NEGATIVITY
HEGEL'S SOLUTION TO THE QUESTION OF PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEM
IN THE PREFACE TO THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF MIND

The profound idea that Hegel introduces and develops in the Phenomenology of Mind is to be found in his discovery of the significance of negativity. Here negativity is more than just a merely formal procedure that we could equally well describe using the rather tired word “dialectic”. Rather, negativity is a concept that describes reality itself. On the one hand it represents reality as subject, since it expresses the principle that the real enters into a relation to itself through a process of negation. Something is the Other to itself, thus intrinsically marked by negation; thus it not simply there, simply present in existence, but rather exists as self-relation through this Other. On the other hand negativity describes reality as dynamic, as suffering and transience. Truth, reconciliation, and infinitude have to first develop and assert themselves against this negativity. Thus Hegel conceives reality not merely as an abstract unity or as an abstract opposition, but rather as a dynamic and generative potency that first makes the creative power of mind understandable along with the development of the concept and life itself in all its multifariousness.

This basic insight underlying Hegel’s thought begins to coalesce increasingly in the years before 1807. In particular his critical engagement with the philosophies of Fichte and Schelling, his friend of his Tübingen days, begins to show him a new path. Hegel unequivocally positions himself on the side of the post-Kantian avant-garde that does not see itself merely as following in Kant’s footsteps. Like Schelling, Hegel strives for a new breakthrough in philosophy, one that is to begin with a Kant critique in order to move beyond this to a system that is both living and vital and yet comprehensive. Its goal is to encompass life, the life of the mind, in all its breadth and depth and to translate this into a living system. Hegel shares this conception with Schelling; however, it puts him at odds with Fichte. Certain inadequacies afflicting the general situation of German philosophy after Kant begin to concern him, inadequacies that are not merely conceptual in nature. Hegel begins to see that neither the abstract identity of

1 Translation: Karsten Schöllner (Berlin).
an absolute I nor an unconceptual transcendence of the finite can lead to a philosophy that is capable of disclosing the existential sense of life. Hegel seeks a conception of reality characterized by ideal concretion rather than abstract subsumption.

For a long time Hegel found himself thinking in the wake of Schelling, who had made himself spokesperson of a movement that aspired to effect a revolutionary and visionary change in the philosophical situation after 1800, primarily through heightening their public presence, for example with newspaper projects and a romantic notion of combining literature, art and philosophy. Schelling was seen as a young philosophical author by his contemporaries, Hegel as writer of reviews and a polemical critic. In Jena, where he was called to a professorship in philosophy at an astonishingly young age in 1798, Schelling developed not only an abundant natural philosophy but also a philosophy of identity that was to express the entirety of philosophy as an organic whole. Schelling's philosophy drew from a variety of sources; after beginning on a highly speculative note with an interpretive commentary on Plato's Timaeus and an associatively written second outline of a philosophy of the I following Fichte, after an intensive study of the writings of Spinoza and Leibniz, after continuing his critical revision of Fichtean thought, his interests in a speculative philosophy of nature finally led him to a "System of Transcendental Idealism" in 1800 that claimed to be a truly unified system and that was to allow all material parts to be developed integratively and organically from this basis. Moreover with this 'system' Schelling demonstrated absolute originality and a high level of problem-solving competence. The System quickly became a bible of the Romantic movement. Many poets, painters and thinkers were able to latch on to the system, exploit it and extend its use. However the enthusiasm wasn't able to conceal the fact of the many weaknesses lurking under the cover of a superficially persuasive systematic approach. Not only was Schelling aware of this, prompting him to a continual and rapid development of his system; Hegel also discovered the weaknesses of a philosophical system based on the thought of pure identity.

At issue is Schelling's basic conviction that the concept of absolute unity has to function as the outer brackets that can frame the manifold of the system's various contents as well as the form and organic structure of the whole. For Schelling this concept of unity was bound to the totality of the unconditional. In this way he attempted to move beyond Kant's edict that the totalizing processes of reason, i.e. the idea of the unconditioned, may only claim a regulative function. Kant had intended to set proper limits to theoretical reason; the unconditioned was only to play a role in practical philosophy, thus not as unconditioned is or must but as an unconditioned should. Thus the soul, God and the world were stricken from theory but rehabilitated practically; for Schelling this had the disastrous consequence that this divergence of the theoretical and the practical threatened to make the construction of a philosophical system appreciably difficult or even impossible.

For Schelling the only possible way to resolve this problem was to adhere to a principle of absolute unity. The limited activity of the understanding, with its functions and rules indissolubly bound to sensibility, was subordinated to reason, which he interpreted positively as the faculty of unity, of infinity and timeless constancy, in other words: as the positive faculty of the ideas. Ultimately the understanding takes its significance from reason: the contents of understanding first become complete in reason. With this restructuring of Kantian thought Schelling hoped to be able carve out an approach to
nature, ethics, history and art that would allow for an affirmative system beyond the
dichotomy of theoretical and practical philosophy and beyond the Kantian critique of
the faculties. However Schelling was not concerned merely with one-upping Kantian
transcendental philosophy; rather it was his interest in the concrete phenomena of nature
and art that drove the construction of his system. A new system of philosophy was not
only to guarantee the coherence of the whole of reason in its development out of a
single principle; it was also above all to clear the way for countless concrete phenomena
of art and nature. In Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* Schelling had not found any path
to a speculative philosophy of nature that could connect to the latest finds in physics
and chemistry. In Kant's *Critique of Judgment* Schelling did not see any potential for an
artistic philosophy that could capture the concrete work of art. Finally in the *Critique
of Judgment* Schelling found a philosophy of organic nature; but the concrete organism,
and in particular the recent discovery of Galvanism, could not really be subsumed
under this theory. Thus it was above all the philosophical impulse towards concretion
that drove Schelling to move beyond Kant in a two-fold manner: firstly, the critical
project of transcendental philosophy had to be taken beyond its limits to create space
for justificatory structures and comprehensive, non-empirical explanatory methods; and
secondly, the ground had to be laid for a likewise comprehensive and non-empirical
presentation of the concrete materials, above all in art and in nature.

In his *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* (1801) Schelling developed his
philosophy of identity further. The thought of a negative philosophy occurs here
for the first time. His principle is now no longer just positive, i.e. the identity, but
also negative, the indifference. Schelling's *Presentation* begins with the *unconditioned
knowledge of absolute*, and thus begins with an instance of knowledge, with an
unconditioned, with an absolute. Schelling explains what it means to speak of
unconditioned knowledge, or the knowledge of the absolute at all, as follows:
absolute reason is the complete indifference of the subjective and the objective. The
thought of reason – in the ambiguity of this 'of' already indicates the indifference
of the subjective and objective – requires an abstraction from the thinker. By means
of this abstraction reason is no longer subjective, and, because not subjective, is also
no longer objective, "since what is objective or thought is only possible in relation
to an instance of thinking, (...) through this abstraction it becomes the true in itself,
which falls into the points of indifference of the subjective and objective". Absolute
reason describes a thinking that eludes all reflection, that conceives things as they are
in themselves, i.e. in absolute reason.

5 Cf. *Darstellung meines Systems*, SchSW I, 4, p. 117. – The system begins with § 7: "Bloß die
Unbedingtheit dieser Erkenntniß zu beweisen, wurde die vorhergehende Reihe von Sätzen vorausgeschickt.
Denn diese Erkenntniß selbst wird eigentlich nicht bewiesen, eben weil sie unbedingt ist." (117f) – This
is what Fichte never realized. In Fichte's *system indifference* is the point of departure. This is the source
of many of Fichte's misjudgments about the character of the Absolute in Schelling's system. [Ich zitiere
sammliche Werke.* (Hg.) Schelling, K.F.A. I. Abteilung Bde. 1-10, II. Abteilung Bde. 1-4. Stuttgart und
Augsburg 1856-1861 (= SchSW)].

Erklärung (§ 1).

3 *Darstellung meines Systems*, SchSW I, 4, p. 115.
With this step Schelling unknowingly set forth a tradition beginning with Meister Eckhart and the neo-Platonically inspired theory of the 'indistinctum', and continuing with Nicholas of Cusa in his theory of the 'non-aliud', the not-other. Here Schelling attempts to contaminate the pure self-sameness of absolute identity with non-identity such that identity still remains identity as such. Thus a conception of negativity develops within Schelling's thought that still remains within the framework of an extended theory of identity. Unlike Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa, Schelling does not succeed in releasing the argumentative potential of indifference; rather, Schelling takes indifference over into a purely negative neither-nor — neither ideal, nor real, neither subject, nor object — that for this reason has to remain substantially under-determined.

Hegel charts his own path to a philosophical solution out of this situation, which was to lead to its first monumental results with his Phenomenology of Mind. However, we should first look at Hegel's critical engagement with Fichte's outline. Hegel's critique of Fichte can appear quite harsh in today's light. And in fact, the critic himself has been criticized quite harshly. However, with the distance of our perspective today, our assessment should bear consideration for the historical streams of thought that were hard to see clearly at the time. This does not mean refraining from judgment out of respect for the giants of our intellectual history, but rather the critical awareness of an epoch that owes much to its historical distance and that aims precisely to liberate that discriminating judgment that refuses to hang on to its past greats but rather is at work in the uninhibited discussion of their arguments.

1. Hegel's critique of Fichte

In 1801 and 1802 Hegel was still arguing within Schelling's line of thought, and it is from this position that he critiqued the philosophy of Kant and above all of Fichte. Superficially at least he prefers Schelling's conception of unity and philosophical system. It is clear in any case that in the first years of the 19th century Hegel developed the rudiments of a theory of negativity through his engagement with Fichte's thought. In 1802 in Glauben und Wissen he criticized Fichte's (1) concept of unity, (2) his concept of reality, and (3) the emptiness of the underlying I.

(1) Hegel criticizes the formalism of this concept of unity, maintaining that it is this formalism that connects Fichte with Kant's transcendental philosophy. For Hegel, Fichte's basic conception of the I — a modification of Kant's transcendental apperception that Fichte, unlike Kant, joins to intellectual intuition — only explicates the formal identity of the ideal, which, being formal, cannot account

for difference and thus stands absolutely opposed to difference. Thus Fichte claim that all worldly contents are nothing other than I, since the I is the only reality, is a formal claim. Hegel maintains that for Fichte the worldly contents are only I in general, not in their particularity. The manifold, the material of knowledge, the particularity of the particular, that which is real in a strict sense, eludes Fichte's philosophy, according to Hegel. Here, as in his previous Differenzschrift, Hegel's critique is addressed not to the concept of unity as such but rather to the fact that Fichte conceived unity as prior to the manifold and not as a unity in the manifold. Unity is only unity due to our abstraction from the manifold. Hegel, in contrast, who is still following in Schelling's footsteps in conceiving unity as absolute identity or indifference, holds that unity is not distinct from the manifold, but rather comprises its essential being.

(2) This is closely connected to Hegel's critique of Fichte's concept of rationality. Even the reduction of things an sich to appearances is only conceivable for Hegel under the assumption of the subject's finitude. Thus this reduction follows from the critique of reason, not the other way around. If the suspicion against reason and content specific to reason fails to hold up, then it no longer matters whether we speak of appearances or things, of sensations or properties – it no longer matters in terms of reality. Hegel argues that this reality is for Fichte an organisation of actuality that can no longer be comprehended by the individual, marked by inscrutable necessity. Thus the empirical existence of the empirical subject is no longer an object of reason, but rather its limit. And the formal identity of the I, which from the perspective of the Wissenschaftslehre is supposed to the sole substance, suffers an inexplicable antithesis here.

(3) Moreover, according to Hegel Fichte's underlying I is empty, empty of content. The content from the transcendental forms that comprises actual knowledge is added after the fact. Hegel does not see a dualism here, strictly speaking, since the I remains absolute substance; however, it is undetermined for itself in contrast to the determinateness of its multifarious contents, which, however, insofar as they are real, are nothing other than I. Hegel criticizes the lack of a derivation of the determinate from the undetermined connection between the indeterminateness of I and the determinateness of actual knowledge. This double indeterminacy makes the initial I deficient, makes it an I that is missing something of decisive importance: its connection to determinacy, to concretion. For Hegel it follows that Fichte's principle if a limited principle, his absolute a limited absolute. Hegel writes: "(...) das völlig Leere, womit angefangen wird, hat durch seinen absoluten Mangel den Vorteil, in sich immanent, die unmittelbare Notwendigkeit zu tragen, sich zu erfüllen, (...) eine Notwendigkeit, die darauf beruht, daß das Prinzip schlechthin Teil, und durch seine unendliche Armut, die unendliche Möglichkeit des Reichtums ist," similar to an empty purse, from which we can deduce money, but only

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9 Cf. GW 4, p. 388.
10 Cf. ibid., p. 389.
11 Ibid., p. 390.
as that which is missing. This basic flaw in the principle becomes the engine driving the deduction. If the principle is incomplete in principle, then it is necessary to continue moving forwards towards totality.\textsuperscript{12}

At the close of \textit{Glauben und Wissen} we find Hegel's first formulation of the task of a philosophy in which negativity makes an appearance as one moment of an absolute system: "Der reine Begriff aber, oder die Unendlichkeit, als der Abgrund des Nichts, worin alles Sein versinkt, muß den unendlichen Schmerz (...) rein als Moment, aber auch nicht mehr denn als Moment der höchsten Idee bezeichnen, und so dem, was etwa entweder moralische Vorschrift einer Aufopferung des empirischen Wesens oder der Begriff formeller Abstraktion war, eine philosophische Existenz geben, und also der Philosophie die Idee der absoluten Freiheit, und damit das absolute Leiden oder den spekulativen Karfreitag, (...), in der ganzen Härte seiner Gottlosigkeit wiederherstellen, aus welcher Härte allein (...) die höchste Totalität in ihrem ganzen Ernst (...) auferstehen kann und muß." The profound seriousness of reason consists, according to Hegel, in penetrating and pervading reason's other. The suffering found in particularity and diversity can only be taken up into the absolute or the totality if conceived in its true existence, in its opposition to the absolute, if it is not simply negated by abandoned morality or by mere abstraction but rather presents itself as a moment of the absolute through a genuine unity lived and thought through to its end.

If we adapt these points of critique into a set of criteria for a principled system of philosophy, we can conclude that already in 1802 Hegel was envisioning a principle that, firstly, conceives unity not merely as a formal abstraction but as something that determines content and structures the system. Secondly, this principle is to generate a concept of reality that expresses the absence of contradiction and yet fundamentally explains the real forms of actuality, including its cultural moments. Thirdly and finally it is to disclose the substantial variety of philosophy's relations to self and the world and thus make the ethical order, law, art, and religion accessible to philosophy in the fullness of their historical and systematic dimensions.

2. Hegel's critique of Schelling

The 'Preface' to the \textit{Phenomenology of Mind} was the public first glimpse of Hegel as a systematic thinker. However, he continued to pursue his polemical and critical interests without pause. By this point his critique also turns against Schelling for the first time. In a sense Hegel's polemical critique of Schelling is at the same time an homage, which might be hard to read beneath the harsh tone that Hegel takes. Here, at this prominent position in the \textit{Phenomenology}, Hegel's polemic is meant to be particularly effective. In fact Hegel with one capricious sentence branded Schelling's philosophy with an epithet it still bears today, an epithet that took on a life of its own and is assumed to be self-evident - namely, that Schelling's absolute is the night in which all cows are black. The harshness of this criticism must well have been intentional: he was looking to mark off his own philosophical system from that of

\textsuperscript{12} Cf. Ludwig Siep, \textit{Hegels Fichtekritik und die Wissenschaftslehre von 1804}, Freiburg/Munich 1970, 29 f.
his friend from his Jena days; thus he sought to differentiate himself from a theory that he himself had at one time stood behind. The criticism cannot conceal the great debt that it owes to its object of critique.

Hegel's diagnosis is, roughly, that Schelling subsumed the wealth of the material under a formal and general absolute. He tried to subject everything to the absolute Idea. For Schelling — or, rather, for the Schelling that Hegel refers to — the absolute is absolute identity. The subjection of this diverse variety to one absolute identical principle means a reduction of diversity to absolute unity, without this unity being able to encompass a moment of negativity. Hegel saw that in Schelling's philosophy the manifold becomes degraded within itself to a mere appearance without substance in contrast to the absolute, identical one. This results in a philosophical system that contains everything different, but nothing as different. But a closer inspection shows that this expansion has not come about through one and the same principle having spontaneously assumed different shapes, but rather through the shapeless repetition of one and the same formula, only externally applied to diverse materials, thereby obtaining merely a boring show of diversity. Hegel thus expresses his understanding that Schelling's accentuation of identity is done for the sake of the variety of phenomena, and not out of a melancholy and world-weary escapism such as one could accuse the later Schelling of.

Here Hegel takes up Schelling's system not just to critique but also to bring forward the presentation of his own system. Schelling's system presents a formless motion, according to Hegel; but he also concedes that Schelling struck the right path for a solution. The rich variety of concrete forms and the absolute identity of the (divine) principle can only be brought together if we conceive their relation dynamically, not statically, i.e. as movement. Yet Hegel criticizes Schelling for having only applied this principle externally to the various and manifold. This only leads to a continual repetition of the principle — movement as repetition. Schelling seeks material and ascertains its relation to the absolute in order to then integrate this into the ordo of the universe accordingly. In Hegel's view, Schelling is concerned not to destroy the multifariousness of phenomena but to save it. Yet Schelling's solution relies on a mere opposition, such that the manifold remains outside of the absolute, and thus negation likewise remains external to the absolute.

We can see that the concept of difference takes on central importance in this critique, since Hegel faults Schelling's system with being unable to express difference as difference. Consequently the system can only apply the one and identical throughout the inessential differences of the various that is in itself nothing other than the one and absolute. In the first paragraphs of the Presentation of My System of Philosophy Schelling in fact describes how reason is one both within itself and outwardly, and that everything which is, is in reason as the one and selfsame. The 11th section of the text is headed by the Spinozistic proposition: "Alles, was ist, ist die absolute Identität selbst." Schelling adds, for the sake of clarification: "Alles, was ist, ist an sich Eines. (...) Die absolute Identität ist das Einzige, was schlechthin, oder an sich ist, also ist alles nur insofern an

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13 Hegel, Akad.-Ausg. 9, 16. real quote: "It thus appears that everything has been subjected to the absolute Idea", p. 8.

14 Z.B. in: Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie (1801).

15 Hegel, GW 9, p. 16-17.
sich, als es die absolute Identität selbst ist, und insofern es nicht die absolute Identität ist, ist es überhaupt nicht an sich." Thus we cannot attribute any being to diversity; it is always non-existent diversity, inessential difference. Everything that is different is inessentially different, and essentially there is only identity, which – as Hegel would say – is given boring repetition in diversity. This is due to a certain formalism in method, as Hegel explains in another passage of his Preface: „This formalism ... imagines that it has comprehended and expressed the nature and life of a form when it has endowed it with some determination of the schema as a predicate. The predicate may be subjectivity or objectivity, or, say, magnetism, electricity, etc., contraction or expansion, east or west, and the like. Such predicates can be multiplied to infinity, since in this way each determination or form can again be used as a form or moment in the case of an other, and each can gratefully perform the same service for an other. In this sort of circle of reciprocity one never learns what the thing itself is, nor what the one or the other is.”

Hegel's critique of Schelling is exemplified in this polemic analysis of Schelling's method, which in particular is a critique of:

1. the arbitrariness of predication: predicates can be arbitrarily attributed to each particular object;
2. the circularity of predication: predicates can be attributed to each other reciprocally; and
3. predication adds nothing to the knowledge of the matter: one learns nothing about the thing itself, since it is concealed under the predicates attributed to it. The thing itself is not conceived in its self-movement, but rather distorted by externally applied predications.

Finally, this whole procedure only works when the material that this formalism is applied to is already previously known. Nature and its forms, precisely that which is curious and odd, has to be already known to us such that the form, the rule or the law, can be applied to it. Thus the a prioricity of Schelling's system turns out, for Hegel, to be the opposite: identity is added to the material post factum. „The Idea, which is of course true enough on its own account, remains in effect always in its primitive condition, if its development involves nothing more than this sort of repetition of the same formula. When the knowing subject goes around applying this single inert form to whatever it encounters, and dipping the material into this placid element from outside, this is no more the fulfillment of what is needed, i.e. a self-originating, self-differentiating wealth of shapes, than any arbitrary insights into the content."  

3. Negativity as solution

The static coexistence of unity and difference cannot be a stable and enduring relation and thus not a reasonable one. It only becomes such through the concept of movement,
whereby negativity occupies the centre of Hegel’s thought. Negation initially means limit or lack. The negative is the negative of the positive and thus is not just different but determined as a contrary and contradictory term of relation. This implies a moment of identity, such that Hegel can also say: “Im Gegensatze ist die bestimmtte Reflexion, der Unterschied vollendet. Er ist die Einheit der Identität und der Verschiedenheit; seine Momente sind in Einer Identität verschieden; so sind sie entgegengesetzte.” This perspective on the one – here formally abbreviated – opens up a perspective on negativity. Negativity is the germ cell of subjectivity, since subjectivity implies a movement that can only be generated by negation, and only through the negation of negation returning into itself. "Wenn fernherhin von Negativität oder negativer Natur die Rede seyn wird", as writes Hegel in the Logic of 1812, "so ist darunter nicht jene erste Negation, die Grenze, Schranke oder Mangel, sondern wesentlich die Negation des Andersseyns zu verstehen, die, als solche, Beziehung auf sich selbst ist." Negativity – in contrast to negation – focuses the whole, which is not just negation or the negation of negation but the relation to itself. This outlook on the whole and its processual character robs negativity of its destructive aspect. By Fichte and Schelling one still finds trains of thought where negativity has to show up for the destructive moments. For Fichte, thinking negationless unity without even the possibility of diversity is the very task of thought. For Hegel, in contrast, negation bears the diversity of forms and qua negation of negation first makes a self-enriching, self-developing and comprehensible unity possible.

Hegel is very clear about the fact that this insight into self-developing movement does not simply appear one day, but rather has a substantial history of its own, its own developmental history that calls for an interpretation in light of this history as well as in light of the larger world history. In formulating the goal of his system, Hegel was conscious of his agreement with Fichte and Schelling. As he says, it all comes down to "das Wahre nicht als Substanz, sondern ebensosehr als Subjekt aufzufassen und auszudrücken." The genesis of this problem begins with Spinoza, who conceived God as substance and thus faced the problem of bringing substance and subject together into unity. However, for Hegel this position is encumbered by the basic flaw that self-consciousness no longer retains any function for the system, that it goes under and is negated without any part of it being sublimated and retained in its essence.

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21 Hegel, GW II, p. 77.
22 Fichte, WL 1804, GA II, 8, p. 69f. – However, it is important for an understanding of Fichte’s position to note that the thought of the absolute is only possible in the mode of difference, namely in the mode of the duality of thinking and the object of thought. Unlike with Hegel, for Fichte the negative moment only appears through the consummational character of the insight into the absolute. [Johann Gottlieb Fichte: J. G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. (ed.) Lauth, Reinhard u.a. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1962ff. (= GA)].
24 Hegel, GW 9, p. 18.
With this reading Hegel maintains the traditional line of Spinoza interpretation of his era, which saw Spinoza’s position as a one-sided realism—although already situated in the context of the theory of subject and objectivity. A conception that was merely the exact counterpart to Spinoza would not be any better. If we hold fast to “thinking as thinking,” we have nothing more than generality as such, a mere simplicity, an undifferentiated, unmoving substantiality. In the context of a philosophy that seeks a radically conceived subjectivity, it becomes clear that this simple subjectivity cannot express anything more than Spinoza’s substance. At first glance this subjectivity refutes Spinoza’s claim to allow extension and thought, the real and the ideal, to exist indistinguishable from one another as infinite attributes of the one substance, and refutes this in favor of the unity of thought. Yet ultimately this results in the same static combination of substance and subject. If we conceive thought as directed entirely at itself, as conceiving itself in its unity, then we can no longer find our way to the diverse contents of thought. The rich variety of forms remains external to thought.

Finally Hegel comes to a discussion of intellectual intuition, which he sees as the unmediated unity of thought and intuition, thus the unmediated unity of substance and subject. This is unmistakably directed at Schelling, but also at Fichte, whose *Tathandlung* is occasionally seen as intellectual intuition by Fichte himself. In both Fichte and Schelling Hegel sees a conception that aims as a unity of substance and subject. This is in fact, for Hegel, the task that a consistent philosophical system has to set itself. However, he adds that it all comes down to “dieses intellektuelle Anschauen nicht wieder in die träge Einfachheit zurückfällt und die Wirklichkeit auf eine unwirkliche Weise darstellt.”

Alongside the idle simplicity Hegel also criticizes the unreal reality with a view to the consequences of the system outlines. This means:

1. Mere unity as the principle of a system is entirely inadequate for an immanent explanation of things. It leads to the consequence of a vacuous repetition of the absolute one upon an inessential diversity. This is what makes the simplicity idle: it is unmoving, it fails to develop itself.
2. This makes reality unreal. The principle dominates the conception of reality. Simplicity comes to be the essential, the various its mere appearances. However, just this infinitely various manifold is the real reality, which is then degraded through the emphasis on unity into an unreal reality. The wealth of forms becomes an unreal wealth.

For Hegel all of these positions share the same flaw that they fail to conceive subjectivity as living. “Die lebendige Substanz ist ferner das Seyn, welches in Wahrheit Subject, oder was dasselbe heißt, welches in Wahrheit wirklich ist, nur insofern sie die Bewegung des

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25 Inspired by Jacobi, it was Fichte and Schelling above all who saw a model for their own philosophy in Spinoza in both methodic and systematic terms while at the same time distancing themselves from him, since his system struck them as too objective and one-sidedly realistic.

26 Cf. Hegel, GW 9, Anm. p. 486: The editors of the *Phenomenology* conjecture, with some measure of plausibility, that the formulation *thinking as thinking* is a reference to Bardili and Reinhold.

27 Hegel, GW 9, p. 18.
sich selbst Setzens, oder die Vermittlung des sich anders Werdens mit sich selbst ist."\(^{28}\)
The various strands of argumentation are all tied together here. The concept of the living, which first begins to play a dominant role in the chapter on self-consciousness, implies the thought of self-developing movement as well as the thought of subjectivity. If idle simplicity is contaminated with living subjectivity, it becomes a becoming unity. It is then no longer statically exemplified in the inessential manifold, but rather is itself a living diversity, a becoming self-different, as Hegel says, in order to return to itself. Unity that is not idle is the "sich wiederherstellende Gleichheit".\(^{29}\) As to how the concrete wealth of forms can co-exist consistently with the generality of thought, Hegel answers: the whole is development, it is "als Subject die reine einfache Negativität, eben dadurch die Entzweyung des Einfachen, oder die entgegensetzende Verdopplung, welche wieder die Negation dieser gleichgültigen Verschiedenheit und ihres Gegensatzes ist."\(^{30}\)

From a systematic perspective the concept of negativity forms the central conduit.\(^{31}\) Negativity is the characteristic relation of thought to itself. Or as Hegel himself puts it: the identity that constitutes the substantiality of negativity is a negative self-relation, a self-relation that relates to itself by means of a negation of itself. Thus negativity is not only a property of content as the means by which it relates to itself; it is, moreover — aside from the structural complexity — a specific particularity of philosophical knowledge itself that in working through the otherness of what it thought it ultimately gains a self-characterization. And, finally, it forms the connection between all content and the thinking subject. It is not found just on one side of a system and thus is not simply opposed to another side.

However, if we only consider negativity under the aspect of self-consolidation, or "reconciliation" in theological terms, the negative element becomes degraded to a mere accessory or transitional stage.\(^{32}\) But the negative is also found in processuality, in the movement from self through the other back to the self, as suffering, the suffering of living.\(^{33}\) In the Phenomenology Hegel expresses this conception with the emphasis of a freshly wrought insight: "Thus the life of God and divine cognition may well be spoken of as a disporting of Live with itself; but this idea sinks into mere edification, and even insipidity, if it lacks the seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labour of the negative. In itself, that life is indeed one of untroubled equality and unity with itself, for which otherness and alienation, and the overcoming of alienation, and not serious matters. But this in-itself is abstract universality, in which the nature of the divine life to be for itself; and so too the self-movement of the form, are altogether left out of account."\(^{34}\)

\(^{28}\) Hegel, GW 9, p. 18.
\(^{29}\) Hegel, GW 9, p. 18.
\(^{30}\) Hegel, GW 9, p. 18.
\(^{34}\) Phänomenologie des Geistes, stw 21, found on p. 10.
The concept of divine life, loaded with theological connotations, explicates the absolute in its foundational structure. It cannot remain what it is in itself; namely identity with itself, it has to become for itself; it has to come to relate to itself through an other. The absolute has to become transparent, precisely because it is not just object but equally subject. Edification results from an anaesthetized distortion of the processuality of the absolute. It is merely a muted and fixed generality that maintains an indifference to the particular forms of the negative that it encompasses; when it becomes the formative motif of intellectual life, it produces diffusion, nebulousness, lack of clarity, in which no determinations are possible any longer since all negation is repudiated.

The seriousness, the suffering, and the labor of the negative make themselves felt against the insipidity and boredom of the merely identical universality and bring the isolated universality back into relation with the particular. In his *Logic* Hegel says of living individuals: "Die unendliche Beziehung des Begriffes auf sich selbst ist als die Negativität das Selbstbestimmen, die Direktion seiner in sich [-] als subjektive Einzelheit und in sich [-] als gleichgültige Allgemeinheit." It is the bifurcation, which from the perspective of the absolute is self-bifurcation, that manifests itself in the consciousness of living people as infinite suffering. "Der Mensch hat dieses Bewußtsein in sich, daß er im Innersten dieser Widerspruch ist; so ist das der unendliche Schmerz über sich selbst. Schmerz ist nur vorhanden im Gegensatz gegen ein Sollen, ein Affirmatives. Was nicht ein Affirmatives mehr in sich ist, hat auch keinen Widerspruch, keinen Schmerz. Schmerz ist eben die Negativität im Affirmativen, daß das Affirmative in sich selbst dies sich Widersprechende, Verletzte ist." The bifurcation, the suffering of the negative, is thus a mark of finite human subjects tasked with self-knowledge and with knowledge of a higher reality through this self-knowledge. This entails an emancipative movement: away from the particular and single, which Hegel presents as the untrue, towards the truth organically integrated into the self-movement of the absolute. Ultimately Hegel arrives at a transformed conception of reality. Metaphysics has always thought of reality, in particular of God as the quintessence of reality, "dass sie dann noch bleibe, insofern alle Negation, damit aber alle Bestimmtheit derselben aufgehoben sei. Allein sie ist das Dasein überhaupt; sie enthält das Sein-für-Anderes, und näher die Grenze oder Bestimmtheit." Reality itself is drawn into the negative, whereby negativity is withdrawn from all merely particular conditions of validity and set as the foundational structure of an absolute metaphysics. With this step Hegel opens the possibility of a concept of sweeping dynamic. "The True is the Bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunk; yet because each member collapses as soon as he drops out, the revel is just as much transparent and simple repose." I owe my appreciation for the translation of my paper to Karsten Schöllner (Berlin).

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37 Hegel, Werke 17, p. 263.

38 Hegel, Logik (1812), GW 11, p. 65.

39 Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, GW 9, p. 35.