Thought's Dialectic

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In what sense does Hegel's philosophy have a distinctive method? This is a more difficult question to answer than one might expect, since Hegel is somewhat (in)famous for his "dialectical" method of negation.[1] On the one hand, Hegel's philosophy seems to reject all assumptions including, presumably, those of method. On the other hand, Hegel's *Phenomenology* and *Logic* both seem to develop their argument according to a distinctive methodology, and part of the aim of the *Logic* is to show, in particular, that the shortcomings of Kant's Critical method of reflection can be overcome or otherwise avoided.

In what follows I aim to sketch answers to these questions. I discuss the issue of presupposition, the Fichtean background, and Hegel's conception of "determinate" negation. This discussion of method is not a discussion of dialectic *as such*, e.g., as discussed in the *Encyclopedia* §§79-82. That will be discussed in detail separately.

1   Method & Presupposition

Hegel contends that logic must be presuppositionless:

> if no presupposition is to be made, if the beginning is itself to be taken
> immediately, then the only determination of this beginning is that it is to be

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[1] For an overview of the debate concerning Hegel's method see (Maybee 2020). For an extended defense of Hegel's method as dialectical and as always taking a specific form, see (Forster 1993). For an opposing view see (Houlgate 2006, 32–35). See also (Maker 1994, chap. 5; Nuzzo 2011; Kreines 2015, chap. 10).

> the beginning of logic, of thought as such. There is only present the resolve, which can also be viewed as arbitrary, of considering thinking as such. The beginning must then be absolute or, what means the same here, must be an abstract beginning; and so there is nothing that it may presuppose, must not be mediated by anything or have a ground, ought to be rather itself the ground of the entire science. (SL 48/21:56)

Taking the absence of presuppositions seriously raises an immediate problem – how is the logic to proceed? If logic cannot presuppose anything, then it cannot presuppose a method in advance of the inquiry, according to which the logic will proceed.[2] If that is correct then in what sense is Hegel's method in the *Logic* "dialectical"?

This question is made all the more difficult that attempts to formulate a kind of general schema in which Hegel makes his arguments tend to wide up in problems. For example, Forster characterizes Hegel's method as follows:[3]

> Beginning from a category A, Hegel seeks to show that upon conceptual analysis, category A proves to contain a *contrary* category, B, and conversely that category B proves to contain category A, thus showing both categories to be self-contradictory. He then seeks to show that this negative result has a positive outcome, a new category, C (sometimes referred to as the "negative of the negative" or the "determinate negation"). This new category unites - as Hegel puts it - the preceding categories A and B. That is to say, when analyzed the new category is found to contain them both. But it unites them in such a way that they are not only preserved but also abolished (to use Hegel's term of art for this paradoxical-sounding process, they are *aufgehoben*). That is to say, they are preserved or contained in the new category only with their original senses modified. This modification of their senses renders them no longer self-contradictory (and not a source of self-contradiction in the new category that contains them both). That is because it renders them no longer contraries, and therefore no longer self-contradictory in virtue of their reciprocal containment. At this point, one level of the dialectic has been completed, and we pass to a new level where

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[2] (Beiser 2005, 160) goes so far as to characterize Hegel's method as an "anti-method", i.e. "a method to suspend all methods".

[3] (Forster 1993, 132–33).

> category C plays the role that was formerly played by category A.1* And so
> on. Hegel understand each step of this whole process to be necessary.

This perhaps describes *some* of Hegel's discussions of dialectic, but it is not at all clear that it captures all of them, or even all the core uses. For that reason, among others, it has remained controversial.[4]

One point, emphasized by Houlgate among others, is that Hegel does not presuppose a dialectical process, but *discovers* it in the process of his argument in the *Logic*. William Maker presents this position rather emphatically when he writes:[5]

> [T]aking 'method' to denote a specific and specifiable set of rules of procedure as operational or cognitive principles for the consideration of a given subject matter … [then i]nsofar as method is that which can–even if only in principle–be justified, formulated or learned in abstraction from the subject matter to which it is to be applied, Hegel does not have a method. Insofar as 'method' is taken to be a significant term only in and through a contrast with some content for which the method is designed and to which it is applied, Hegel does not have a method. Insofar as a method constitutes a given or theoretically derivable principle or set of principles in terms of which a subject matter is thought or considered, Hegel does not have a method. Insofar as one can speak of there being, in the sense just outlined, a phenomenological method, a scientific method, a transcendental method, an analytical method, a speculative method and so on, Hegel does not have a method.

So Hegel does not have a 'method' in any sense that presupposes a given principle or process of derivation that is independent of the content to which the method is applied. But this isn't to say that there is *no* method to the argument of the *Logic*:

> How could I possibly pretend that the method that I follow in this system of logic, or rather the method that this system itself follows within, would not be capable of greater perfection, of greater elaboration of detail? Yet I know that it is the one and only true method. This is made obvious by the very fact that this method is not something distinct from its subject matter and content – for it is the content in itself, *the dialectic which it possesses within*

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4   For criticism of Forster see (Houlgate 2006, 33–35), the citations contained therein, and below.

5   See (Maker 1994, 99–100); see also (Houlgate 2006, 32–34).

> *itself*, which moves the subject matter forward. It is clear that no expositions
> can be accepted as scientifically valid that do not follow the progression of
> this method and are not in tune with its simple rhythm, for it is the course
> of the fact itself. (SL 33/21:38)

Hegel's point here seems to be that, at least in the case of the *Logic*, there is no method apart from the content of the *Logic* itself. This raises several questions though. First, can we expect that the method, whatever it is (i.e. whatever exactly is meant by the phrase "the dialectic which it possesses within itself") will be the same throughout the *Logic*? Second, is the method in the *Logic* going to be transferable to other parts of Hegel's system? Answering these question will partly determine (or be determined by) how we construe Hegel's overall system. To see how to answer these questions, it is helpful to first take a detour through Fichte's Jena philosophical project and its conception of a "synthetic" method.

2   The Fichtean Background

In the course of articulating the basic structure of his science of knowledge, Fichte presents three steps or phases. In the first the pure or absolute subject is posited; in the second, the "not-self" is posited in opposition to the subject or "I". At this point Fichte acknowledges a problem: the conclusions concerning the subject and the "not-subject" to which it is opposed are in contradiction.

> The second principle annuls itself [*hebt sich auf*]; and it also does not annul
> itself. If this is how things stand with the second principle, it cannot be
> otherwise with the first as well. It annuls itself and also does not annul
> itself. For, if I = I, everything is posited that is posited in the self. But now
> the second principle is supposed to be posited in the self, and also not to be
> posited therein. Thus I does not = I, but rather self = not-self, and not-self
> = self. (GWL 1:106-7)

Fichte contends here that the absolute subject, in positing itself, is also opposed to itself (as the "not-self" or "object" pole of its own self-consciousness). This might seem to lead to a contradiction and, in that sense, a dissolution or nihilism of rational activity.

Obviously this is a problem. Fichte could reject one or the other of the principles he has articulated, but he takes them to be mutually implicating. So if Fichte is not to reject this starting point for his system he must demonstrate that this contradiction can be resolved, or is otherwise, merely apparent. As he puts it,

> All these conclusions have been derived from the principles already set forth, according to laws of reflection that we have presupposed as valid; so they must be correct. But if they are correct, then the identity of consciousness, the sole absolute foundation of our knowledge, is itself nullified [*aufgehoben*]. And now our task is hereby determined. For we have to discover some X, by means of which all these conclusions can be granted as correct, without nullifying the identity of consciousness. (GWL 1:107)

So Fichte contends here that there is some further concept within which the contradiction or opposition between the self and not-self can be resolved. In fact, what Fichte presents are a series of concepts, including <reality>, <negation>, <limit> (which contains the two prior), and <divisibility> (which contains all three prior concepts). The putative contradiction (annihilation) of the I and not-I is resolved by construing them as mutually limiting one another. The I and the not-I must both be seen as "divisible" (GWL 1:108–9). They are each in part different from each other, and yet in part also the same as or equal to (*gleich*) each other.

The synthetic method of reasoning is genuinely *productive* of the new concept. Fichte asserts that "I must not be understood to maintain that the idea of a limit is an analytical concept, inherent in the combination of reality and negation, and capable of being evolved from this" (GWL 1:108). This synthesis thus involves "discovering in opposites the respect in which they are alike" (GWL 1:112–13). So, from an original identity, opposition is derived, which threatens a contradiction that that is then resolved in the positing of a new concept in which a new (partial) identity is discovered. According to Fichte, this resolution of contradiction through the synthesis of opposites in a new concept is necessary for all scientific knowledge. As he says of the move from the contradiction between self and not-self to the synthetic concept of divisibility,

> there can be no further question as to the possibility of this [synthesis], nor can any ground for it be given; it is absolutely possible, and we are entitled to it without further grounds of any kind. (GWL 1:114)

Fichte here states that concepts introduced in this way are ones to which "we are entitled". Moreover, such concepts are introduced without appeal to anything empirical. They are concepts necessary to avoid contradiction, in the explanation of the possibility of experience (and in particular the self-positing ego and its activity). In Kant's terminology then, Fichte provides through the synthetic method a "metaphysical deduction" of our concepts, insofar as their content is derived from non-empirical content. The method also provides a

"transcendental deduction" of the concepts, insofar as the instantiation of such concepts is necessary for experience. Such concepts are also made *determinate*, in that their content is defined to the extent necessary to avoid contradiction.[1]

This *synthetic* method is importantly different from the *analytical* method (of analyzing given concepts into their components), which also leads to oppositions or contradictions. Fichte claims that with the analytic method "we not only do not get very far, as Kant says; we do not get anywhere at all" (GWL 1:113). The analytic method does not generate *new* concepts/content, or new identity relations, but merely generates concepts/content that are already present in the content of the concept(s) being analyzed or thought. This means that in the case of a contradiction generated through mere conceptual analysis, there is no positive result—i.e. there is no content generated, and no further concept in which these opposed concepts can be resolved. In contrast, the synthetic method enables us to move beyond contradiction and thus avoid being left with nothing (at least from the perspective of reason). In this sense the synthetic method brings forth some new positive content (e.g. of <limit> or <divisibility> by means of a negation of the old content.

Fichte's synthetic method is clearly the basis for Hegel's own. But it is not *identical* with Hegel's characterization of the "movement" of the concept. Several points are worth noting here.

First, Fichte *begins* his philosophy with the self-positing subject. But such a beginning violates Hegel's no presuppositions rule, for it simply *assumes* that thought takes the form of first-personal thinking. Second, while Fichte characterizes his synthetic method in terms of an interaction between thesis, antithesis, and synthesis (GWL 1:123-5), it is not clear that this is true for Hegel. Certainly, *some* of Hegel's arguments take this form (e.g. in the dialectic of <being>–<nothing>-<becoming>) but not all do.[6] Third, and perhaps most importantly for our purposes, Fichte fails to adequately explain how it is that *new* content is generated through the synthetic method. We've seen that Fichte clearly rejects the idea that the synthetic method is a simple "unpacking" of the prior content of a concept. For Fichte, as for Kant, there is no analysis without a prior synthesis. But then what is the source of this *new* content. For Kant, a synthetic judgment either had its new content based in sensory experience (in intuition), or based in the conscious apprehension of some structure that is

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[6]   Forster notes that "Hegel, over large stretches of his texts, deviates from the intended general structure of the method in more or less extreme ways." (Forster 1993, 155). But Forster also assumes that Hegel's method always takes the same determinate form; for criticism see (Houlgate 2006, 33–34). It is also a matter of dispute as to whether Fichte himself construes the synthetic method as always taking a thesis-antithesis-synthesis form. See (Wood 2016, 63) for discussion and defense of a broader conception of the synthetic method.

inherent in the mind's own activity. Fichte seems to intend something like the latter when he says,

> we can infer the synthesis; and can equally establish the third thing, in which the two opposites are united, not as a product of reflection, but as something discovered thereby. It is, however, a product of that original synthetic act of the self, and as an act, can thus no more attain to empirical consciousness than can the acts already postulated. (GWL 1:124)

So the content is to be traced to the acts of the absolute (self-positing) subject. But then if we reject (as Hegel does) the contention that thought must be presupposed as the activity of such a subject, then we cannot explain the source or origin of the content in terms of the acts of such a subject.

Hence, given Hegel's rejection of Fichte's starting point, his method (such as it is) in the *Logic* requires a different explanation of how content originates. This involves two important Hegelian ideas. The first is that thought exhibits "movement" (*Bewegung*); the second is that such movement takes the form of what Hegel calls "determinate negation" (*bestimmte Negation*)

3   Thought's Movement

Recall that Hegel construes the method of the *Logic* as inseparable from its content: "this method is not something distinct from its subject matter and content – for it is the content in itself, *the dialectic which it possesses within itself*, which moves the subject matter forward" (SL 33; 21:38). But what does it mean to say that thought "moves" in this manner, or that it is internally "dialectical" in a sense that is generative?

Hegel's view is that each concept of the *Logic* is internally inconsistent in a way that drives the activity of thinking that concept towards the development of a new concept that is not inconsistent in the relevant way. As Hegel puts it, "what is to be considered as method here [i.e. in the *Logic*] is only the movement of the concept itself" (SL 737; 12:238). Likewise, he says,

> What propels the concept onward is the already mentioned negative which it possesses in itself; it is this that constitutes the truly dialectical factor. *Dialectic*, once considered a separate part of logic and, one may say, entirely

> misunderstood so far as its purpose and standpoint are concerned, thereby
> assumes a totally different position. (SL 34/21:39-40)

In contrast to Kant, who considers the use of reason to generate concepts ("ideas") through the process of seeking conditions for any given conditioned judgment or object as inherently self-undermining when applied in an unlimited manner, Hegel considers reason as able to generate new and ever more determinately adequate concepts through the process of presenting, and then overcoming, apparent contradictions (or perhaps "oppositions" is better here).

But in order for there to be such an "engine" of dynamic production, it has to be the case that the "negation" of a concept by its opposite is itself a productive kind of opposition, rather than one that simply leads to an end to thought. We can see this problem clearly as presented by Kant, who says that,

> the proposition that no predicate pertains to a thing that contradicts it is
> called the principle of contradiction, and is a general though merely nega-
> tive criterion of all truth, but on that account it also belongs merely to logic,
> since it holds of cognitions merely as cognitions in general, without regard
> to their content, and says that contradiction entirely annihilates and cancels
> them [*gänzlich vernichte und aufhebe*] (A151/B190)
> that no cognition can be opposed to [the principle of contradiction] with-
> out annihilating itself [*ohne sich selbst zu vernichten*] certainly makes this
> principle into a *conditio sine qua non*, but not into a determining ground of
> the truth of our cognition. (A151-2/B191)

Thus, in Kant's view, contradiction leads to the "annihilation" of thought itself. Hegel (like Fichte) rejects this position. Contradiction doesn't end the activity of thinking, but produces new thought (i.e. is productive of genuinely novel content for thinking). Hegel's name for this sort of productive opposition is "determinate negation".

Hegel's notion of determinate negation appears in a number of places. For example, in the *Phenomenology* he says,

> Skepticism which ends with the abstraction of nothingness or emptiness
> cannot progress any further from this point, but must instead wait to see
> whether something new will present itself and what it will be, in order that
> it can also toss it into the same empty abyss. By contrast, while the result
> is grasped as it is in truth, as *determinate* negation, a new form has thereby

> immediately arisen, and in the negation, the transition is made whereby the progression through the complete series of shapes comes about on its own accord. (PS 53/9:57; see also EL §81)

Here we see Hegel characterize a *new* shape of consciousness as the determinate negation of a prior one. Determinate negation is thus *productive* of its content. We see this very clearly also in Hegel's statement in the *Logic* that,

> [t]he one thing needed to *achieve scientific progress* – and it is essential to make an effort at gaining this quite *simple* insight into it – is [i] the recognition of the logical principle that negation is equally positive, or that what is self-contradictory does not resolve itself into a nullity, into abstract nothingness, but essentially only into [ii] the negation of its *particular* content; or [iii] that such a negation is not just negation, but is the *negation of the determined fact* which is resolved, and is therefore determinate negation; that [iv] in the result there is therefore contained in essence that from which the result derives – [v] a tautology indeed, since the result would otherwise be something immediate and not a result. Because the result, the negation, is a *determinate* negation, it has a *content*. [vi] It is a new concept but one higher and richer than the preceding – [vii] richer because it negates or opposes the preceding and therefore contains it, and it [viii] contains even more than that, for it is the unity of itself and its opposite. – [ix] It is above all in this way that the system of concepts is to be to erected – and [x] it has to come to completion in an unstoppable and pure progression that admits of nothing extraneous. (SL 33/21:38)

There is a lot to unpack here. I've added roman numerals in brackets to better discuss the set of claims being made.

Hegel says first that we must recognize "the logical principle that negation is equally positive", and that this is what is needed to achieve progress in science. I take Hegel not to be making a general point about negation *as such*, but rather a specific point about negation as found in what is "self-contradictory".[7] Moreover, it doesn't seem that Hegel is here speaking of *any* contradiction we can generate, but rather of (self-)contradictions in specific determinate conceptual categories.[8] This reading of (i) is supported by the claims made in (ii) and (iii)

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[7] For a similar defense of this reading see (Houlgate 1985, 216–17); cf. (Rosen 1982, chaps. 2-3).

[8] There is still a question as to why some self-contradictions (e.g. "the red door is not red", "married bachelor") don't admit of dialectical treatment.

– viz. we don't simply have negation, but rather the negation of a self-contradictory content that thereby resolves into a new content.

Hegel then contends (iv) that this new content also contains the old content, though in a way that is no longer self-contradictory. Hegel speaks of this as (v) "tautological" because to speak of the "result" of such negation, or of its being "derived", a "consequence of", or "following from" the original concept is to see its content as related to the previous content in question. If it did not satisfy these conditions then it would simply be an immediately posited content.

Thus Hegel does indeed seem to construe the dialectical activity of thought as generative of new content in a manner that might be described as "inference", since there is a kind of derivation or following-from between new and old content. But such dialectical inferences are not the same as those we see in classical syllogistic reasoning, where there is a derivation of content in the conclusion, but via a kind of subsumtive process or activity. Here it is perhaps of use to take a brief excursus on Kant's conception of reason and inference, as a contrast to the sense of "derived content" that Hegel is utilizing in the *Logic*.

3.A   Kant on Reasoning and Results

Kant characterizes an *immediate* inference is one in which a thinker moves *directly* from one judgment *A* to another *C*, while a *mediate* inference requires an further intermediary judgment *B* to license the transition from *A* to *C*. Kant is represented as holding this position quite clearly in the *Jäsche Logik*:

> An **immediate** inference (*consequentia immediata*) is the derivation (*deductio*) of one judgment from the other without a mediating judgment (*judicium intermedium*). An inference is **mediate** if, besides the concept that a judgment contains in itself, one needs still others in order to derive a cognition from it. (9:114)

Kant characterizes immediate inference as carried out by the understanding, and as only involving a change in the form, rather than the matter, of a proposition. For example, Kant characterizes the transition from the judgment "All men are mortal" to the judgment "Some men are mortal" as an immediate inference (JL 9: 115).

Mediate inferences require three judgments, two of which are mediated by a third, and Kant represents this mediation as structured according to the traditional framework provided by Aristotelian syllogistic logic. Hence, Kant considers the variety of forms of Aristotelian syllogism as limning the structure of mediate inference as such.

Aristotelian syllogistic inference connects three judgments: a premise (the "minor" premise) together with a conclusion via a mediating second premise or rule (the "major" premise). The predicate of the conclusion is the "major" term, and the premise that contains it the "major" premise. The subject of the conclusion is the "minor" term, and likewise the premise containing it the "minor" premise. The term common to the two premises is the "middle" term. The major premise thus establishes a relation between the concepts constituting the minor premise and those constituting the conclusion via the assertion of the middle term. Consider one of Kant's many well-worn examples:

1. All men are mortal [Major – All As are Bs]

2. Caius is a man [Minor – Some C is A]

3. ∴ Caius is mortal [Conclusion – Some C is B]

One thing to note here is that to say that there is a mediate inference above from (1) to (3) is *not* to say that there is a succession of immediate inferences from (1) to (2) and (2) to (3).[9] This distinction does not specify why Kant would separate the activity of understanding and reason in the way that he does.[10] Indeed, Hegel tends to characterize what Kant calls "reasoning" as rather activity of the understanding, or at best, of "dialectical reason", but not of "speculative reason", which is (for Hegel) the faculty by which we come to comprehend the unity of such finite forms of opposition.[11]

For Kant, a sufficient condition of distinguishing between immediate and mediate inference is that immediate inference involves only a change in the 'form' rather than the 'matter' of the judgments (e.g. change of quantity from 'all crows are black' to 'some crows are black'). The mediate inference above, however, includes a change in matter. In the transition from (1) to (2) there is a change of matter with the introduction of the new content concerning Caius. The fact that there is a change of matter in this way is sufficient for its counting as a 'mediate' inference.

Going back to our toy example from above, and assuming that it is analytic that humans are mortal, we can see that assertion of the subject term "human" is sufficient to explain an assertion of the predicate term "mortal" in the judgment "Caius is mortal." The minor

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9   Such a view of inference, where 'mediate inference' is just the chain of moves from one clearly understood judgment to another, is held by Descartes and Locke, among others.

10 Accounts of Kant's conception of mediate inference that thereby appeal merely to the fact that such inference involves the connection of premises by a middle term, e.g. (Rohlf 2010; Willaschek 2018) are in this sense incomplete, since they do not indicate what exactly about the activity of *reason*, as opposed to understanding, it s that marks a special capacity for relating judgments. For general difficulties in characterizing reason as a distinct intellectual capacity see (Grier 2001, 118–19)

11 See (Hegel 2010, secs. 79-82).

premise subsumes a particular (designated by "Caius") under this condition, thus allowing one to assert, of *Caius*, that he is also mortal.

So the truth of the conclusion of Kant's toy example—i.e. that Caius is mortal—is necessitated by the premises in the sense that their assertion is sufficient for the conclusion to be true. In this sense, Kant considers the syllogism to be a depiction or representation of *why* "Caius is mortal" is true.

Thus when Kant says that in reasoning (in the narrow sense) "I determine my cognition through the predicate of the rule (the *conclusio*), hence *a priori* through **reason**" (A304/B360-1) he means that it is through reason (as opposed to understanding or judgment) that the mind is able to represent the truth of the conclusion (itself a cognition) rather than its opposite, on the basis of the assertion of the premises, which thereby necessitate the conclusion. The connection of reason to "determination" in this technical sense also explains Kant's tendency to connect the use of reason with "comprehension" (*Begreifen*), which is characterized in the *Jäsche Logik* as having *insight* (*Einsicht*) into a cognition (JL 9:65) sufficient for one's purposes. One has insight just in case one can represent the sufficient condition of something's being determinately the case, to the exclusion of its opposite. In the case of comprehension, this insight need not be perfect or complete, but rather that which is "sufficient for our purpose", whether speculative or practical.

Hegel construes dialectical activity as a kind of *reasoning*, of an activity of thinking in which one thought is connected (or follows from) another. But he does not characterize this notion of resulting from a previous thought or concept as consisting in the kind of subsumptive process Kant discusses above. The difficulty is stating in positive terms what this process *is*.

3.B   Ontology as Ontogeny

One clue for understanding Hegel's positive view of dialectical activity is his statement in the *Encyclopedia* that,

> Properly construing and recognizing the dialectical dimension is of the highest importance. It is in general the principle of all movement, all life, and all actual activity. … life as such carries within itself the germ of death and that, generally speaking, the finite contradicts itself in itself and for that reason sublates itself. (EL §81, A1)

As Hegel says here *life* is a form of dialectical activity. Indeed, such activity is the principle of "all life". If we take Hegel's statement here (and in other places, e.g. SL 746, 12:246) at face value then in dialectic we have a kind of *organic activity*, where each new concept or form

of thought follows from the previous, not in the sense of subsuming it (i.e. standing as a consequent of its sufficient condition, in the sense outlined by Kant), but as *developing* it.[12]

In this sense then, one stage of the dialectic follows from or "results" from the previous stage in the sense of developing from it as an oak develops from an acorn, or a butterfly from a pupa. Moreover, the notion of "development" here should be understood in terms of *epigenesis*, which is to say a spontaneous (in the sense "self-driven" or "self-active") progression of ever greater articulation and organization, that depends on an internal modulation of the activity, and manifests a continuous and mutually responsive relation between parts and whole. This contrasts with *preformationism*, which consider the articulation and organization of life to be a function of metaphysically and logically prior parts.[13] Epigenesis requires a self-organizing power, or "*Bildungskraft*".[14] I want to briefly describe seven important features of such development:

1. Self-organization

2. (Re)production

3. Teleological determinacy

4. Holism

5. Path dependence

6. Necessitation

7. Essential unity

The first point is easy to see, and simply falls out of Hegel's statement of his "method", such as it is, as deriving from "the content in itself, *the dialectic which it possesses within itself*, which moves the subject matter forward" (SL 33; 21:38). There is thus nothing external to thought to which we advert in explaining its structure and content. Thought is a self-organizing being.

Returning to our discussion of SL 33/21:38, we see Hegel state the following:

> [vi] It [i.e. the determinate negation or conceptual result of dialectical activity] is a new concept but one higher and richer than the preceding – [vii]

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[12] Concerning the centrality of the concept of an organism to Hegel's overall thought see (Beiser 2005, chap. 4); see also (Ng 2020).

[13] For detailed discussion of the preformationism–epigenesis debate in German philosophy see (Zammito 2018).

[14] See (Goy and Watkins 2014; Berg 2014) for further discussion.

> richer because it negates or opposes the preceding and therefore contains
> it (SL 33/21:38)

Here we see Hegel's conception of thought as (re)productive, in the sense that the novel result of dialectical activity nevertheless "contains" the previous content. At times this containment might be quite literal, as in the first stage of the *Logic*, where <being> and <noting> are content within the concept <becoming>, and where an epigenetic analogue would be the literal retention of structure in a later stage of development (as the structure of a human infant's limbs with respect to its adult maturation). But in other cases the retention will not be so explicit or literal, as in the case of Hegel's account of the relation between <concept>, <judgment>, and <syllogism>.[15] But again, just as a feature in the life-cycle of an organism (or the phylogenetic cycle of the species) may be recapitulated in an different form in a later stage (e.g in the radical transformation from pupa to butterfly) so too the content of one part of the dialectic may be radically different from how it appears in another part.

Hegel continues,

> and it [viii] contains even more than that, for it is the unity of itself and its
> opposite. – [ix] It is above all in this way that the system of concepts is to
> be to erected

As we see in (viii) the new content, or "result", is richer than the previous content, but not simply in the sense that it is the *aggregate* result of combining the other two contents. Rather it is a *new content*, that nevertheless retains vestiges of the prior stage. Here again the analogy to organic development is obvious in that a later stage (e.g. the butterfly, or the oak) is a *new* and *richer* (i.e. more articulated, complex, capable, etc) stage.

Such a conception suggests that there is at least a weak form of teleology going on in each stage of the dialectic. This needn't mean that each stage has some specific end, or even that there is a specific end in view for the entirety of the dialectical process in the *Logic*. But the transitions between stages. But the transitions between stages aren't simply unrelated happenings. Each later stage is a development of the former. Each stage is thus, as development, *more determinate* than the prior stage. And insofar as we are understanding the activity as involving a kind of formative power or drive (i.e. a *Bildungskraft* or *Bildungstrieb*) the result of this activity is a kind of drive towards ever-increasing determinacy. And in positing a self-organizing, self-determining drive towards increasing (conceptual) determinacy, we can be assured that a "system" develops in the sense relevant to Hegel—viz. an intercon-

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[15] This is, for example, one place where Forster explicitly acknowledges the apparent shortcomings of his conception of Hegel's dialectical method. See (Forster 1993, 155).

nected series of concepts or judgments in a self-supporting whole that is comprehensive and complete (i.e. captures all and only the relevant conceptual forms of determinacy). This system gives intelligibility to its parts—in the case of the *Logic*, stages of conceptual determinacy. Moreover, each conceptual "moment" (e.g. each stop in the activity of dialectic such as <being>, <nothing>, <becoming>, <determinate being>, etc.) is not itself independent of the whole of which it is a part. Each content is individuated partly in terms of its relation(s) to other content.[16] So the holism is both in the *organization* of the content (i.e. the epigenetic progress from lesser to greater determinacy) and in the *nature* of the content (i.e. in the specific character of each conceptual "moment").

Finally, and relatedly, Hegel says,

> and [x] it has to come to completion in an unstoppable and pure progression that admits of nothing extraneous. (SL 33/21:38)

With (x) we see again an appeal to teleology, with the notion of a "progression" ("*vollenden*"). But we also see Hegel articulate the last three related notions of organic, epigenetic, development. These are the *path dependence*, *necessity*, and *essential unity* of the activity. Since we have a progression from lesser to greater determinacy that is "unstoppable" I take the progression to be one where each result follows necessarily from the previous result, and moreoever, in a way that makes each part necessary for the next (e.g., in the way that an oak tree must first be an acorn). And since this necessary progression "admits of nothing extraneous", it constitutes an essential unity, one that is complete and, in a sense, could not be other than it is.[17]

We see this appeal to a kind of essentialism in the development of the *Logic* in Hegel's characterization of its starting point: "It thus lies in the *nature of a beginning itself* that it should be being and nothing else" (SL 50/21:59). Similarly, Hegel talks of the *Logic* as concerned with "thinking as such" (SL 41/21:47), and in the *Encyclopedia* Hegel says,

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[16] This is an important feature of Hegel's characterization of understanding vs. reason in the *Encyclopedia* discussion of §§79-82.

[17] This isn't to say that dialectical activity must necessarily complete itself, or develop in a necessary way. Hegel is often taken to be committed to this. But the concept of epigenetic development I've been appealing to here doesn't require it. Moreover, since Hegel considers the determinacy of the whole of logic is itself a partly historical process, it is clear that conditions may not always be such as to realize the proper development of thought. Again, we can see a clear analogy with an organism whose development in its proper manner may be arrested by various extraneous factors (e.g. not enough nutrients, or room to grow, etc.). Of course, the disanalogy here is that the absolute, as *absolute*, is conditioned by nothing and has nothing "outside" of it to limit it. So this leaves us with a question as to whether the analogy can be appropriately fleshed out.

> The realization that the dialectic makes up the very nature of thinking and that as understanding it is bound to land in the negative of itself, i.e. in contradiction, constitutes a cardinal aspect of logic. (EL §11A)

It is the nature of thought/being that we examine in the *Logic*, and its development, like the development of any organism, exhibits a progression through various necessary stages until it reaches its most determinate form. However, unlike finite organisms, this progression has no ultimate disunity to overcome.

There seems to be a non-accidental relation between Hegel's conception of the absolute and finite things and Spinoza's characterization.

> E1p33s1: A thing is called necessary either by reason of its essence or by reason of its cause. For a thing's existence follows necessarily either from its essence and definition or from a given efficient cause. And a thing is also called impossible from these same causes—namely, either because its essence, or definition, involves a contradiction, or because there is no external cause which has been determined to produce such a thing.

The *Logic*, in examining the nature of thought *as such*, is an explication of what follows from the essence or nature of thought. In the case of finite determinations of thought (i.e. finite things) however, there is always something external from which they follow, or with respect to which they stand as contraries and thus as moments to be sublated.[18]

Hence, it is only true of finite parts of this absolute that "The ripest maturity, the highest stage, that anything can attain is the one at which its fall begins" (SL 539/12:42).

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[18] See (Melamed 2012) for related discussion.

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