessary for the possibility of finite objects, we are unable to proceed to a legitimate claim about its actuality. For a helpful discussion of Kant’s account cf. Boehm (2012). Note that Schelling, while appealing broadly to Kant’s doctrine of the transcendental ideal, does not import Kant’s appeal to a stock of predicates but develops instead the doctrine of potencies in which being first appears as subject. Sebastian Gardner (2020) has recently published a paper on Schelling’s appeal to Kant’s notion of the sum total of possibilities. Surprisingly however, Gardner refers to a precursor from Kant’s precritical period instead of engaging with the transcendental ideal as it appears in the *Critique* and which is Schelling’s point of reference.

But what exactly does Schelling mean by “soul”? First of all, it would be a mistake to think here of the inner psychic life of a person for we are (still) dealing with fundamental ontological principles. Similarly, Schelling is not talking of a principle exclusive to the realm of living beings but, again, of a *general* ontological principle. Although the soul-principle is most evident in living beings, it is not exclusive to them on Schelling’s view. In a certain, although possibly more primitive sense, all things can be said to derive their actuality from something that unifies the principles grounding their generation. In this wide sense Schelling therefore suggests that we can think of all things as ‘ensouled’ i.e. that “in a certain way [...] everything is full of soul” (PRP 416).<sup>148</sup>

Secondly, it would be wrong to think of the soul as an extension of the threefold structure of potencies. For the potencies have proven to denote potentials of being i.e. what anything must be capable of, if it is to be at all.<sup>149</sup> The new principle of soul, by contrast, stands for that which *actualises* these potentials. This role of an actualiser or realiser of potentials also explains why Schelling uses hylomorphic terms for describing the roles of the potencies: they can be called matter or material because, like matter, they represent potentials. As such they require something that actualises their potential, and in this respect the soul-principle plays a role similar to that of the form of a hylomorphic compound. It actualises what is otherwise merely potential.

Schelling therefore points out that the soul-principle is not one of the potencies, for in relation to them it represents actuality, while the potencies have turned out to be merely potential. In this respect, it is important for Schelling that we “distinguish being from that which *is* being” (PRP 402), the potential from the actuality of being; soul is the latter, while the

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<sup>148</sup> Schelling’s choice of words is reminiscent of how Aristotle reports the view of Thales in *De Anima*: “Certain thinkers say that soul is intermingled in the whole universe, and it is perhaps for that reason that Thales came to the opinion that all things are full of gods” (De Anim. I.5 411a5–10). However, while Aristotle is sceptical of such an approach, Schelling seems to think that some version of it is, in principle, viable.

<sup>149</sup> Within the dialectic of potencies, the second and third potencies play the role of being actually what their predecessors are just possibly. However, the point is that this role of something actual is preliminary and dependent on the actuality of yet higher principles. By the end of the dialectic of potencies we are meant to see that all of them (including the third), are just possible, potential ways of being. None of them has succeeded in defending its initial claim to the title of that which gives actuality to being.



potencies are the former.<sup>150</sup> While soul therefore cannot be a *fourth potency*, it is explicitly referred to as a *fourth cause*. Its effect is to unify the three previously established causal principles so that they jointly bring about being not just in general but also “in a determinate guise [*Gestalt*]” (PRP 403). As such, the soul represents a more fundamental causal principle, one without which the others could not even play their own roles of contributing to the generation of individual things.

## 9.2 Schelling on Substance

The upshot of Schelling’s discussion of the soul-principle is that the potencies, while disclosing important ways in which being can manifest itself, are themselves dependent on a more fundamental principle that unifies and actualises them. Unlike the potencies themselves, this principle “no longer just belongs to being but is indeed essentially *that which Is being*” (PRP 403). It is no coincidence that this distinction between *what just belongs to being* and a *central or core sense of being* is reminiscent of Aristotle. For Schelling obviously thinks that the dialectic has led us into a discourse broadly comparable to that of *Metaphysics VII*, namely the search for a *core sense of being* which Aristotelians call “substance”.<sup>151</sup> Once more the “question which, both now and of old, has always been raised” namely “what being is,” has therefore transformed itself into the question “what is substance?” (Met. VII.1, 1028b4–5).

The point is now to explain how exactly we should think of substance and Schelling discusses this again in close dialogue with Aristotle. In particular, he is interested in the idea that the notions of *essence* [τί ἦν εἶναι] and *form* [εἶδος] are helpful candidates for clarifying the nature

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<sup>150</sup> At the same time, Schelling claims that while the soul-principle is *not one of* the potencies, it is inextricably tied to them: it could neither itself be actual without them or actualize something other than the potencies. Its actuality *is* to give actuality to the structure of being as we have encountered it in the potencies. Soul thus “emerges as actus, but not in such a way, that it could separate itself of that of which it is actus (the cause of being). By contrast, it is in order to be just this [namely the actualiser of the potencies]” (PRP 401). As García (2011, 154) helpfully puts it, “the soul is only the actuality of something potential, material, and it has no being of its own beyond this actualization”. This ultimately makes the soul-principle subordinate to an even higher principle which Schelling identifies with an absolutely pure and “unprethinkable” actuality. Such actuality is proper to God on the one hand, and to man in so far as he is created in God’s image. As we will see later on, in human beings this divine character is manifest as spirit [*Geist*].

<sup>151</sup> For a helpful overview cf. Cohen and Reeve (2021) esp. sections 3 and 5. To avoid misunderstanding, Schelling is interested in the discourse about substance in the *Metaphysics*, not so much in that of the *Categories*. The view that Schelling’s interest in a fundamental sense of being is analogue to Aristotle’s discussions of candidates for the role of substance is also shared by Gabriel (2006, 129–30).

of being in the substantial sense. However, Schelling is vigilant against what he perceives as a fatal misinterpretation of Aristotle, namely the view that the substance of things is a universal. In particular, Schelling denies that genus-universals like *man* or *oak tree* can play the role of substance.

Schelling's reason for denying this will finally lead us back to the discussion of the problem of individuality. As I hope to show, Schelling will come to argue that if we were to treat the substance of things as a universal, we would block the way to a solution of the *problem of unique distinction*. However, to appreciate this move we have to come to terms with his appropriation of Aristotle's notion of *essence* [τί ἦν εἶναι] (section 9.2.1) and its relation to the notion of form [εἶδος] (section 9.2.2).

### 9.2.1 Schelling on Aristotle's Notion τί ἦν εἶναι

So far, Schelling thinks to have shown that being, as it is expressed in terms of the potencies is still not fully self-sufficient and depends on a principle by which it gets endowed with actuality in the first place. On the one hand it is clear that this principle stands for being in a fully self-sufficient and no longer dependent sense. On the other hand, it remains provocatively unclear what is the nature of this being. In this respect, Schelling points to Aristotle's discussion of substance which he assumes to be roughly equivalent to his own interest in a fully self-sufficient being which the dialectic of potencies strived to disclose but couldn't reach. Aristotle considers several initial candidates for the role of substance, of which one, namely the *essence* or "τί ἦν εἶναι" of things turns out as especially important.<sup>152</sup> It is this notion which Schelling also takes under closer consideration.

Superficial acquaintance with Aristotle's philosophy is enough to realize that by pointing to the expression "τί ἦν εἶναι", Schelling is leading us down one of the deepest rabbit holes in scholarship. For this term has kept Aristotle interpreters busy since antiquity and continues to do

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<sup>152</sup> The other "candidates" are the "universal", the "genus", and the "substratum" (cf. Met. VII.3, 1028b33–5).

so today.<sup>153</sup> The reason is that although it plays a central role in Aristotle’s understanding of substance, it is almost untranslatable. While “τί ἦν εἶναι” (from now on “têe”) is often rendered as “essence”, this does not convey but rather cloaks the semantic and grammatical complexity of the Greek original. A more literal translation would be, for instance, “that which it was to be”. Part of what makes the expression difficult to grasp is the use of the past tense (“was”) in relation to a substantivized infinitive of being. Schelling is aware of these difficulties but quickly casts them aside in favour of a less grammatical and more philosophical analysis of the idea expressed as *têe* (cf. PRP 403–6, esp. 401 fn. 1). For despite the grammatical issues in relation to Aristotle’s enigmatic term, it is fair to say that it is used to emphasise what is *central* to the being of a thing as opposed to other, more peripheral aspects of it.<sup>154</sup>

Schelling points to several passages from the *Metaphysics* which he uses to develop his own notion of a central sense of being. When Aristotle introduces the term “têe”, he emphasises that material objects could not come to be without immaterial principles governing their generation.

In this

sense health comes from health and house from house, that with matter from that without matter; for the medical art and the building art are the form of health and of the house; and I call the essence [τί ἦν εἶναι] substance without matter.  
(Met. VII.7 1032b10–5)

One may be tempted to point here to the grammar of the *têe*, and to emphasise the past tense in the literal rendition “that which it *was* to be”: one *first* needs the skill or art of building before one can *then* go about actually assembling bricks and timber into a house. In this sense, something immaterial, namely a skill, *was* there already before something material (namely a house) can come to be. However, this sense of temporal priority is not what Schelling is after: “the *têe* is by no

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<sup>153</sup> For a helpful commentary on the various ways of rendering and interpreting this expression cf. Weidemann (1996).

<sup>154</sup> One way of specifying the relevant sense of “centrality” here is to point to the fact that Aristotle links the *têe* to the *definition* of a thing. The *têe* would thus indicate the being which corresponds to the definition of a thing, for instance, “the ‘what it is to be’ of a tiger” (Cohen and Reeve 2021, section 7). However, as we shall see in due course, Schelling thinks that it is very important to carefully keep apart the definable and conceptual aspects of a thing from the core of its being. This is why I use the more neutral formulation “what is central to the being of a thing” rather than speaking of its “definitory being”.

means *just* what *was* but what continuously *is* in the thing” (PRP 404 fn. 1; emphasis added).

Schelling’s focus is not so much on temporal but rather on *ontological* priority.<sup>155</sup>

Aristotle expresses the idea of ontological priority by stating that the *tête* “is also called the substance [οὐσία] of each thing” (Met. V.8, 1017b20–5) as well as by emphasising that reference to some thing’s *tête* is always reference to what this thing is – not just accidentally but – “in virtue of itself”:

The τί ἦν εἶναι of each thing is what it is said to be in virtue of itself. For being you is not being musical; for you are not musical in virtue of yourself. What, then, you are in virtue of yourself is your τί ἦν εἶναι. (Met. VII.4 1029b13)

What Schelling recognizes in the above quoted passages, is the idea of a substantial core being of things, something which figures as the cause of their very existence as opposed to other, less substantial aspects of their being (e.g. being musical). Echoing Aristotle’s talk of being *in virtue of oneself*, Schelling thus writes: “the τί ἦν εἶναι is each thing [*jegliches*] according to what *IT itself* is [nachdem was *ES selbst* ist], independently from any contingency, materiality, and otherness” (PRP 405). In his own terminology, Schelling expresses the idea of such a core being as that “which *is* being as such [das Seyende überhaupt *seyende*]” (403) and as “that which is being in each [individual] case” (405).

### 9.2.2 Substance as Form

The interpretation of substantial being as *tête* highlights that the substance of a thing is tied to its very existence. For instance, things can survive changes in terms of accidental features, and they can also gain and lose some of their matter. However, they cannot undergo change with regards to their substance without also ceasing to exist. While this does bring us somewhat closer to an understanding of the nature of substance, this understanding still remains somewhat in the abstract. One would like to know what exactly this substantial core consists of or what sort of entity plays this role according to Schelling. To the surprise of any reader who expects here a

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<sup>155</sup> Schelling also writes that Aristotle treats the *tête* as a cause which is “the first” not by time but “by dignity” [*der Würde nach die erste*]. This probably relates to Aristotle’s notion of a “first cause” as expressed in Met. I.3, 983a20–30. Cf. Schelling’s fn. 1 in PRP 403.

radical departure from Hegel's idealism, Schelling does not hesitate to connect the substantial core of things with the notion of form, so that, like Hegel, we find him ultimately arguing for a version of the theory of *substantial forms*. In what follows, I will present evidence for Schelling's endorsement of the view that the substantial core of each thing is a substantial *form*. Against this background I will then show how Schelling's version of this account is nonetheless indeed still radically different from Hegel's.

Regarding the first of these issues, we can point, for instance, to the fact that Schelling describes the substantial core being of things as “εἶδος ἐνὸν” which he translates with “immanent form” (PRP 404 fn. 1). Furthermore, when elaborating on that which “*is* being”, Schelling quotes a passage from the *Metaphysics* where Aristotle identifies the notion of form with the *tête* and the primary substance of things: “By form [εἶδος] I mean the τί ἦν εἶναι of each thing and its primary substance [πρώτην οὐσίαν]” (Met. VII.7, 1032b1–5). Underscoring the importance of this material for his own account, Schelling adds:

It will not be without benefit to linger on with this passage [Met. 1032b1–5] for a moment. What is called εἶδος and gets equated with the τί ἦν εἶναι here, was translated by the scholastics with “form”; quite appropriately as an opposition to matter i.e. the most general, because all-receiving being which is most remote from anything that is a *This*. (PRP 406)

This should make it sufficiently clear that Schelling thinks that the substantial core being of things is their form in the sense of a substantial form, i.e. that aspect of a thing which it cannot lose without also losing its existence. Schelling also has no objection to referring to such forms by using a “sortal [*Gattungsbegriff*]” (PRP 406) such as *man*, *oak tree* or *living being*. A man can be musical, dark-haired, and so on, but these traits represent accidental forms, not the substantial core of what this individual is “in virtue of itself”. By contrast, what he is throughout his existence is a living being and a man, and he could not fail to be such without also failing to exist at all.

In face of this, one may wonder whether Schelling has ultimately arrived at a position that is more similar to, rather than different from, that of Hegel. For we have seen that the heart and soul of Hegel's account is to revive the doctrine of substantial forms in the guise of the concrete

universal i.e. the substance-kind. As we have seen now, Schelling's account is not entirely dissimilar to this project, at least not regarding the idea that forms constitute the substantial basis for individual beings and that they can be associated with sortals like *man* or *oak tree*. Given that Schelling, at the same time, clearly seeks to provide an alternative to Hegel's metaphysics, this is indeed surprising. One may come to sympathize with Schelling's contemporary Franz von Baader, who marvelled that Schelling "always wants to say something different than Hegel and yet, he ends up saying almost the same thing" (Baader 1963, 147)<sup>156</sup>. Nonetheless, all that being said, it is precisely the doctrine of substantial forms that offers insight into a crucial difference between both authors. In the next section, I will therefore show where Schelling finally turns in a decidedly different direction than Hegel.

### 9.3 Individuality and Pre-Conceptual Being

The puzzle that we have arrived at is this: the basic trait of Schelling's later philosophy is insistence on a pre-conceptual dimension of reality. At the same time, he seems to subscribe to the doctrine of substantial forms which – in Hegel's hands – is a powerful tool for demonstrating the thoroughgoing conceptuality and intelligibility of all reality. What has happened? Did Schelling ultimately slip back into a more traditional idealist perspective? In what follows, I will argue that he did not, and to understand why, we have to engage once more with an important aspect of Schelling's Aristotelianism, namely his precise understanding of what sort of entity a substantial form is.

The solution to the puzzle is that Schelling has a different interpretation of substantial forms as opposed to Hegel. On Schelling's reading, forms are no universals in the sense that they could be common to many. Although Hegel, of course, always insists that the universal is not *just* common to many, he never denies that universals like *man* and *oak tree* (which for him play the role of substantial forms) are the same in many individuals, their equally *common* and *substantial* basis.

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<sup>156</sup> Cf. Tilliette (1992, 173) who also mentions this passage from Baader.

For instance, Hegel concedes on one occasion that “commonality is also a universal, albeit only an outer form of universality” (EL §20R). Furthermore he holds that “substantial universality [...] is the genus” (SL 619/12.120) where it is clear that a genus collectively applies to all individuals belonging to it. Where Hegel criticizes the view that universality is tantamount to commonality he carefully uses the expression “not merely” to indicate that universality comprises more than commonality: “the fact that they [many individual humans] are collectively human beings is not merely something common to them, but their *universal*, their *genus*, and all these individuals would not be at all without this, their genus” (EL §175A). This warrants the correct conclusion that Hegel denies that universality and commonality are one and the same, it does not, however mean that universals could somehow fail to be common to all their instances. Schelling, by contrast, explicitly denies that the substantial form of an individual can be common to many. Instead, he argues that forms must be unique in each case and as such peculiar to each individual.

Many philosophers find this idea that forms could be anything other than universals deeply counterintuitive. Even those who disagree with Plato about the separate existence of such forms may still feel attracted by the idea that individuals of the same kind share *literally the same* form. As Plato has it, all beautiful things share in the same form of beauty:

if there is anything beautiful besides the Beautiful itself, it is beautiful for no other reason than that it shares in that Beautiful, and I say so with everything. Do you agree to this sort of cause?—I do. (*Phaedo* 100c)

One does not have to agree with Plato on the independent existence of forms in order to agree with him on the idea that all things belonging to one kind (“anything beautiful”) have *one and the same* substantial form (“the Beautiful itself”) as their primary cause or substance. In fact, many of those walking in the footsteps of Aristotle do agree in this respect: for instance, Michael Loux (2018, 103) regards Aristotle as committed to the claim “that it is form understood as something somehow common to all the members of a given species that is primary *ousia*”.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> As Loux (2006b, 115) also puts it: the “essences of concrete objects are inherently general, [...] essences are things shared by all the members of a kind”.

However, as Frede and Patzig (1988, I.48–57, II.243–52) have shown in their impressive two volume commentary and translation of *Metaphysics VII*, this interpretation is subject to strong textual counter-evidence supporting the claim that forms cannot be treated as universals. Of course, this perspective brings up new problems, for instance regarding the question what it means for individuals to belong to the same kind – if this does not mean to share the same form. The philosophical appeal of the so-called *forms-as-individuals-reading* however is that it can offer solutions to a number of problems in the vicinity of the problem of individuality (such as, for instance, the problem of numerical difference, issues of diachronic identity, and, as I will argue in relation to Schelling, the *problem of unique distinction*).<sup>158</sup>

Schelling can be seen as an early representative of this interpretation, and he incorporates elements of Aristotle’s appeal to non-universal forms into his own ontology. Most notably, Schelling appropriates Aristotle’s claim that the substance of things cannot be a universal if it is to ground the existence of individuals. In Schelling’s hands this account of forms turns out to support the assumption of a pre-conceptual dimension of being as pure activity i.e. pure thatness. Bringing up this topic thus allows me to finally relate my engagement with Schelling’s later philosophy back to the central topic of this thesis, namely the problem of individuality. As I hope to show, Schelling’s argument relates especially to the third problem which I have called the *problem of unique distinction*, and which has turned out as the most difficult one within Hegel’s framework.

### 9.3.1 Schelling’s Callias Example

We have already seen that, according to Schelling, substantial forms give rise to being as something uniquely tied to an individual: the *tête* (which Schelling identifies with the form or *eidos* of things) provides being to “each thing [*jegliches*] according to what *IT itself* is [*nachdem was ES selbst ist*]” and “independently from any [...] otherness” (PRP 405). This shows that for Schelling, the primary cause of being is closely connected with individuality; especially with the

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<sup>158</sup> For a recent defence of the *forms-as-individuals-reading* cf. Koslicki (2018, 76–103).



idea that the being that is actualised by a substantial form is the being of an *individual* that has a unique self which it shares with no other thing. For Schelling it seems to be clear that such uniqueness is not an accidental feature of things. Instead, it is something they derive from their very substance. If this is correct, then the substance of things, i.e. their substantial form, must be suitable to convey uniqueness to the individual. This is precisely why Schelling is sceptical of treating substantial forms as universals, namely because he thinks that this is incompatible with the task of giving rise to the being of an individual with a unique self.

To demonstrate that the substantial forms of individual beings should not be understood as universals and, as such, common to the individuals that have them, Schelling invites a thought experiment: If a painter wanted to make a portrait of an individual, say Callias, what would he focus on? What aspect of Callias' being would be most suitable for singling out Callias as the very one he is? A first attempt could be made with Callias' accidental properties, such as, for instance, "brown of colour or white, with full hair or bold and so on" (PRP 405). Such properties are related to Callias' being in as much as they convey what Callias is *like*. However, they are not suitable for carving out his individuality, for even in their entirety they do not represent Callias as the very individual he is: "none of this is Callias" (PRP 405). As Schelling points out, "nothing is contained in this [collection of properties] that he [Callias] would not share with others, in conjunction this would amount to nothing more than material similarity" (PRP 405). Schelling knows of course that accidental properties (like the ones mentioned above) are not necessarily ideal candidates for the role of substance. Aristotle would say, they are not what Callias is "in virtue of himself", while Hegel might argue that such features are merely "abstract universals" that may contribute to Callias' particular character but do not, as such, make him the sort of thing he is. But Schelling's key worry is a very different one, as we have emphasised, namely that such properties do not make Callias – or anything else – *the very individual* he is because they can be shared by others.

Schelling then suggests a different option, namely to identify Callias' substantial being with a genus-concept such as *man* or *living being*: “to the question: what is Callias? One can answer by virtue of a genus-concept [*Gattungsbegriff*], for instance: he is a living being” (PRP 406).

However, this option is quickly discarded as well. According to Schelling, universals like *man* or *living being* have an important connection to what Callias is, but they should not be treated as an individual's cause of being because they are not unique to the individual:

[B]ut that which is for him the cause of being (in this case the cause of life) is not something universal. It is not second ousia but ousia in the first and highest sense, *prote ousia*, and the latter is *unique* to each and for *nothing else*. The universal by contrast, is common to many [...]. (PRP 406–7)

This passage is obviously and explicitly (cf. PRP 407, fn. 1) a reference to the famous lines in which Aristotle casts doubt on the idea that substantial forms can be universals (Met. VII.13, 1038b5–15). In order to understand this important background of Schelling's thinking as well as what he makes of it, I will now take a closer look at the relevant background material.

### 9.3.2 *No Universal can be Substance*

Schelling says in the Callias example that the cause of being, i.e. the substantial form of an individual, “is not something universal” and that we should think of the substance of things in terms of something unique or peculiar to them. The inspiration for this claim comes from a passage in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* that is as famous as it is controversial. Depending on interpretation, Aristotle he can be seen as arguing that substantial forms cannot be universals:

The universal also is thought by some to be in the fullest sense a cause, and a principle [cf. Plato's *Phaedo* (100c)]; therefore let us attack the discussion of this point also. For it seems impossible that any universal term should be the name of a substance. For primary substance is that kind of substance which is peculiar to an individual, which does not belong to anything else; but the universal is common, since that is called universal which naturally belongs to more than one thing. Of which individual then will this be the substance? Either of all or of none. But it cannot be the substance of all; and if it is to be the substance of one, this one will be the others also; for things whose substance is one and whose essence is one are themselves also one. (Met. VII.13, 1038b5–15)<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> On the interpretation of this passage cf. Frede and Patzig (1988, I.48–57, II.243–52).

This passage is often summarized as the claim that “no universal can be substance”. The catchy slogan, however, cannot hide that the argument in support of it is notoriously complicated. Below I offer a discussion of the argument based on a simplified reconstruction.<sup>160</sup> While my reconstruction certainly does not cover all levels of complexity involved, it will help to see more clearly what philosophical issues are at hand:

- 1) A universal is common to all of its instances.
- 2) Things whose substance is one are themselves also one.
- 3) If a universal is the substance of anything at all, then it is the substance of either all or of none of its instances.
- 4) If a universal is the substance of all of its instances, then all of its instances are one.
- 5) The instances of a universal are not one.
- 6) Therefore (by 1–5), a universal is not the substance of all of its instances.
- 7) Therefore (by 3 & 6), a universal is the substance of none of its instances.<sup>161</sup>

This argument is meant to show us that the consequence of treating universals as the substance of individuals are not acceptable. A lot depends here on premise 4): it states what (arguably) makes it impossible for a universal to play the role of substance. The reason, as stated by Aristotle, is that then all the individuals that are instances of the universal would share their substance and therefore turn out as “themselves one”. Roughly, the idea is that if a universal like *man* was the substance of all human beings, then all human beings would be somehow “one”.

It remains unclear though, what exactly is meant here by “being one” (cf. Loux 2018, 207). Surely this must be a sense of being one which is significantly problematic if applied to the individuals that share a universal as their substance. For otherwise the argument would not give us a good reason to be sceptical about treating universals as the substance of things.

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<sup>160</sup> This is a modified version of the reconstruction offered in Loux (2018, 203–5).

<sup>161</sup> Consequently, a universal also could not be the substance of anything other than its instances. For the instances of a universal were assumed to be the only candidates for things of which it could be the substance.

For instance, Aristotle might be thinking here of “being one” in terms of many individuals belonging to the same species. But this would be a rather unproblematic consequence of sharing the same universal as substance, and it is hard to see why oneness in species should lead to the conclusion that the universal cannot play the role of substance. So perhaps Aristotle is thinking of a stronger sense of oneness, namely *numerical unity* (cf. Frede and Patzig 1988, II.248). In this case, the argument would be that sharing the same universal as substance makes all things that have this substance numerically identical i.e. one single thing. For instance, all human beings would then be one single thing. But then again, this also seems to be an unlikely interpretation because Aristotle (whether rightly or wrongly) points to matter as that which generates numerical difference among individuals despite them being one in terms of their form (cf. Met. VII.8, 1034a5–8).

The truth is that it remains unclear in what sense Aristotle thinks that sharing a universal makes many individuals “one”. In face of the ongoing debates about this exegetic issue, it would be unwise to make any attempt at deciding it here. However, the ambiguity of the relevant passage itself is enough to show that Schelling has considerably interpretative leeway regarding his own productive appropriation of Aristotle. Regarding Schelling’s interest in the problem of treating universals as substance, I think that neither the idea of being one in species, nor that of being one in number, are the best interpretative option.

Schelling asks what is the cause of being for an individual, and he makes clear that whatever we come up with as an answer must secure a unique identity for this individual i.e. it must make it the very thing it is and non-substitutable for any other. Schelling then tells us that universals such as, for instance, “brown of colour or white, with full hair or bold” (PRP 405), but also genus-concepts such as “living being”, are ill-fitted for this role because other things can have them too i.e. Callias can “share [them] with others” (PRP 405). The point Schelling is making does not seem to be that Callias, Socrates, and all other living beings would somehow melt into a single object if they were to share *living being* as their substance. Rather, the point is

that they would lose that which makes them the unique living beings they are, individuals that cannot be substituted for one another.

### 9.3.3 *What Sort of Entity is a Form if it is no Universal? Εἶδος as Actus*

We have seen that for Schelling, a substantial form cannot be a universal if it is to ground the being of an individual. If any thing's substance was a universal (and thus potentially common to many) this thing would lack any unique distinction from other things that share in its substantial form. Therefore, substantial forms cannot be universals on (my reconstruction of) Schelling's account.

But if substantial forms are not universals, what then are they? Schelling's suggestion is that they are *activities*. Ironically, this claim looks again suspiciously Hegelian. For it is one of Hegel's great ontological innovations to reject an interpretation of substantial forms as something passive and instead to develop an account of substantial forms as activities. However, for Hegel it is important that on his activity-related interpretation of form, forms remain universals. Although Hegel denies that universality can be reduced to mere commonality, the fact that forms turn out as active is meant to be fully compatible with the idea that these forms are collectively shared by all members of a kind.<sup>162</sup> This is why for Hegel, the activity-related interpretation of form should be understood as an appeal to *ways* or *patterns* of being active. For ways or patterns of activity can be shared by many, numerically distinct individuals existing in such and such ways. As we have also seen via Hegel, this approach raises the question of what makes each of these individuals the very one it is, and as such uniquely distinct from and non-substitutable for any other. This problem presents, as I hope to have shown, a difficulty for Hegel.

Schelling, as we shall see now, entertains a more radical version of the forms-as-activities account. In particular, he will argue that ultimately, substantial forms can only be the cause of

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<sup>162</sup> For instance, Hegel identifies the universal in its role as substance with the *genus* to which an individual belongs together with other individuals of the same kind: "substantial universality [...] is the genus" (SL 619/12.120). And while he thinks that commonality does not exhaust universality, he still accepts it as a "form of universality": "commonality is also a universal, albeit only an outer form of universality" (EL §20R).

being for an individual because the relevant way or pattern of activity gets distinguished from the act itself, i.e. the bare fact *that* there is an activity rather than the way in which it manifests itself. The former then, is considered to constitute a pre-conceptual, non-sharable basis for the being of things which is no longer sharable by many.

Certainly, to be intelligible, this idea requires closer consideration and I will now try to explain how Schelling implements it in his ontology. For this purpose, it is helpful to consider a passage where Schelling discusses the alternative translations of Aristotle's term εἶδος, that is, the expression Schelling interprets as denoting the substantial form of things. What is philosophically at issue here, is not so much an issue of translation, but rather in what ontological category substantial forms belong. As Schelling suggests in the quote below, one's preferred translation of εἶδος betrays where one stands philosophically on this question:

Recently, some translate it [eidōs] with *concept*, but the concept, according to them, contains the What (the τί ἐστίν [ti estin]), although they later add: the concept is the *solely actual*. But they say the same thing of the universal, and they attribute this doctrine also to Aristotle. (PRP 406)

These “recent” translators are, without a doubt, Hegel and the Hegelians.<sup>163</sup> But we should not get distracted by this and instead focus on what Schelling thinks they get wrong. The key issue is that an interpretation of eidōs as “concept” invites the idea that it ultimately belongs in the category of universals which are sharable entities.

When Aristotle wants to emphasise the intelligible and universal structure of things, he sometimes uses the expression τί ἐστί/τί ἐστίν which introduces questions of the form “What is x?” and can be used in a substantivized form where it is commonly translated as “the What” of things. In this respect, the expression denotes the essence of a thing in terms of a universal that is predicated of it, e.g. in terms of the genus-concept *man* which is predicated of Callias. It cannot

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<sup>163</sup> As noted by García (2011, 154 fn. 19) Schelling might be referring here to the Aristotle chapter in Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Here (TWA 19.200–2) Hegel translates “καὶ εἶδος” with “das Allgemeine”. At the same time, he recognises that as the soul of a living being “substance is active form” and an “entelechy”. While Hegel thus also follows an interpretation of Aristotelian forms as activities he combines this with the idea that forms are universals.

be disputed that in Aristotle “the What” has an eminent role in indicating the substantial core being of things. The following passage shows this clearly:

that which is primarily is the “what”, which indicates the substance of the thing. For when we say of what quality a thing is, we say that it is good or beautiful, but not that it is three cubits long or that it is a man; but when we say *what* it is, we do not say “white” or “hot” or “three cubits long”, but “man” or “God”. (Met. VII.1, 1028a10–20)

Schelling has no objection to this analysis in general – in fact, it corresponds to his own way of talking about the potencies as the intelligible structure (“the What”) of things. However, he considers it a mistake (both in terms of a reading of Aristotle and philosophically) to identify the What which is connected to the substance of things with this substance itself. For Schelling, these are two different matters. As to the ontological nature of the substance i.e. substantial form of things, Schelling therefore opts for an interpretation of *eidos* as “actus”, i.e. activity:

Aristotle, however, treats the *eidos* as *actus*. That means, it is not a mere What but rather the That of the What which has been posited in being. The same applies to the *usia* in as much as it is the cause of Being – in our words: that which *is* being – in each case of being [*dem jedesmal Seyenden*]. (PRP 406)

This passage confirms that Schelling interprets the substantial form as an activity. The form (*eidos*) and substance (*usia*) of things is “actus”. However, the view that substantial forms are activities as such is not tantamount to them being unsharable and unique in each case. Hegel, for one, treats the substantial form as an activity without therefore denying that many individuals can partake in it. Similarly, contemporaryhylomorphists, such as Kosman (2013, 81) for instance, think that forms are the exercise of an “essential activity” and therefore substantial – without therefore turning their backs on the *forms-as-universals-interpretation* (cf. Koslicki 2018, 64–5). Broadly speaking, the key to treating forms as activities while also treating them as sharable entities is to focus on the *way* in which the activity manifests itself. For instance, Callias and Socrates both live human lives and that means they are engaging in *the same activity*.

Schelling, by contrast, explicitly rejects the *forms-as-universals-interpretation*. Therefore, his focus is not so much on *what* individuals do, but rather on the fact *that* they are active at all. As he highlights in the quote above, in being an activity, the substantial form is not “a mere What” but

instead a “That”. That is, the form as activity is considered in terms of the facticity of its being and not merely in terms of its structure, way, or pattern.

To be sure, this “That” is still said to entertain a connection to the intelligible and universal essence of things in as much as it actualises an activity of a certain *type*, for instance, a human activity in a human individual such as Callias; hence Schelling’s remark that the substantial form it is the *That of a What*. At the same time, that which is responsible for individuating Callias as the very human being he is, can only be the former, the *That* of his activity, not the sharable way in which it is carried out.

Schelling thus makes the assumption that there is an important ontological distinction between the way in which an activity is carried out and the fact that there is activity at all. The latter is treated as radically pre-conceptual, unshareable, and therefore unique in each individual case. It is this distinction that allows Schelling to provide an answer to the question what makes an individual the very individual it is and to thereby offer a solution to the problem of unique distinction, the third problem of individuality as defined at the beginning of this thesis and the one which proved to be most difficult within Hegel’s account.



## 10 Schelling's Appeal to Activities as Pre-Conceptual Being

It should have become clear that Schelling's reason to accept a pre-conceptual level of reality are closely connected to his views on individuality. As we have seen, Schelling thinks that the substance of things ultimately consists in something that is not sharable by many and instead is peculiar to each individual. That which individuates things in this sense therefore cannot be a universal and is identified by Schelling with the pre-conceptual Thatness or factual existence of things. With this we can see that Schelling does not introduce the idea of a pre-conceptual aspect of reality without argument. Instead, we came to see that he embeds this controversial move into the argument that such pre-conceptual reality is required in order for there to be individuals with a unique identity. Importantly this argument is independent from Schelling's views on mythology or religion, so that we do not need to point to these in order to evaluate whether or not appeal to pre-conceptual reality it is a sound move. All we had to do was to consider carefully how Schelling uses Aristotle's views about substantial forms in order to develop his own account of individual beings.

At the same time however, the solution proposed to the problem of unique distinction by Schelling comes at the cost of reintroducing something that cannot be known through conceptual thought. This raises the question to what extent the proposed solution can even count as explanatorily satisfactory. After discussing this issue (section 10.1), I will proceed to a further difficulty with Schelling's account, namely his claim that the Thatness of things is always already tied to an intelligible Whatness (section 10.2). In particular, I will raise the question whether the arguably individuating Thatness of Schelling's account is sufficiently independent from the intelligible What-aspect of being in order to carry out its role of an individuator. I will argue here that while Schelling does claim that Thatness is normally connected to Whatness, he also entertains the view that the relation holding between both is asymmetrical and that Thatness is prior to Whatness.

This appeal to a priority of a pre-conceptual reality can evoke the association of a nominalist position, either in terms of the view that universals only exist in the mind or in terms of the view that universals do not exist at all. However, I argue (in section 10.3) that neither of these types of nominalism applies to Schelling and that his position should rather be considered as an unorthodox version of conceptual realism. In section 10.4, I raise the question of how we can engage with the pre-conceptual reality which, according to Schelling, makes us fully individual. I conclude that while we cannot do so conceptually, we can acquire practical knowledge of it. Section 10.5. provides a summary of what has been said about Schelling.

#### 10.1 Schelling and the Issue of Unknowables

First of all, one may wonder how much of a solution to the problem of unique distinction Schelling even presents. For with the Thatness of an individual's activity, a conceptually unknowable element is being introduced. Since we cannot intellectually engage with any thing's Thatness, it seems we have no way of knowing what it is that arguably makes, for instance, Callias the very one he is.

In my view, this is a bullet Schelling must bite. If individuality as uniqueness is brought about by a pre-conceptual dimension of being, we cannot grasp it conceptually. However, this is not necessarily a problem from Schelling's perspective. Rather it confirms what Schelling had claimed already in 1809, namely that there is an "incomprehensible base of reality in things, the indivisible remainder, that which with the greatest exertion cannot be resolved in understanding but rather remains eternally in the ground" (FE 29/ VII.159–60).

Reliance on such a pre-conceptual dimension of reality as the basis of individuality in things does mean indeed that we cannot epistemically confirm what makes any individual the very one it is. This epistemic issue, however, is not ultimately Schelling's concern. His concern is with being, and on his view, the thorough analysis of the idea of being leads us to a point where we are bound to admit that being cannot become fully transparent to thought, that it ultimately slips through the 'diamond net' thought casts onto it. However, on Schelling's view this result is

what the thorough and honest investigation of a metaphysics of pure thought leaves us with. We may not like it but, in Schelling's opinion, it is where the argument, or rather, the dialectic, leads.

## 10.2 Is Thatness Sufficiently Independent to Play the Role of an Individuator?

That being said, one may also have the opposite worry about Schelling's account, namely that the Thatness of things has not been shown to be sufficiently independent from the intelligible What-aspect of being in order to carry out its role of an individuator. For while Schelling claims that the substantial form (or soul) is not a mere What, he also says that it is not a mere That either.

Instead, it is "the That of the What" (PRP 406) and as such always already amalgamed together with the universal, intelligible, and sharable aspect of being. Schelling also writes in relation to his notion of the substantial form as soul that it "emerges as actus, but not in such a way that it could separate itself of that of which it is actus (the cause of being). By contrast, it exists exclusively for the sake of being this latter [namely the actualiser of the potencies]" (PRP 410). As García (2011, 154) puts it, "the soul is only the actuality *of* something potential, material, and it has no being of its own beyond this actualization".

In face of this, one may be tempted to go even further and to interpret the actuality of substantial forms as a mere by-product of the universals that manifest themselves in various ways or patterns of activity. This however is not Schelling's point. Instead he thinks that while That and What are always connected on the level of finite beings, they ultimately turn out as separable with respect to both the divine reality of God and the being which is created in his image, namely man. In fact, Schelling argues that the tight connection between the energetic act of being and its intelligible structure constitutes the basis for a feeling of incomplete individuality in finite individuals:

All finite things [*Alles Werdende*] however long for that which is neither the possibility nor (like the soul) the actuality of an other and therefore Is plainly for itself and separately from everything else; [they long] for that which therefore is no longer a principle like the ones we have formerly called principles, that is, a universal but instead an absolute individual and as such pure, untainted actuality which excludes all potentiality, not entelechy but pure energy [...]. (PRP 412)

God, as he can be addressed within the negative philosophy, is “that in which there is absolutely nothing universal” (SET 65/XI.586) and this makes him an eminent case of individuality, an absolute individual as opposed to the sort of thing “that we normally call an individual [*Einzelnes*] (for the latter always still contains within itself so much that is universal)” (SET 65/XI.586).

Now, the point is that for Schelling, the connection of That and What which we encounter in finite things is not necessary in principle and that both dimensions of being remain distinct – even if they normally come as a pair. With God, there is at least one individual where Schelling considers the pure act of existence as fully independent from its possible (but not necessary) connection to the realm of universals. Here we have a perfect case of individuality and this involves the separateness of That and What.

However, this also includes the possibility of these separate levels to entertain a connection which Schelling does not hesitate to call “the unity [*Einheit*] of being and thought” (SET 65/XI.587). God as pure act thus “contains in himself nothing except the pure thatness of his own Being” but this does not exclude the possibility of him having “a relation to thought, a relation [...] to the *concept of all concepts*, to the *Idea*” (SET 65/XI.587).

These passages are interesting regarding Schelling’s theological views and his engagement with special metaphysics. For our current purpose however, they reveal something quite independent from these subjects. Namely, they show that for Schelling the unity of being and thought is not a matter of identity but rather denotes a different relation which we could call connectedness. Indeed, Schelling holds that this relation is asymmetrical and that Being (or Thatness) enjoys priority over thought, i.e. the universal structure of reality:

In this unity, however, the priority does not lie on the side of thought; *Being* is the first, thinking only the second or following. This opposition is likewise that of the universal and what is individual *per se*. But the path does not go from the universal to the individual, as people generally seem to hold these days. (SET 65/XI.587)<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> This passage describes Schelling’s view on the relation of being and thought in God. I do not want to give the impression that this is simply the same as in finite beings. However just a few lines below, Schelling finds it necessary to remind the reader that the priority of being applies “especially [to] what is the individual in the highest sense”

Thus, on Schelling's view, Thatness is anything but a mere by-product of the universal structure of things, even if it is normally (in finite things) connected to it. By contrast, for Schelling, it is this universal structure that is secondary to the in itself purely individual core being of things:

What one should say, rather, is that the individual [*das Individuelle*] [...] realizes itself, i.e., makes itself intelligible, or enters into the sphere of reason and knowledge, inasmuch as it generalizes itself [...]. (SET 65–6/XI.588)

As Schelling puts it here, it is non-universal and in this sense individual being that first establishes the connection to the “sphere of reason” i.e. the realm of universals. One may of course have doubts about the view that there can be such a distinction and independence of what Schelling calls Thatness, unprethinkable being and so on. However, I hope to have shown that it is clear that Schelling claims this independence and that there is no indication that it is not also present in the realm of finite individuals.

Above I have addressed the worry that on Schelling's account, pre-conceptual Thatness might not be sufficiently independent from the universal and sharable Whatness of things in order to constitute an independent ground for the unique identity of individuals. What I hope to have shown via Schelling's understanding of divine being is that he makes a distinction between the purely energetic act and the intelligible structure of being. It should have become clear that wherever the latter are presented as entertaining a unity by Schelling, this unity should not be understood as an identity but rather as a relation between two in principle separable realms of being. Furthermore, we have seen that within this relation, Schelling regards the universal as dependent on pre-conceptual being.

### 10.3 Schelling and Nominalism

Schelling's appeal to a priority of Thatness, i.e. the pre-conceptual aspect of reality, implies that concepts or universals somehow come second. This can invite the interpretation that Schelling ends up with a nominalist position according to which universals in some way lack reality. At the

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(SET 66/588) i.e. to God. It would make no sense to highlight that this is *especially* the case regarding God if it was not *also* the case for all other individuals.

same time, however, Schelling is also very eager to show that the being which we encounter in pure thought is not just something psychological but also, as its name suggests, a form of being. This makes it rather difficult to judge what Schelling ultimately thinks about the ontological status of the conceptual. In this section, I will make an attempt at clarifying this issue and opt against a nominalist interpretation.

In the classical, Lockean sense, nominalism is the view that universals are mind-dependent entities whereas contemporary philosophers tend to regard nominalism as the view that universals do not exist at all. In my judgment, neither view adequately captures Schelling's position. On the first issue, it seems clear that Schelling does not think that universals are only our projection onto the world. Rather, on his view, the question of their status depends on their standing within mind-independent reality itself. Nonetheless, on the second issue, this leaves open that Schelling might be a nominalist in the modern sense i.e. that he entertains the view that universals do not exist (neither in our minds nor anywhere else). A passage that can seem to make this interpretation attractive is the following:

[I]here is nothing universal whatsoever [*es existirt überhaupt nichts Allgemeines*], only the individual exists, and the universal being [*das Allgemeine Wesen*] exists only if the absolute individual provides it with being [*wenn das absolute Einzelwesen es ist*]. (SET 65/XI.586)<sup>165</sup>

The first part of this sentence could be seen as an expression of the nominalist claim that universals do not exist at all. However, I doubt that this is what Schelling means. For what he actually says is that universals do not exist *independently*, i.e. that they require something other than themselves for their existence. In the broad scheme of things, Schelling suggests, it is God as an absolute individual and pure Thatness who gives being to the universal essence i.e. the intelligible structure of reality. Something analogue holds for finite beings, namely that the universals characterizing them as the sorts of things they are ultimately dependent on the Thatness of their substantial form (which is on Schelling's view no universal).

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<sup>165</sup> This passage is embedded in one of Schelling's frequent references to Kant's doctrine of the transcendental ideal. However, the Kantian background does not add much to the philosophical problem at hand. Therefore I refrain from discussing it here.

However, to say that something *depends* on another thing for its existence is not the same as saying that it does not exist at all. Similarly, Schelling also says of the first potency that while it turns out *not* to be *in its own right*, this does not mean that it is *not at all*. Rather, not being in one's own right should be seen as a privative mode of being – but a mode of being no less. As Schelling writes, “privation is not absolute negation” and “the mere privation of Being [*Beräubung des Seyns*] does not exclude the possibility to be” (PRP 288 cf. 313).<sup>166</sup> This status of possible being applies, as we have seen, to the entire series of potencies which in Schelling's view represents the foundation of all intelligible structure. Such structure, “the infinite potency of Being”, is not a mere fiction or a mere phantasma of knowers; by contrast, as Schelling concedes on one occasion, it is “of course, [...] also what is real and occurs in experience” (GPP 142/XIII.75). On the one hand, Schelling thus thinks that universal structures are in need of something that actualises them. On the other hand, he clearly states that in the things we encounter in the actual world, universal structures do exist.

I therefore do not think that a nominalist position adequately represents Schelling's views on the ontological status of universals. While it would go beyond the scope of this thesis to ultimately decide how his view should be characterized, I think it is worth at least making an attempt. If pressed, I would argue that Schelling's view is an unorthodox variety of conceptual realism, namely the view that universal structures exist in the world: Schelling *never* advocates the view that reality, as we actually encounter it, is devoid of universal structure. Even in his final writing period he maintains “that whatever *Is* must also have a relation to the *concept*” and what “has no relation to thought, also does not *truly exist* [*nicht wahrhaft Ist*]” (SET 65/XI.587). Instead, what makes his version of conceptual realism unorthodox, is his claim that the rationality of the actual rests on a foundation which is itself not graspable in pure thought. Therefore, while admitting that everything that exists has a connection to the concept, he insists that we should

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<sup>166</sup> On Schelling's distinction between not being at all and a privative mode of being also cf. Dews (2023, 126–32).

not think of this connection in terms of identity. Being and concept therefore are treated as related but not as one and the same.

By contrast, for a more orthodox conceptual realist like Hegel, “being is known to be in itself a pure concept and the pure concept to be true being” (SL 39/21.45). There thus is no question of establishing a connection between being and concept because they are always already kept in a unity which guarantees “that there is rhyme and reason to the world” (EL §24R). Schelling modifies this idea in such a way that he can still speak of a unity of being and thought, but by this he means not identity but instead a unity of two distinct relata. He does not deny that the world itself (not just our mind) has an intelligible structure. However, he holds that the reality of universals in the world rests on a pre-conceptual foundation, so that there also “is something other, over and above mere reason in the world” (X 143–4). For Schelling, it thus becomes interesting to ask how reality acquires its conceptual structure or how “the world” ended up “in the nets of the understanding or of reason” (X 143–4). While such a question is no longer answerable within the negative philosophy (which has been our focus), it turns out as interesting and relevant from a Schellingian perspective. For Hegel, by contrast, it would not make sense to ask how the world acquires a conceptual structure since for him, there is no gap between this structure and the very being of things.

While Schelling therefore entertains a decidedly different version of the claim that conceptual structures are real as compared to Hegel, he should not be seen as a nominalist. Rather, he puts forward an unusual version of the view that the conceptual exists in a non-psychological fashion.

#### 10.4 How to Engage with Pre-Conceptual Being

Finally, I would like to come back to a version of our first worry, namely that Schelling’s appeal to a pre-conceptual dimension of being is an appeal to something intrinsically unknowable and opaque. We have already discussed the issue of whether appeal to something unknowable can be respectable as an answer to a philosophical question. A further issue with Schelling’s appeal to a



pre-conceptual dimension of being is that while it arguably plays an important role in making us the very individuals we are, it seems to be, at the same time, utterly beyond our reach. This is not only philosophically dissatisfying but also practically dissatisfying as well, i.e. regarding the consequences of Schelling's philosophy for the engagement with ourselves as individuals. In what follows, I will discuss two possible reactions to this problem, one based on Wolfram Hogrebe's notion of "orphic reference", and one which I myself develop in relation to Schelling's notion of spirit.

Hogrebe has proposed a metaphorical description for the relation of being and thought in Schelling which is based on the idea that any attempt at verifying pre-conceptual being is bound to fail while at the same time, we can develop a spirit of trust in that it always already accompanies conceptually graspable reality. Hogrebe calls this way of relating to pre-conceptual being "orphic reference", by which he alludes to the eponymous ancient myth. Pre-conceptual being is thus like Eurydice who follows Orpheus on the way out of Hades but only on the condition that he won't look back and thereby check that she follows:

[E]xplicit reference to the pure positivity [of pre-conceptual being] makes the latter disappear although it will follow all oblique ways of reference [...] like Eurydice follows Orpheus as he goes ahead. A verificationist approach fails in front of this pure positivity: in this case, verification is tantamount to liquidation. Where our concepts are brought to their knees there is, according to Schelling, only this experience of ineffability as a warrant of the fact that there is anything at all. (Hogrebe 1989, 74)

Applied to the issue of the individual's pre-conceptual substance, this comes down to the idea that we would have to take the ineffability of that which makes us the very individuals we are as a sufficient warrant for being an individual with a unique identity. More broadly speaking, Hogrebe's point comes down to the interesting observation that Schelling's philosophy can have a quasi-therapeutic effect of not insisting excessively on verification, of showing us that we jeopardize our relationship with actuality if we try to force it into the grasp of our concepts – like Orpheus (who figures here as the allegory of thought) ultimately jeopardizes his relationship to Eurydice by verifying her following.

However, as any therapist knows, therapeutic measures often provoke resistance, and I myself am not entirely satisfied with the idea that my individuality rests on the absolutely opaque. Luckily, Schelling offers an alternative to the purely anti-verificationist, orphic approach. As a concluding step of my discussion of Schelling, I will now provide a sketch of this alternative and raise, once more, the question how we can engage with the pre-conceptual being that arguably makes us the very individuals we are.

Schelling was, of course familiar with the objection “that such an actuality [...] could not be thought” (SW XIV.341). In part, he countered it by pointing out that even if pre-conceptual being cannot become the object of thought, it can still be considered as *a point of departure* for thought, a starting point from which thought continuously moves away but which, for this very reason, also belongs to it as an indispensable origin:

True thinking only is in the departure from this point – but just like the starting point of a movement, in which the movement itself is not yet present, still belongs to the movement, similarly this [unprethinkable being] becomes a moment of thought in departing, in moving away from itself. (SW XIV.341)

The problem with this reply is that this starting point itself cannot become explicit to thought, so that the best we can do is still to refrain from any further attempt to engage with it intellectually. However we approach the pre-conceptual, it is always already withdrawn and, so to speak, hidden behind the conceptual scheme through which we approach it.

Furthermore, even if there was some way of non-conceptual engagement with the pre-conceptual, there would still be the problem that the finite beings do not contain it as such, but only in combination with the conceptual. For as we have seen already, the pre-conceptual Thatness of finite things never presents itself in its purity but only in conjunction with an intelligible What-aspect of their being. This idea is part of Schelling’s theory of substantial forms fashioned after the model of the soul: they are always the *That of a What*, not a pure That which could acquire an independent presence. The only individual where Schelling grants an independent presence of Thatness is, the “absolute” individual, namely God whose being is “independent and separable from all Whatness” (PRP 402).

At the same time, however, Schelling also claims that the human soul is a special case among the finite beings. As human beings, we are ‘created in the image of God’ and as such we have a version of the explicit presence of Thatness normally peculiar to the Divine. In this respect, Schelling grants the human soul the ability to become itself and independently from God’s “actus” and thereby “to be *like* God” (PRP 419). Schelling associates this capacity of the human soul with the notion of spirit. While the talk of spirit as a peculiar capacity specifically of the *human* soul is inspired by Aristotle’s notion νοῦς, Schelling hesitates to associate it straightforwardly with the capacity to think.<sup>167</sup>

This raises the question of what precisely it is that elevates our existence as human beings over that of other finite beings and makes us ‘God-like’. According to Schelling this “transition” from merely being an ensouled being to a God-like and spiritual being rests on the ability of human beings to engage in a type of activity which Schelling describes as “just deed, pure deed” (PRP 419), an activity in which there is “no Whatness at all but pure Thatness without any potentiality, which is therefore in-deed [in der That] *like* God” (PRP 419–20).

Regarding the sort of activity Schelling has in mind, he suggests a parallel to Fichte’s notion of “Tathandlung” (cf. PRP 420) and (in as much as the relevant activity is linked to the notion of spirit) he also draws parallels to Aristotle’s account of the nous (cf. PRP 479–81). However, the most promising lead is that Schelling associates this activity with the human ability to create. By this Schelling means that human beings are not only able to produce things

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<sup>167</sup> Schelling’s interpretation is that while the νοῦς generates our thinking engagement with reality (“science”), it itself is not something universal but rather the “opposite of what is universal and the what is individual to the highest degree” (PRP 459). In the first place, spirit is therefore “nothing theoretical, as one usually tends to assume; originally it is rather will, pure will which is for the sake of willing, which does not will some [other] thing but only itself” (PRP 461). As such, spirit is considered by Schelling as the source of innovation, cultural and scientific development. He also associates human spirit with the mythological figure of Prometheus (cf. PRP 481–3) who steals fire from the Gods and gives it to the humans so that they too are in a position to create genuinely new things, to develop their skills and to cultivate the world they inhabit. Finally, it is worth mentioning that spirit is considered by Schelling as a culmination of individuality in human beings and he associates this view both with Aristotle and Fichte (cf. PRP 420). Thus, Schelling claims that “for Aristotle that which he calls nous, far from being the most universal and impersonal, is instead the most personal of all, the proper self of man or, to use Fichte’s expression, it is truly the I of each individual [*wahrhaft eines jeden Ich*]” (PRP 480). Spirit thus represents the specific way in which the individualizing Thatness of things is present in human beings.

according to a pre-given plan or innate blue-print (like a spider produces its web), but moreover to create genuinely new things.

Creation in this sense is the characteristic activity of God but, as Schelling points out, mankind is in possession of a version of the originally divine art of creation. For unlike animals (who are ensouled but lack spirit), human beings can produce, for instance, works of art which are truly original. In Schelling's understanding, such originality requires that the act of creation involves an initial element of purely energetic activity, a deed that does not follow a pre-given pattern but brings forth something genuinely new and surprising. As he suggests on one occasion, engaging in such activities is precisely what makes us familiar with the pre-conceptual and pure act of our existence:

For at times one must conceive of such a Being, for instance in cases of generation [*Hervorbringungen*], deeds, actions the possibility of which becomes knowable only through their actuality. Nobody would call something that comes to be by means of a preexisting concept an original. An original is something of which one only concedes the possibility when one has its actuality in front of oneself. (SW XIV.341–2)

According to this passage, we are not as unfamiliar with unprethinkable being as it initially seems when we take thinking as our primary mode of engaging with reality. For, as Schelling suggests, it is in certain types of activities that we experience the 'Thatness' of being in a practical and non-discursive way. What Schelling seems to have in mind, are activities where there is no pre-given concept of the expected result, where the outcome is an "original". Although I admit that Schelling struggles to explain how we can engage with pure 'Thatness', and as such with the part of ourselves which arguably makes us the very individuals we are, he does hint at the idea of a practical familiarity with pre-conceptual being. While we may not be able to access this aspect of our being as thinkers, there may be the option to engage with it practically, as genuinely creative agents.

## 10.5 Summary

We have seen that Schelling, in his final writing period, develops his so-called *negative* philosophy which I have interpreted as an *a priori* metaphysics of being. It should have become clear that

Schelling does not simply adopt a pre-given account of being, neither an empirical one nor one that is directly derived from Kant's doctrine of the transcendental ideal. Instead his method consists in a successive clarification of the thought of being as indeterminate. Only in the course of this successive clarification does this being turn out as determinable, determinate, and the process of moving from determinability to determination. This is how I have presented the initial level of Schelling's so-called doctrine of potencies. While the latter does not presuppose any pre-given standard of what being truly is, it does develop such a standard in the course of the dialectic. It has thus turned out that true being is self-sufficient i.e. not dependent on further, more fundamental ways of being.

The question thus comes up to what extent the potencies as ways in which being becomes manifest are jointly self-sufficient. If this could be shown, being would turn out as fully transparent to thought. However, Schelling argues that in thought, the potencies can only be grasped as a succession while the principle that unifies the individual steps of the succession remains opaque. For Schelling, the unity of the potencies thus remains something we cannot properly grasp in pure thought. At the same time, it is only *in their unity* that the potencies constitute being.

This issue then reoccurs on a higher level on which the potencies have been reinterpreted as causal principles. To really figure as the cause of being for anything, Schelling argues, we have to grasp the various causes involved in its generation as unified to a joint effect. The potencies, however, remain only a partial ground for the being of things unless they are unified. They thus still require support from a more fundamental principle which would then be the ultimate cause of being for a thing. Schelling then asks how we should think of this principle. To this end he discusses corresponding notions in Aristotle's metaphysics, in particular the ideas of soul and substance. The latter stand for the desired fundamental sense of being which the potencies (due to their lack of unity) cannot generate.

Schelling then discusses the view that such substantial being consists in the essence of things and he interprets essence as the substantial form of an individual. This brings his analysis surprisingly close to Hegel's, for Hegel too thinks of the substance of things in terms of their form. However, while Hegel identifies the form of the individual with its concrete universal or "substance-kind", the notion of substantial form leads Schelling to a radically different conclusion.

As Schelling shows again via Aristotle, the view that the substance of things is a universal precludes an understanding of their uniqueness as individuals. For universals, even if they involve a surplus over and above mere commonality, are sharable entities. Schelling then suggests that the truly substantial aspect of a substantial form must consist in an activity. While there can be a version of the interpretation of form as activity according to which forms are universals, Schelling proposes the view that the substance of things consists in the facticity, or the That of an activity rather than the way in which it is carried out. The latter is understood as pre-conceptual and in this capacity not sharable. On this basis, Schelling argues, the individual can have a substance that it does not and cannot share with others so that however much it has in common with other things, the uniqueness of its existence is secured.

Finally, I have addressed some worries about Schelling's account. The first is that Schelling introduces an aspect of being that cannot be known through thought. This does mean that we will never be able to give an account of how Thatness or pre-conceptual being makes anything unique. All we can say is that it resists being shared by others but we cannot elucidate this any further. I have argued that this is something Schelling or a proponent of his account must accept. Furthermore, I have discussed how Schelling thinks of the relation between conceptual and pre-conceptual aspects of being and I have shown that his view should not be regarded as a form of nominalism. Finally, I have tried to show that a pre-conceptual level of being, while it cannot be known conceptually, does not have to remain opaque to us in every sense. In relation to Schelling's notion of spirit I have therefore explored the view that the pre-

conceptual ground of our individual existence may become transparent to us in a practical, rather than a conceptual sense.

## Conclusion

### *On a Recent Criticism of Hegel*

Robert Pippin has recently surprised his readers with his Heideggerian turn. The surprise is doubled, as the former defender of a categorical scheme reading of Hegel now agrees with Heidegger, that “Hegel thinks thinking’s self-determination as the ‘logic’ of *Being*, and not as a subjective epistemological condition” (Pippin 2023, 212). The agreement between Pippin and Heidegger, however, is not limited to a realist interpretation of Hegel’s *Logic*; it also includes the fundamental objection Heidegger levelled against it, namely:

[T]hat the meaning of being itself would be forever hidden, even forgotten, if Hegel’s views about the “infinity” of pure thinking, there being nothing “outside” the conceptually determinable, were accepted. Being would be rendered a determinate object like any other, a position which would assume and not account for the meaning of being itself. (Pippin 2023, 210)

The objection is that Hegel fails to raise the question about the meaning of being which becomes all-important for Heidegger – and this is meant to make trouble for Hegel. However, I doubt that Hegel would be impressed. He could point out that he does have an account of the meaning of being, namely that on his account “being is known to be in itself a pure concept and the pure concept to be true being” (SL 39/21.45). Furthermore, Hegel can retort that this account of the meaning of being is by no means a mere “assumption”. The *Logic* itself is its vindication in as much as it observes how being’s self-development reveals its identity with the conceptual. Being is not *assumed* to be conceptual; it is the very development of being itself by which it turns out as concept in the course of the *Logic*. Hegel does not only raise the question about the meaning of being – he also answers it.

Pippin might reply to this that Hegel’s project still is in trouble because it does not demonstrate the conditions of its own possibility:

Thinkability (understood as the *Logic* does, as knowability) as such is not one of the determinate moments of the *Logic*, and when its, judgment’s, characteristics become self-conscious in the *Concept Logic*, it is the forms of judging this or that, in their determinate possible inferential relations that are attended to. (Pippin 2023, 216)



So the point is that Hegel does not tell us how we can even enter the game of pure thought. To do so, Pippin argues with Heidegger, Hegel would have to take into account the type of being that does the thinking, namely Dasein, and disclose “how pure thinking itself comes to be available to, mean what it does to, Dasein” (Pippin 2023, 222). According to Pippin’s Heidegger, the way in which thinking (and through thinking being) becomes “available” must thus be prior to thinking itself, “pre-conceptual” and “nondiscursive”:

Since Heidegger does not mean recognizable in a concept, he defends the much more radical and unprecedented claim that such availability is pre-conceptual, a nondiscursive mode of availability. (Pippin 2023, 215)

From this point of view Hegel’s insistence that thinking is available to us because our primary mode of engagement with being is always already thought, i.e. *thinking things over* looks like a prejudice, indeed a “logical prejudice”, as Pippin (2023, 214) has it. How do we even come into a position to think things over and to thereby reveal their being as conceptual?

But of course, from Hegel’s point of view, the insistence that thinking is available to us through something nondiscursive and pre-conceptual looks like a prejudice too, something one has to be in the *mood* for rather than something one could claim to know. Hegel might point out, for instance, that the only way to establish knowledge of how thinking is available to us is to do so in the mode of knowing:

[T]he examination of knowing cannot take place other than *by way of knowing*. [...] [E]xamining it means nothing other than acquiring knowledge of it. But to want to know *before* one knows is as incoherent as the Scholastic’s wise resolution to learn to *swim, before he ventured into the water*. (EL §10R)

The availability of thinking has to be intact already when the search for its conditions begins. But then this search is internal to thought, it is nothing other than the self-development of being as being thought. It is in grasping this development that we know ourselves as familiar with thought, and come to understand that being is nothing other than thought. It is through grasping this that we gather assurance that being in all its guises has *the conceptual, thought, the universal* as its meaning, both in ourselves and in the beings that are other than us:

Spirit has the certainty which Adam had when he looked on Eve: “This is flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bone.” Thus Nature is the bride which Spirit weds. But is this certainty

also truth? Since the inner being of Nature is none other than the universal, then in our thoughts of this inner being we are at home with ourselves. (EN 246A)

This is the sublime promise of Hegel's philosophy, that we are not alien to the world precisely because its being is "none other than the universal". As long as this promise is kept, there is no need for any engagement with the pre-conceptual, and our way of being in the world is nothing other than "thinking things over". There is no sense of deficiency in this, rather thought is simply the right way to be genuinely at home in the world.

The point I am making is that the appeal to the pre-conceptual as Pippin makes it (in Heidegger's name against Hegel) is unlikely to shake confidence in the thoroughgoing conceptuality of reality as long as it is passed onto Hegel from the outside. If thinking has pre-conceptual conditions then it may be right to be wary about Hegel's identification of being and concept. But saying so does not make it true, and there is no pressure whatsoever for Hegel or a Hegelian to accept an argument based on premises he does not accept. To be convincing, the case for a pre-conceptual aspect of being has to be made on the basis of a difficulty *within* Hegel's project. It is by showing that Hegel cannot have what *Hegel* wants, rather than by showing that another philosopher wants something other than Hegel, that honest critique must proceed.

*Looking Back at "Hegel Schelling and the Problem of Individuality"*

This thesis has dealt with something that Hegel wants, namely an integration of individuality into his logic as metaphysics and it has shown how Schelling (after attempts to confront Hegel with external criticism) has identified the issue of individuality as the target of a more internal criticism. To reconstruct this encounter I have first dealt with Hegel's metaphysics in general and with the role of individuality in particular. It has been shown that Hegel develops a notion of universality which is not construed as simply an opposite to the particularity and singularity of individuals but rather as the principle through which an individual can be particular and singular in the first place. We have then seen how Hegel develops this metaphysics in the course of an ontological interpretation of judgments and syllogisms.

While this account made some progress regarding an understanding of individuality, it also was shown to exclude the reality of change in important ways. The notoriously difficult transition towards the *Logic's* Objectivity chapter was thus interpreted as overcoming this lack by rearticulating Hegel's ontological framework in hylomorphic terms. On this basis we have then seen how Hegel can offer a solution for the *problem of unity*. This solution is to interpret the universal as the immanent form and final cause of the object through which its manifold material parts are joined into a whole. Like Aristotle, Hegel's account thus privileges living beings as paradigm cases of individuals; but we have also seen that this does not preclude attributing some degree of unity to other entities as well. An important insight gained through this analysis was that Hegel's theory of life does not simply apply pre-established ontological categories to specific realm of objects, but represents instead a sui-generis way of thinking about the ontological structure of things.

Against this background, we have turned to the remaining problems of *numerical difference* and *unique distinction*. In terms of the former it was observed that Hegel is not an orthodox follower of Leibniz and that he denies that the *identity of indiscernibles* could figure as a principle of difference. At the same time, we have also found out that Hegel appropriates Leibniz's ideas that individual beings have an inner activity and are causally autonomous. Through an analysis of the Idea of Life it became clear that on Hegel's account, individuals differentiate themselves from their surroundings and thereby create mutually exclusive and consequently distinct spheres of causal autonomy. It was then asked to what extent this account can also deliver a solution of the *problem of unique distinction*. However, it did not seem to be possible to divorce Hegel's appeal to inner activities of individuals from the idea that the latter are regarded as sharable types or patterns of activity. Thus, what makes individuals countably distinct from one another on Hegel's account does not also equip them with something unique to them.

It is here that Schelling was called to enter the debate. However, instead of directly jumping to Schelling's engagement with the topic of individuality, it was conceded that the style

of his late philosophy makes it difficult to appreciate his arguments. It was argued that while this concern applies both to his explicit critique of Hegel and the key argument from his early Berlin period, his final account of the negative philosophy is a more promising candidate for a confrontation with Hegel. Through a detailed reconstruction of Schelling's *Doctrine of Potencies* we finally arrived at the point where he addresses the problem of individuality.

For Schelling an important reason to deny being's thoroughgoing conceptuality is that it precludes the possibility of individual beings being unique in each case. Interestingly, we found out that Schelling nonetheless shares Hegel's view that the substance of the individual is a *substantial form* and that he also advocates interpreting this form as an *activity*. However, unlike Hegel, Schelling argues that it is only by focussing on the facticity or Thatness of the act (rather than its type or pattern) that we arrive at something genuinely individual and unsharable. On Schelling's view, this shows that, ultimately, we cannot account for the being of individuals in exclusively conceptual terms and must therefore accept a pre-conceptual foundation of their being which makes them the unique individuals they are. Finally, we have critically discussed Schelling's proposal.

Schelling's late philosophy has had a strong impact on the further development of what we now call "continental philosophy". Thinkers like Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and those who draw from them (such as, for instance, Sartre or Adorno) are indebted to Schelling in many ways. They all agree with him that Hegel's conceptual interpretation of reality is somehow insufficient. However, Schelling, who was among the first to criticise Hegel in this way, not only *claims* that appeal to the pre-conceptual is unavoidable, he also argues for it. Schelling's project never succumbed to the temptation of setting arbitrary limits to reason, to the popular sentiment of a post-rational period of philosophy. Instead he advocated that the most convincing way of taking reason seriously is to acknowledge the limits of reason through rational means. Qualified insight into these limits does not diminish reason, instead it opens up the possibility of new and liberating ways of engaging with reality. We have seen that one option intimated by Schelling is a

form of practical knowledge through which being becomes transparent to us. This of course is something Heidegger also took very seriously. However, with Schelling one no longer has to be in the mood to do so; rather, one can explore such an approach and also understand why it is not simply a second best to the thoroughly conceptual approach offered by Hegel.

It remains to be said that this also means that the dispute between Hegel and the advocate of a pre-conceptual level of being is by no means settled. Schelling's argument, as I have presented it, can be maintained only if Hegel is indeed unsuccessful in accounting for the uniqueness of the individual. There are in principle two strategies for a Hegelian defence: 1) to explain why ultimately it is a mistake to consider uniqueness a necessary aspect of individuality or 2) to show how it can be accounted for within the metaphysics of the concept after all. If I had to choose between these alternatives, I would go for the second one. Most likely there is still more to be said about how Hegel's notion of the universal as active form can be constitutive of individual being all the way down to the uniqueness of its being. If anything, I hope this thesis can incentivise further research in these matters, and keep the spirit alive in which thinkers like Hegel and Schelling struggled for an adequate grasp of the actuality we find ourselves confronted with.

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