

Substance Subjectivized

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Abstract: The paper provides a methodological reading of Hegel's programmatic declaration on substance and subject according to which the statement should be understood as a call to develop a new conceptual regime that would enable us to think what the inherited conceptual made unthinkable. The paper first tries to decipher the passage in question by putting it in perspective of the philosophical debate of the time, using Bardili, Reinhold, Jacobi, and earlier Hegel's writings; in the second part, Hegel's declaration is presented as the final answer to Spinozism, this time understood against Schelling and as a defence of consequent thinking; at the end, some general implications are briefly considered.

Keywords: Substance, Subjectivity, Hegel, Spinoza, Metaphysics, Understanding, Reason

In the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel makes the famous programmatic declaration:

In my view, which must be justified only by the exposition of the system itself, everything depends on comprehending and expressing the true not [merely] as *substance*, but also equally as *subject*.¹

The declaration – shorthanded into the slogan: Substance is subject – has acquired a special status in the scholarly tradition. Hegel was extremely cautious in using first person singular and rarely spoke of what *his* philosophical intentions were. Moreover, the statement was made in a unique historical conjunction, at the moment as Hegel, under utterly insecure personal conditions and in the middle of deep theoretical hesitations, just completed the composition of the *Phenomenology* and realised for the first time that he was in possession of a system of his own. It is a place of strategic importance marking, as it were, the endpoint of Hegel's development. And since the Preface was intended not for the *Phenomenology* specifically, but for the entire *System of Science* which was supposed to follow, it strangely serves as an opening to a work that has never been written. It may well be the sole point offering a fresh, self-confident view over Hegel's philosophical system as a whole.

Hegel's declaration is of course so general that it lends itself to a variety of interpretations. Indeed, its openness seems to be deliberate,

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¹ Hegel 1977c, p. 9–10. – Hegel translations are occasionally modified without particular indication.

for in the very same Preface Hegel himself provides several readings, all of them equally convincing, including the one that refers to the standard S–P sentence form. As if Hegel – the supreme joker, who reputedly stressed that philosophical insights cannot be reduced to general formulas and yet proved to be extremely skilful precisely in inventing formulas for general use, as if Hegel wanted to illustrate his other thesis how it is only through the effort of concept that a thought acquires a definite content. Or, as is if he wanted to show once more that every real event in philosophy comes about as a combined result of many simultaneous strands of thoughts. In this sense, while many lines of interpretation can be considered correct at the same time, none of them is by itself sufficient to provide a complete explanation.

However, there is one line of interpretation that clearly stands apart: the one that reads Hegel's declaration with reference to Spinoza. It was Spinoza after all who was renowned as the philosopher of substance.² It is therefore only natural to read Hegel's statement with reference to his treatment of substance in the *Science of Logic*, or to rely on his presentation of Spinoza in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* – especially since both references appear to comply almost perfectly with it. In the *Science of Logic*, for instance, the *substance* stands for the last and the highest thought-determination before Objective logic passes into *Subjective* logic. And in retrospect Hegel offers a description that strictly corresponds to our programmatic declaration:

The only possible refutation of Spinozism can only consist, therefore, in first acknowledging its standpoint as essential and necessary and then raising it to a higher standpoint on the strength of *its own resources*. ... The exposition in the preceding Book of substance as leading to the *concept* is, therefore, the one and only true refutation of Spinozism.³

In a very similar vein, Hegel presents the situation in his *History of Philosophy*:

The general point to notice here is that thinking, or the spirit, has to place itself at the standpoint of Spinozism. This idea of Spinoza's has to be acknowledged to be true and well-grounded.

2 Cf. Hegel 2010a, p. 511: "The philosophy that assumes its position at the standpoint of *substance* and stops there is the *system of Spinoza*."

3 Hegel 2010a, p. 512.

There is an absolute substance, and it is what is true. But it is not yet the whole truth, for the substance must be thought of inwardly active and alive.⁴

Note that in both instances, the standpoint of substance is acknowledged to be true and necessary, it is deficient merely to the extent that it lacks activity or subjectivity. Therefore, so Hegel's argument would go, when one begins to philosophise one has to start by being Spinozist; yet it is of even greater importance that in philosophising one does not stop at this standpoint of mere substance: instead, one has to produce a true refutation of Spinozism and, by doing so, to conceive the true as subject as well.

As we can see, this line of interpretation fits nicely into Hegel's project and is textually well-supported. Indeed, it has been able to produce numerous valuable insights, for instance by Sandkaulen and, in a somehow different respect, Bowman, to mention just the two.⁵ Yet without any intention of discarding their relevance in what follows we are going to propose a somehow different reading. Hegel's confrontation with Spinoza is often presented at the level of doctrinal content where the main thrust of his critique is supposed to be directed against the non-existence of independent personality in Spinoza's system, or against the presumed indeterminateness of his one substance.⁶ Instead, we are going to claim that in his programmatic declaration in the Preface Hegel has a different image of Spinoza in mind – an image that was basically shaped by the so called *Pantheism Controversy*, portraying him as the iconic proponent of a certain way of thinking, of a specific *finite* conceptual regime which Hegel interchangeably called representation [*Vorstellung*], understanding, or reflection. Read in this way Hegel's programmatic declaration would basically boil down to a demand that we should – in agreement with what was vigorously advocated by Horstmann⁷ – start to "think differently",

4 Hegel 1990, p. 154.

5 Cf. Sandkaulen 2008; Bowman 2012.

6 It may be added that any presentation of Hegel's refutation of Spinoza is considerably complicated by Hegel's habit of conflating the doctrine actually defended by Spinoza with the views taken by his "friends", in particular Jacobi and Schelling. For instance, when Hegel comments on the absolute "abyss" that all determinate being is thrown into, he is first and foremost referring to Philosophy of Identity defended by Schelling. And while it may well be true that Spinoza's substance necessarily leads to Schelling's Absolute, so that they prove to be inseparable after all, it is still reasonable to distinguish them.

7 Cf. Horstmann 2006, p. 73: "Whatever one makes of the details of Hegel's philosophy, we should always remember that it is principally concerned with inaugurating a new conception of rationality, with grounding and elaborating a new kind of philosophical thinking." Cf. Horstmann 1999, p. 278, and Horstmann 1991.

change our “paradigm of rationality”.

In the paper, we will first try to decipher the passage in question by putting it in perspective of the philosophical debate of the time, including Hegel’s earlier writings; in the second part, Hegel’s declaration is presented as the ultimate answer to Spinozism, this time understood against Schelling and as a defence of consequent thinking; at the end, some general implications are briefly considered.

I

Let us now take a closer look at Hegel’s declaration:

In my view, which must be justified only by the exposition of the system itself, everything depends on comprehending and expressing the true not [merely] as *substance*, but also equally as *subject*. At the same time, it is to be observed that substantiality comprises within itself the universal, or the *immediacy of knowledge*, as well as that [immediacy] which is *being* or *immediacy for knowledge*. – If the conception of God as the one substance shocked the age in which it was proclaimed, the reason for this was on the one hand an instinctive awareness that in such a view self-consciousness merely perishes and is not preserved. However, on the other hand, the opposite view, which clings to thought as thought, to *universality*, is the very same simplicity, is undifferentiated, unmoved substantiality. And if, thirdly, thought does unite itself with the being of substance as such, and grasps immediacy or intuition as thinking, it still depends on that whether this intellectual intuition does not again fall back into inert simplicity, and does not present actuality itself in a non-actual manner.⁸

The main lines of Hegel’s picture seem rather obvious. After making the programmatic declaration, he draws a portrait of recent history of philosophy, starting with Spinoza, the philosopher of the one substance who shocked the opinions of his time to such an extent that he draw upon himself an excommunication from the Jewish community; and ending most probably with Schelling who indeed acknowledged the virtues of intellectual intuition, yet nevertheless fell back into the same inert simplicity where according to Hegel all cows are black. But why does Hegel feel a special need to stress that there are two different modes of immediacy in Spinoza, in correspondence to the two attributes

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8 Hegel 1977c, p. 9–10.

of extension and thought? In what sense does the introduction of intellectual intuition represent a breakthrough? In relation to what? And to whom does the middle term in this three-stage story refer to?

If we start by answering the last question, the first name that comes to mind is of course Fichte, the philosopher of subjectivity⁹ – in particular since he explicitly defended his doctrine of science as the only possible alternative to Spinozist dogmatism.¹⁰ And as we will see, in a sense, it is Fichte. We have to remind ourselves, however, that Fichte himself never clung to “thought as thought” (or perhaps “thinking as thinking”) used here as a paradigmatic description for the so called opposite position. In fact, the collocation “Denken as Denken” was the trademark of *rational realism* presented by Gottfried Christoff Bardili in his *Outline of the First Logic* in 1800. Why Bardili, then?

The details of Bardili’s *Logic* can be left aside, for it is not certain if Hegel even read the book.¹¹ But he was familiar with Reinhold, who after yet another conversion enthusiastically defended Bardili’s views in his many volumes of the *Contributions to an Easier Overview of the State of Philosophy at the Beginning of 19th Century*. In the preface to the first volume Reinhold sketches out the development of philosophy after Kant, claiming that through recent contributions to Transcendental Idealism its “*cycle [Kreislau] is fully completed*” (mark the words!).¹² With Fichte and Schelling it has gone full circle only to find itself trapped in the bounds of subjectivity: so a new move is needed now, not a step forward, but “an essential step *backwards*”, namely towards the analysis of “thinking itself” where the main obstacle of philosophy is supposed to come from. And it is there that, according to Reinhold, Bardili achieved something of considerable philosophical value.

Two points of importance to our present purpose should be noted here. First, in the third *Contribution* Reinhold deplores the “deep-seated habit”, familiar in particular “among philosopher of our time”, to conceive

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9 Cf., for instance, Yovel & Hegel 2005, p. 97.

10 Cf. Fichte 1982, p. 6ff.

11 It may be noted – out of respect, and due to obvious solidarity with Hegel’s own project of founding philosophy by developing a new logic – that in his Preface Bardili too explicitly refers to Kant who, in his public declaration against Fichte in 1799, mocked the Doctrine of Science as a vain effort, that had accordingly never been tested, to “extract the real object out of *pure logic*”. But if it has never been tested, asks Bardili, how can we know it is a vain effort? In fact, Bardili defended the ability of thinking to produce something real, for if there is anything universal and strictly necessary, it can be grounded in thinking only. Consequently he proposed a new start for philosophy based on a fundamental analysis of “thinking as thinking”, prior to and independent of its application to any object. Cf. Bardili 1800, pp. XI–XVI.

12 Reinhold 1801, p. VI.

of thinking as “*merely subjective activity*”. For that reason, even logic itself is often treated as a “science of merely *subjective forms* – that in themselves have *no real truth*”.¹³ If we consider the state logic is in, there may be even some truth in this judgment; but if so, Reinhold adds, then

the *reformation of philosophy* would necessarily have to start *with the correction* of the previous *science of thinking*, ... – *by introducing* a completely *new* investigation of thinking, as thinking.¹⁴

Second, in rational realism the essence of thinking as thinking was inherently linked to *calculation* and to the *mathematical method* in general. “He who calculates, thinks,” declares Bardili at the very beginning of his investigation.¹⁵ Similarly, since it is only in mathematics that thinking was able to resist all the attacks of “*sceptics* and *dogmatists*”, philosophy too should, according to Reinhold, look first “at the application of thinking *in mathematics*”.¹⁶ In this way Reinhold was led to the following definition:

In calculation and by calculation *thinking as thinking* describes itself under the *character of infinite repeatability of one and the same as one and the same in the one and the same and by one and the same*, or as *pure identity* – and it is exactly this infinite repeatability, or pure identity, that the *essence*, or *inner character of thinking*, as thinking consists in.¹⁷

At the end, Reinhold’s commitment to rational realism can be summarized as the project to undertake a renovation of philosophy by developing a fundamentally new science of real logic wherein thinking is modelled along the guiding lines of mathematics.

Indeed, such a project bears obvious resemblance to Hegel’s mature science of logic, with a small, if important difference, that Hegel developed his program *against* the mathematical method. So, before

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¹³ Reinhold 1801, pp. 96–97. – Cf. Reinhold 1801, p. 95: »*If*, and *to what extent*, the application of thinking as thinking is *subjective, objective* or *both at once* – that should be determined only by the investigation in question.”

¹⁴ Reinhold 1801, p. 98.

¹⁵ Bardili 1800, p. 1.

¹⁶ Reinhold 1801, p. 102.

¹⁷ Reinhold 1801, p. 106. – Cf. Bardili 1800, p. 3.

we return back to Hegel we have to introduce another player into our plot: Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi. In 1799, in the heat of the Atheism Controversy, Jacobi composed an open letter to Fichte accusing the latter’s philosophy as nihilism. Once more, the details of this writing can be left aside. For our present purpose it is only relevant that at the begging of the letter Jacobi made a strange observation suggesting that materialism and idealism – ultimately Spinozism and the system of Fichte – in the final analysis boil down to the same. True, they begin from opposite starting points, one from self-determining matter and the other from self-determining intelligence; however, they both proceed in exactly the same manner, so that in the end, that is “for a *power of thought* that *will think to the end*”,¹⁸ they produce the same result, incidentally both ending in nihilism.¹⁹

In order to understand Jacobi’s equalization it has to be taken into account that, for Jacobi, it is the formal structure that determines the character of a philosophical system. In his view, for instance, the whole system of Spinoza is in a way contained already in the consequent use of the *mos geometricus*. In the second edition of the *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, he writes:

Under “mechanism” I include every concatenation of purely efficient causes. Such concatenation is *eo ipso* a *necessary* one, just as a necessary concatenation, *qua* necessary, is by that fact a *mechanistic* one.²⁰

But since the usual method of logical reasoning proceeds according to equally necessary relations, the same mechanistic logic reigns in the realm of thought as well. Nowhere is this more evident than precisely in Spinoza according to whom “the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things”. If ideas essentially behave in the same way as the paradigmatic billiard balls, we have to acknowledge the existence of something like a “mechanism of ideas”. Or alternatively, granted that mechanism and materialism may be considered interchangeable, we could speak of “materialism without

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¹⁸ Jacobi 1994, p. 502. – Again, mark the words!

¹⁹ In fact, Jacobi reaches this conclusion in a three-step argument. First, materialism and idealism have the same dogmatic formal structure. Second, this formal structure prevents us to reach to anything real outside the realm of thought. Third, since this equally applies to the realm of thought as well, we are left with nothing real. Materialism is idealism which is nihilism: dogmatism as such is nihilism.

²⁰ Jacobi 1994, p. 366.

matter”.²¹ Spinoza's and Fichte's philosophy are to that extent just two different sides of the same dogmatic, mechanistic system. In any case, it was through such representation of “an *inverted Spinozism*”, adds Jacobi, that he first found entry into Fichte's *Doctrine of Science*.²²

After considering Jacobi's reduction of Fichte, we are now in a position to return to Hegel. But instead of going directly to the programmatic declaration in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, we are going first to examine an analogous statement Hegel made just a few years earlier. The reasons for this final detour will, I hope, soon be evident. In 1802, working in close collaboration with Schelling, Hegel published the article *Faith and Knowledge, or Reflective Philosophy of Subjectivity in the complete range of its forms as Kantian, Jacobian, and Fichtean Philosophy* that was likewise devoted to the latest developments in philosophy. Here too, we are not going to dwell upon the details, especially since we can here safely assume that the reader is sufficiently familiar both with Schelling's new Philosophy of Identity as well as with the main line of Hegel's argument. Let us just observe that in spite of the differences that may exist among the tree philosophers, namely Kant, Fichte and Jacobi, Hegel in essence claims that they all share the same “fundamental principle” of “absolutisation of the finite”: instead of acknowledging the contradictory nature of everything finite, they all treat the finite as true in itself, limit reason to the finite forms, and make it thus incapable of grasping the true, infinite absolute.²³ Concluding his examination, Hegel wrote:

In their totality, the philosophies we have considered have in this way recast the dogmatism of being into dogmatism of thinking, the metaphysics of objectivity into the metaphysics of subjectivity. Thus, through this whole philosophical revolution the old dogmatism and the metaphysics of reflection have in the

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²¹ Jacobi 1994, p. 502. – Jacobi proposed to describe Spinoza's substance as a cube with being (the objective) at the upper and thought (the subjective) at the bottom side, where all the points of both sides are exactly bound together with invisible threads. The point is that by turning this cube upside down, that is by transfiguring materialism into idealism, everything would have looked exactly the same as before. “Strange,” adds Jacobi, “that the thought has never occurred to Spinoza of inverting his philosophical cube.”

²² Here, we cannot discuss the question whether Jacobi's characterization of Fichte's *Doctrine of Science* was justified. To our judgment, it was completely unwarranted, since if there was anyone that before Hegel strived to develop a different conceptual model appropriate to think freedom, it was Fichte. But this is not the point here.

²³ Cf. Hegel 1977b, p. 62: “The fundamental principle common to the philosophies of Kant, Jacobi and Fichte is, then, the absoluteness of finitude and, resulting from it, the absolute antithesis of finitude and infinity, reality and ideality, the sensuous and the supersensuous, and beyondness of what is truly real and absolute.”

first place merely taken on the hue of inwardness, of the new and fashionable culture. ... This metaphysics of subjectivity has run through the complete cycle of its forms in the philosophies of Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte ... Therewith the external possibility directly arises that the true philosophy should emerge out of this formation, nullify the absoluteness of the finitudes and present itself all at once as perfected appearance, with all its riches subjected to the totality. ... this completeness has now been achieved.²⁴

The sequence above runs in such a striking parallel to our statement in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* that, we believe, it can be considered its tacit original. As such it makes clear for whom the middle term stands for and what his precise deficiency was: between Spinoza and Schelling there is Fichte, to be sure – yet not Fichte alone, but the whole bunch of contemporary philosophers, including Kant, Jacobi and everyone else. Why such a harsh verdict? Because for Hegel the transcendental revolution was no real revolution after all! The philosophies of Kant and Fichte remained equally dogmatic and equally metaphysical as the former varieties of Spinozism, since they continued to rely exclusively on the conceptual tools inherited from the philosophical tradition. The change they initiated was at best superficial, a matter of colour only, or a question of fashion. They simply turned the metaphysics of objectivity into metaphysics of subjectivity – while, and this is crucial, retaining the same *dogmatic, mechanistic method of thinking*.

Hegel in essence subscribed to the diagnosis given by Jacobi: Transcendental Idealism is nothing but inverted Spinozism that left the essential structure of the philosophical cube intact. However, at the same time he extended it to include Jacobi himself. In spite of all the criticism addressed against the paradigmatic philosophical figures, Hegel argues, Jacobi too accepted their fundamental presuppositions regarding the validity of finite conceptual forms; and by doing so, he in fact consolidated the exclusive right of the traditional dogmatic mode of thinking. In any case, nothing of philosophical importance can be achieved by simply fleeing from being to thinking and from one immediacy to another, for thinking – at least *such* thinking – is still but one of the attributes of the same substance. So Hegel claims that these “philosophies of subjectivity” in the final analysis remained at the standpoint substance: they include “the very same simplicity”, the

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²⁴ Hegel 1977b, p. 190.

“unmoved substantiality”.

But there is a positive result to this sequence as well. With the philosophies of Kant, Fichte and Jacobi, the subjective “cycle is fully completed” and its incapacity to grasp the true finally manifest. The outward conditions are thereby established to undertake the true renovation of philosophy, and we may assume that, this time, it is bound to involve a thorough investigation of the thinking itself. In order to succeed, however, the true science of reason must dispel its fascination with the mathematical method, since according to Hegel, and contrary to what was suggested by Bardili or Reinhold, it was precisely by trying to reduce thinking to calculating that philosophy remained trapped in the closure of substance. So, relying on the assessment implicitly provided by Jacobi, Hegel wanted to carry out Bardili’s project of a new foundation of thinking against Bardili’s initial intentions.

In *Faith in Knowledge* Hegel clearly expected this decisive revolution to come from Schelling’s direction. The brief indication given here in guise of a conclusion, together with Hegel’s earlier self-confident descriptions contained in the *Difference Essay*, strongly suggest that for him “true philosophy” included a kind of objective scepticism²⁵ denying that the finite truly exist, and leading to something like “self-annihilation of reflection”,²⁶ whereby the limitation of the finite thought-determinations would finally be left behind opening the way to a positive cognition of the absolute. The hopes for an imminent revolution ended shortly, however. In the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, which marked the public break between the two philosophical friends, Hegel continued to acknowledge that the steps taken by Schelling were steps in the right direction. However, if we can rely on the hint implicit in the construction of the sentence, Schelling did not go far enough in that direction and as a consequence fell back into the same inert simplicity he had started from.

According to Hegel’s account, Schelling overcame the strict division that was separating being and thought in the dogmatic metaphysics (Kant, Fichte, and Jacobi included). This is by itself sufficient to annihilate the traditional representational model where idea and thing, subject and object inhabit two parallel worlds without any interaction between them. Yet the very mention of intellectual intuition which is supposed to “apprehend intuition as thinking” suggests that Hegel

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25 For a presentation of Hegel’s relation to scepticism in Jena period, see for instance Vieweg 1999.

26 Cf. Hegel 1977a, p. 96: “So far as reflection makes itself its won object, its supreme law, given to it by reason and moving it to become reason, is to nullify itself. Like everything else, reflection has standing only in the absolute; but as reflection it stands in opposition to it. In order to gain standing, therefore, reflection must give itself the law of self-destruction.”

has something more specific in his mind. We are inclined to believe that, here, Hegel is referring to the subject theme raised in the Remark of the §§ 76 and 77 of the *Critique of Judgment* where Kant, discussing the inevitable limitations of discursive understanding to explain the phenomenon of life, invoked the idea of an “intellectual intuition” and “intuitive understanding”. Schelling’s admiration for the Remark is well known. Starting from his earliest writings, he was full of praise in its regard, claiming for instance that nowhere on so few pages so many deep thoughts were brought together; his philosophy of nature can be viewed as a prolonged effort to develop an appropriate, that is, non-mechanistic or speculative conceptual model for explaining natural phenomena.

At first Hegel supported Schelling’s endeavour. But soon he felt obliged to distance himself from what the Philosophy of Identity actually turned into. On the one hand, Hegel grew positively bored of the speculative excursions into philosophy of nature conducted by Schelling and his pupils. Such constructions struck him as arbitrary formalism: they came about “through the shapeless repetition of one and the same, only externally applied to diverse materials”.²⁷ Note how exactly this allegation rephrases Bardili’s definition of thinking! On the other hand, Hegel considered Schelling’s absolute method, that started with the finite, exposed its inner contradiction, only to end in “this single insight that in the absolute everything is the same”,²⁸ simply void and in vain. No *determined knowledge* is gained by such “dissolving of what is distinct and determinate” and throwing everything without difference into the same “abyss of vacuity”. There is no movement, no life, nothing determined therein. And if this is to be the idea of the absolute, it is definitely presented here in a “non-actual form”.

Schelling’s basic orientation was according to Hegel correct. He set out to overcome the limitation of finite determinations, to unite intuition with thinking, to apprehend “the being of substance as subject”, to grasp it as a “living substance” which is “in truth subject, or what is the same, which is in truth actual”.²⁹ However, this is not enough. Everything depends on comprehending the substance as subject, true; still, Hegel adds – *es kommt noch darauf an*, “whether this intellectual intuition does not again fall back into inert simplicity, and does not present actuality itself in a non-actual manner”. And this is where Schelling failed!

Perhaps this failure was inevitable, for “in its begging” every new

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27 Hegel 1977c, p. 8.

28 Hegel 1977c, p. 9.

29 Hegel 1977c, p. 9.

science is in a position of weakness compared to the material richness and the detailed formal structure of the old one; it can therefore easily happen that “the formalism which recent philosophy denounces” only “reappears in its midst”. But then, the time has *now really* come to elaborate an actual presentation of actuality! This is the Gordian knot Hegel set out to cut.

II

In the proposed interpretation Hegel’s programmatic declaration was read as an injunction to develop a new philosophy, after the so called metaphysics has completed its full cycle, and after the first attempt made by Schelling relapsed in the same formalistic dogmatism. In part, his renovation call demanded a much closer attention to be paid to the actual study of nature. Instead of shapelessly repeating one and the same, as Schelling and his epigones presumably did, the “expansion” has to come about “through one and the same having spontaneously assumed different shapes”, that is to say, through an immanent self-differentiation analogous to the one that can be observed in self-transformation of a concrete living organism.³⁰ But what is even more important, indeed decisive, is the need to invent a new mode of thinking, an altogether new regime of rationality that would be able to think what from the standpoint of the traditional regime of thought proved to be unthinkable. Against the mechanistic logic of necessity that used to rely on the mathematical method, a new organicistic logic of freedom is needed. In this sense Hegel’s declaration may be understood as an ultimate response to the challenge set by the Spinozism Controversy.³¹ Let us explain.

In *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, which created a huge intellectual turmoil at the time of its original publication in 1785, Jacobi reported of his conversation with Lessing that allegedly included the following exchange:

Lessing: There is no other philosophy than the philosophy of Spinoza.

Jacobi: That might be true. For the determinist, if he wants to be

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³⁰ According to the remarkable, well argued and finally convincing proposal made by Förster, Hegel’s distancing from Schelling may have been influenced by his interest taken in Jena biological garden set up by Goethe, cf. Förster 2007. In addition, Förster drew attention to Goethe’s *Metamorphosis of Plants*. Goethe in retrospect commented, for instance, “that his thought does not separate itself from the objects, that the elements of the objects, that the intuitions go into them and are intimately permeated by them, that his intuiting itself thinking, his thinking intuiting is” (cf. Förster 2007, p. 120).

³¹ For an excellent presentation of the debate and its implications, see Beiser 1987, pp. 44–126.

consistent, must become a fatalist: the rest than follows by itself.³²

Philosophy was here used as general name for the project to provide an explanation according to the criterion of sufficient reason for everything. In that respect it was tantamount to the standpoint of rational knowledge. But since this knowledge proceeds by giving reasons with necessary validity, the standpoint of philosophy unavoidably results in a fatalistic world where there is no place left for freedom – together with everything that is usually associated to subjectivity, including such phenomena as beauty, love, or life.

Hegel basically subscribed to the relevance of Jacobi’s diagnosis.³³ However, as we have seen, he attributed the fatalistic consequence not to the project of rational justification as such, but rather to its inherited habit to rely exclusively on the “mode of cognition distinctive of understanding”.³⁴ The imminent task for philosophy was thus to introduce a different mode of cognition that would not be limited to the finite. From the standpoint of understanding philosophy had to rise to the standpoint of reason.³⁵ Yet as we have seen, Hegel could not be satisfied with Schelling’s absolute method consisting in the mere self-annihilation of the finite. True, in the realm of the infinite, the reflective mode of cognition is bound to produce an explicit contradiction. On the other hand, if the reflection is simply abandoned, as happened in Schelling, the absolute reached in this way not only becomes completely undetermined, the philosophy as a project of rational explanation itself is given up. What Schelling proposed as an attempt to save philosophy was in fact indistinguishable from Jacobi’s outright rejection of it.³⁶ Their respective positions differed only in that Schelling’s two-stage path took longer, for he first assumed the standpoint of philosophy and only later

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³² Jacobi 1994, p. 187.

³³ Cf. Hegel 2009, p. 7: “Jacobi ... recognized with Spinoza that this view is the ultimate and true result of all thinking, and that every consistent system of philosophy must in the end led to Spinozism.”

³⁴ Cf. Hegel 1970, 20, p. 163: “One may concede that demonstration leads to Spinozism, if under this expression we understand the mode of cognition distinctive of understanding [die Weise des verständigen Erkennens].” Cf. Hegel 1990, p. 156: “To render his philosophy mathematically conclusive and consistent, Spinoza presented it according to a geometrical method, but one that is only appropriate for the finite sciences of the understanding.”

³⁵ Cf. Bowman 2013, p. 31: “[Hegel] therefore accepts the diagnosis of Kant and Jacobi, while rejecting their cure. ... Being *is* intelligibility, but intelligibility is not what we thought it was – nor, for that matter, is being.”

³⁶ In the *Jacobi Review* Hegel compares Jacobi’s sensuous intuition of immediate knowledge to Schelling’s intellectual intuition, declaring both to be “equally abstract”, cf. Hegel 2009, p. 7.

threw it away.³⁷ However, this actually speaks in favour of Jacobi. Instead of indulging in futile process of reducing the determined finite to the undetermined infinite, it would be in fact more reasonable to surrender philosophy right away and directly embrace faith, as Jacobi did.

Considering the final outcome of Schelling's proposal Hegel was thus led to conclude that philosophy couldn't abandon Spinoza without abandoning itself at the same time. That gave a new meaning to the verdict regarding Spinozism, namely, that to be a philosopher is simply to be consequent, or as Jacobi put it, "to think to the end".³⁸ And the task of philosophy grew thereby even harder, since now philosophy had not only to start from the standpoint of Spinoza, but in a sense it had to remain within it, while still be able to produce the dimension of subjectivity.

In any case, Hegel now came to understand his philosophical programme in opposition to Schelling, as a defence of finite determinations against an undetermined infinite. At a certain point in the later Jena period Hegel affirmed that the true itself is structured as reflection:

Reason is, therefore, misunderstood when reflection is excluded from the true, and is not grasped as a positive moment of the absolute.³⁹

This strategic decision⁴⁰ clearly commanded a series of other positions to be taken, ranging from affirmation of the negativity internal to the absolute itself,⁴¹ over positive treatment of contradiction,

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³⁷ In the *Jacobi Review* Hegel implies that in fact Schelling (since he probably refers to Schelling) already produced this determinate result, only to discard it after the fact, cf. Hegel 2009, p. 9: "Thus the difference between determining the absolute as substance and determining it as spirit boils down to the question whether thinking, having annihilated its finitudes and mediations, negated its negations, and thus comprehended the one absolute, is conscious of what it has actually achieved in its cognition of absolute substance, or whether it lacks such consciousness."

³⁸ The expression used by Jacobi is "die *Denkkraft*, *die ausdenkt*"; it literally means something like "the power of thinking that thinks to the end, thinks it through, endures in thinking".

³⁹ Hegel 1997c, p. 11–12.

⁴⁰ Reflection is an extremely complex notion whose vicissitudes by itself embody the complexity of Hegel's position. In general, it stands for the mode of thinking of understanding, with a special emphasis given to the question of determinacy (the formula *omnis determinatio negatio* was often named Principle of Reflection). However, we must not forget that in Kant the reflective judgment was designed to capture the specificity of alternative, nondeterministic mode of predication, and that under this heading reflection, even the so called external reflection found its way into the structure of Hegel's essence.

⁴¹ Cf. Hegel 2009, p. 8: "Everything depends here on a correct understanding of the status and significance of negativity."

to dynamisation of the fixed thought-determinations. All of them, however, can be summed up in the injunction that the result of the self-destruction of the reflection has itself to be grasped within the mode of reflection, as a *concept*. The point where Schelling abandoned reflection is precisely the point where we must stick to determinate thinking – with which philosophy stands or falls. The most explicit formulation of this fundamental program is perhaps to be found in the opening paragraphs of the later *Encyclopaedia Logic*. Speaking of the activity of thinking and of the aspiration of philosophy to find its satisfactions, Hegel notes:

But while going about its business it so happens that thinking becomes entangled in contradictions. It loses itself in the fixed non-identity of its thoughts and in the process does not attain itself but instead remains caught up in its opposite. The higher aspiration goes against this result of this thinking distinctive of mere understanding, and is grounded therein that thinking does not let go of itself, that even in the this conscious loss of its being at home with itself, it remains true to itself, 'so *that it may overcome*', and in the very thinking brings about the resolution of its own contradiction.⁴²

Since every thought-determination is essentially affected with negativity, any consequent use of understanding is bound to bring it out in the form of explicit contradiction.⁴³ This is the major lesson given by Kant in his *Dialectic*, acknowledged by Jacobi in his critique of philosophy, and made use of by Schelling for his absolute method. However, while the manifest contradiction led all off them to a certain devaluation of thinking, declaring that its concepts are incapable of grasping what is true – be it under the guise of restricting their validity to mere subjectivity (Kant), rejecting them altogether in favour of an immediate knowledge (Jacobi), or trading them for the equally abstract absolute identity of $A = A$ – Hegel in contrast followed the suit of Bardili and vehemently rejected this kind of logical despair. "Thinking did not need to fall into the *misology*".⁴⁴ On the contrary, this is precisely the point where the thinking has to remain true to itself, without reservation, the point where we have

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⁴² Hegel 2010b, p. 39. – For a similar emphasis given to the passage, cf. Kreines 2015, pp. 197, 245.

⁴³ Hegel often said that understanding was not only led, but actually misled into contradiction by reason: *misled* or *seduced* since the contradiction violates the basic principle of understanding and works therefore against it; and *by reason*, since reason is supposed to be already at work within understanding. Cf. Hegel 1977a, p. 95.

⁴⁴ Hegel 2010b, p. 39.

to think on, withstand the contradiction, and by thinking it through bring about its resolution.

Here we cannot go into any details of this decisive injunction. Three short remarks will have to suffice. First, a close reading of Hegel's early Jena writings suggest that, contrary to the prevailing opinion, he already at that time considered a similar standpoint of fidelity to thinking. In the concluding remarks to *Faith and Knowledge*, for instance, Hegel called for a "speculative Good Friday" where "the pure concept would give philosophical existence" to what used to be just a moral precept or feeling.⁴⁵ Since the historic Good Friday is a story of annihilation, of the willing death of God himself, and of his subsequent resurrection in glory, the speculative Good Friday seems to command a reading that involves a kind of persistence of thinking in what is equivalent to its death – that is, a resurrection of the concept transformed out of its contradiction.⁴⁶

Second, if we look for a brief illustration of what is involved in such transformation, we can find one directly in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* where Hegel discusses the transitions from representation to thought and from thought to concept.⁴⁷ It is interesting that Hegel starts his sketch from an apparently naïve situation in which representations are immersed in everyday life and serve not so much as notions representing things of the world, but principally as tools that help us find our way around. Within this picture, which bears a strange resemblance to Wittgenstein's description of language games, representations make us familiar with the things, yet strictly speaking they do not convey into us any cognition of them since at this level the necessary distinction between the two realms is simply non-existent.

Such separation happens only with the entrance of understanding that cuts the living structure of the world, tears the representation out of its initial place and breaks it up into its elements. Such analysis transforms representations into thoughts, which are according to Hegel "themselves familiar, fixed, and inert determinations".⁴⁸ At this point one would expect Hegel to lament over the deficiencies of understanding. Instead, he holds a laudation praising understanding as "the most

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45 Hegel 1977b, pp. 190–191.

46 For a closer elaboration cf. Kobe 2005.

47The illustration is paradigmatic since the sequence in question stands for the operation of philosophy us such, cf. EPS 1, 52; 8, 73–74: "The distinction between representations and thoughts has a special significance, because it can generally be said that philosophy does nothing but transform representations into thoughts – and, indeed, beyond that, the mere thought into the concept."

48 Hegel 1977c, p. 18.

astonishing and mightiest of powers, or rather of the absolute power"! This should make us pause. What makes it so absolute? It is not merely the fact that understanding transforms a given content into a possession of the self, or that it exemplifies "the power of the negative", for this it has in common with reason. Its particular absoluteness has rather to do with "the separated and the non-actual as such", with the "making-itself-non-actual" where understanding precisely differs from reason. It should be read therefore as the ontological priority of understanding over reason, which echoes in Hegel's repeated affirmations that understanding can be something without reason, while reason is nothing without understanding. And this is why the true *has to be* necessarily grasped as substance first.⁴⁹

Thoughts are then finally transformed into concepts. This operation is described as "far harder"⁵⁰ since it has to work against the fixity of the determinations that were previously posited by understanding itself. But on the other hand, no new capacity really enters the stage, what is required is only that understanding, this tremendous power of the negative "looks the negative in the face", "tarries with it", that "it endures" in what otherwise would mean its death, that is to say – in contradiction, and "maintains itself in it". In fact, one may say that in facing the contradiction understanding faces only itself. After all it was understanding that posited the mortifying determinations; and it is the very necessity of thinking, which is to say of understanding again that has brought it in contradiction. In a sense understanding is forced to choose – between the necessity of its particular positions and the necessity of its universal laws.⁵¹ In order to "maintain itself" the power of thinking is therefore forced to think on, assume the contradiction, and by tarrying with the negative convert it into being.

This power is identical with what we earlier called the subject.⁵²

At this point understanding may be said to become reason.

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49 Similar point are on many occasions made by Bowman, cf. for instance Bowman 2103, pp. 7, 80, or 189: "Finite cognition is a constitutive moment of the (infinte) cognition of the Idea." – The same applies to Kreines, cf. for instance Kreines 2015, p. 248: "Hegel agrees that the very project of reasoning or theoretical inquiry must begin with a substantial commitment, whose violation would mean giving up inquiry. The beginning is *epistemically necessary*, in this respect."

50 Cf. Hegel 1977c, p. 18.

51 Cf. Hegel 2010b, p. 57.

52 Hegel 1977c, p. 19.

However, this is only a figure of speech, since what is called reason has always already been operative in the guise of understanding. It is therefore more proper to say that substance becomes subject to the extent that thinking simply thinks the true as substance, yet thinks it all the way down, and endures in thinking even in the face of contradiction.

And third, in the description above there was a point when the moment of decision was invoked. In fact, in a situation of inner contradiction, especially when the contradiction is not arbitrary, and even if the sides seem to be of unequal importance, such as above, it is impossible to find a resolution by the means of an internal logical necessity alone. The resolution can be brought about by something excessive only, and that can be supplied to thinking only by including the instance of subject, through a gesture of subjectivation. Hegel was explicit enough about that. In his official discussion on method, in the chapter on the absolute idea at the end of *Science of Logic*, he described the stages of the immanent progress of the concept, paying particular attention to the varieties of negativity. At the stage of absolute negativity, corresponding to the point of undecidability mentioned above, Hegel comments:

Now the negativity just considered constitutes the turning point of the movement of the concept. It is the simple point of the negative self-reference...⁵³

This is the *turning point*, for at this point thinking has to turn its scope away from the objective content of thought-determination and to the subjective form of thinking itself. It is the point where the subject of thought is forced to assume the task of thinking in the first person and force a resolution.⁵⁴ This is the point where substance subjectivizes.⁵⁵

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⁵³ Hegel 2010a, p. 745.

⁵⁴ Regarding the place of decision in Hegel's logic of concept, cf. Bourgeois 1992, p. 91: "Contrary to the usual interpretations ... Hegelian dialectic not only tolerates, but by its very meaning requires, in its essential *necessity*, its anchoring in the *contingency of the sensuous this* and in the *liberty of the decision*."

⁵⁵ Initially it was intended that, at this place, a close comparison with Spinoza's *political* philosophy would follow. We would have tried to show that there is a close similarity not only between Hegel's and Spinoza's theory of the political state; but that there is even a more extraordinary overlapping to be found between Hegel's treatment of the logic of understanding and the logic of reason on the one hand, and Spinoza's presentation of the inner logic of the aristocratic and monarchic regime on the other. Hegel's new logic of the concept would thus prove to be eminently political indeed, developed as an extension of Spinoza's theory of the political. And if true, this would imply that Hegel actually fought Spinoza with the help of Spinoza himself. Here, we can therefore only agree with Campos that "with regard to political philosophy's method, Hegel seems to be much more indebted to Spinoza

In our description of the transition from substance to subject it was claimed that at the turning point of the method a gesture of subjectivization was needed, and the necessity to choose was invoked. Such manner of speaking can easily induce one to believe that Hegel's concept basically refers to the thinking of a subject. This would be wrong.

True, since an empirical subject, be it individual or collective, instantiates the essentially subjective structure of reason, every comprehensive interpretation of Hegel has to allow for such phenomena of subject's thought-formations. Also true, since Hegel himself declared that "the *originally synthetic* unity of *apperception*, the unity of the '*I think*', or self-consciousness" constituted "the *essence of the concept*",⁵⁶ his philosophical project is bound to entertain an intimate relation with Kant's philosophy. However, Hegel alerts, if we try to describe the concept by turning to the nature of the I, "it is necessary to this end that we have grasped the *concept* of the 'I'".⁵⁷ In that way the reference to Kant turns almost into a tautology.

Again, it is worth stressing with Horstmann that "Hegel's concept of logical subjectivity is emphatically anti-subjectivistic and anti-psychological".⁵⁸ Hegel explicitly says that "the concept is also not to be considered as the act of 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*".⁵⁹ And if in Hegel's system the former metaphysics was replaced by logic, this is consequently not to say that for him philosophy has to give up the traditional metaphysical questions concerning the structure of being and humbly limit itself to clarify our conceptual schemes. Quite the contrary, Hegel did not need a special discipline of metaphysics precisely because, for him, the concept was something real in itself, existing at least to the same – and usually to a much higher – degree as the so called objective phenomena of nature. For him, the science of logic simply is the science of what there truly is in the world, and the concept of a thing is at the same time what the

than he is prepared to acknowledge" (Campos 2012, p. 78).

⁵⁶ Hegel 2010a, p. 515.

⁵⁷ Hegel 2010a, p. 516.

⁵⁸ Horstmann 2004, p. 200. In Hegel's use, adds Horstmann, "'subjectivity' precisely cannot be grasped in opposition to 'objectivity', it has rather the function to describe an essential property of a highly developed whole that includes both objectivity and subjective concept." – For a similar point cf. Illetterati 2005.

⁵⁹ Hegel 2010a, p. 517.

thing in question actually is in itself. This is the meaning of the “objective thought” which, according to Hegel, is itself equivalent to the phrase that “there is understanding, reason in the world”.⁶⁰

The true has consequently still to be comprehended as substance – not in the sense of fullness of being presumably provided by substance, but as an expression of its “non-actuality”, its failures and gaps. We need Spinoza, we need him precisely in his untruth, we need him for his “gappy ontology”. And not only in the sense that the things of nature are not thoroughly determined, which indeed they are not, but in order that in their gaps and indifferences they still may, somehow, be.

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⁶⁰ Hegel 2010b, p. 58. – *Reason in the world* is the title of recent book of James Kreines where he vigorously defends a metaphysical reading of Hegel with a peculiar suspended, self-sustaining, top-down ontology of the real concept that lets the nature go free in its indifferent indeterminacy, cf. Kreines 2015. Our point is, however, that there has to be understanding in the world as well. For a similar metaphysic reading of Hegel where more emphasis is given to the necessity of appearing, that is to say of *being* untrue, cf. Bowman 2013.

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