

Introduction to Hegel (1770-1831)

H has two concerns:

- the content of reality: Spirit (Mind)
- the method by which reality operates: dialectic

Ultimate reality is Spirit, but such Spirit is not an exclusive or monistic claim to reality. H never denies the reality of matter, otherwise we'd be left with two one-sided assertions. H does insist, "The Truth is the Whole", but by this he doesn't mean the simplistic one-sidedness of a "night in which all cows are black"; (i.e., within this Whole specificity and differentiation are not forfeited.) Rather he insists that true Idealism entails the truth of Realism.

(Idealism is the notion that reality is mind-correlative or mind-coordinated. Real objects are not independent of cognizing minds, but exist only as in some way correlated to mental operations.

Realism is the notion that objects exist independently of our experience or our knowledge of them, and they have properties independent of the concepts with which we understand them or the language with which we describe them.)

Dialectic is not a simple "one, two, three" progression. Since H insists that all one-sidedness must be opposed, objects cannot simply be destroyed or left behind. As the dialectic effects a higher unity (synthesis) of something and its contradiction (thesis and antithesis), the unity preserves that which it gathers up and transcends.

It is important to understand that the contradiction of which H speaks isn't *sheer* contradiction; the synthesis preserves the contradiction, but not in the relation of mutual exclusiveness. Rather, the contradictory elements are essential moments in a higher unity. (A logician today might say that what H calls "contradictory" is actually "contrary.")

For instance, being and not-being are preserved in the synthesis of becoming. (It is a tenet with H that change is ceaseless.) We think of pure being. But the concept of pure being is wholly indeterminate. The concept of wholly indeterminate being passes into the concept of not-being. I.e., if we try to think of being without any determination at all, we find that we are thinking of nothing. The mind passes back and forth between being and not-being, as each disappears into its opposite. The *truth* of being and not-being is the *movement* of the immediate disappearing of the one into the other. This movement is *becoming*. In short, the concept of the Absolute as *being* is actually the concept of the Absolute as *becoming*. The Absolute is a process of self-development. The emergence of contradiction is the "power" of the dialectical movement.

Again, consider what H says with respect to

Understanding Und'g takes something as given, fixed, limited. (for H thought is a moving activity that begins with accepting the given.)

Dialectic exposes the limited truth involved in the acceptance of the given.

Everything in the world involves opposed and contradictory aspects; i.e., contradiction is the motive force of the world.

This contradiction is real; it is not merely apparent, not imagined, not accidental.

While the und'g is conservative, the dial'c is a perpetual revolution. Therefore the dial'c unfixes things. Nothing in our experience is stable!

(If there were just these two phases, phil. would be only an endless revolutionary activity. Instead, the dial'c points to something beyond itself; namely,

Speculative Thought. It unites contradictory aspects and preserves them in a higher unity. This process is known as "mediation."

The harmonies of spec'ive thought do not reject the disharmonies of dialectical thought. Their "overcoming" must entail perpetual preservation. Nothing is left out.

See for instance, the stage-progression from sense-certainty to perception to forces.

Sense-certainty is the primary experience of "this", "here", "now", with no interpretation, "a booming, buzzing confusion."

Perception arises as something persists long enough for language to be applicable: "apple." Perception retains the sense-immediacy of sense-certainty and adds the discovery between "self" and "others"

Forces are what we infer when we see sense-phenomena as the manifestation of the supersensible.

Note: for H the various stages arise from each other necessarily.

[Marx (1818-1883) will deny that there is any *necessary* progression.

Marx will also deny that the dialectic occurs on account of Mind or Spirit or Absolute. The dialectic occurs on account of *material* laws of history: "dialectical *materialism*."]]

[Kierkegaard (1813-1855) will deny that there can ever be "mediation" between God and humankind. K will deny that the Absolute's knowledge of itself and humankind's knowledge of the Absolute are two aspects of the *same* reality. He will deny that the finite mind of itself can *rise* by means of philosophical thought to the standpoint of the Absolute so as to render human self-consciousness ultimately the same as the Absolute's self-consciousness. The Absolute or the Idea is ultimately self-thinking thought, the subject/object distinction finally overcome. K will insist that there is an "infinite qualitative distinction" between God and humankind that is *never* overcome. The God of Abraham,

(---), Isaac and (---) Jacob" (note why rabbinic authorities insist on repeating "the God of" in each case) is *never* to be confused with H's Spirit or Absolute. Any suggestion of "mediation" between God and humankind is anathema to K. We *encounter* the God who forever remains GOD; the distinction between God and his creatures must never be blurred.