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Hegel's Absolute as Negativity



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Abstract

The relation of the many and the one, difference and identity, multiplicity and unity, particularity and universality, and finally that of negativity and negativity of negativity through reason and history is the core of Hegelian Absolute which is still an inevitable philosophical source to deal with most of the contemporary ontological problems. The article's claim consists of two parts: Absolute is internally a retrospective totality of the System, on the one hand, and it is intertwined with a prospective negativity in a reciprocal relationship, on the other hand. Therefore, Absolute would be an absolute totality and an ongoing openness to the future at the same time. This article explains how Hegel's articulation of the absoluteness is still a challenging ontological problem since it would simultaneously include both totality and negativity.

Keywords: Absolute, Totality, Negativity, Retrospective, Prospective, Openness, Sublation

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Introduction

The Absolute in Hegel's formulation of the System is first and foremost manifested as the final end of the process of knowledge, then as the Concept-in-and-for-itself, and finally as Philosophy. Here in the article, I expound Hegel's final expression of the Absolute Spirit, i.e., philosophy as the final goal of history since even state as the final exposition of the objective Spirit comes before philosophy. In other words, the different formations of the state among Greeks, Romans, Christians, and Germans are the objective conditions of philosophical expressions respectively.

In the absolute presentation Spirit attempts to rise above its objectively historical and social context to consider itself as such. At first it seems to be not very successful. It cannot easily extricate itself from its entanglement in nature, let alone its historically social context. The Greeks achieved a basic portrayal of human beings, but they presented their external characteristic not their intrinsic essence. The man they pictured was Greek man, Greek spirit, not the Spirit as such. But Christianity expresses a different step of the Spirit. Christianity reveals the basic essence of man in general. It also reveals the breadth of spirit. It appeals to all men, Greek and Jew, male and female, slave and free, without considering any specific tribe, gender, race and social class. It presents, or at least begins to present, the Spirit as such, the Spirit as purified of nature and of local peculiarities. Hegel ignores Buddhism and Islam in his philosophy of history, although before and after Christianity they presented the same generality Christianity did.

According to Hegel, Philosophy is the deepest layer of the Absolute Spirit to complete the process of self-actualization. For the moment, the vital problem arises that whether or not philosophy is the end of history, if it is the case that it is the final stage of the process of Spirit's self-actualization. In other words, if it is so it would be a certain sort of meta-history, i.e., beyond history. The foregoing problem intertwined with the main problem of my thesis, which is whether or not the Absolute Spirit is absolutely closed to further development of history. My answer is to be argued based on the openness of the Absolute Spirit to the future. But such an answer first and foremost requires much research to be discovered and interpreted in Hegel's own texts. In other words, according to Hegel, although philosophy is the final manifestation of the Absolute Spirit, it still remains its own historical aspect. Furthermore, being meta-history does not entail any certain sort of closure whatsoever. It is the final step of a certain historical era which is modernity, and Spirit as well as Hegel was not aware of further eras. But Hegel's systematic picture of that era does not deny further eras, although for the moment philosophy as system is not able to know it since it should keep waiting for the future.

On the one hand, philosophy as the final step of the Absolute Spirit seems to be beyond history since it includes all historical objectivities without being objective itself. On the other hand, philosophy is not actualized unless other forms of human institutions are actualized. In other words, philosophy is not but conceptual realization of Spirit's objectivity. Accordingly, it is historical and meta-historical at the same time. It seems to be a contradictory claim, which is put forward as to the last moment of the Absolute Spirit, i.e., philosophy.

I. Philosophy as Totality of the Absolute Spirit

Hegel finishes the enterprise Kant could not do, or he did not want to do so since if there is an insurmountable gap between *noumen* and *phenomenon* philosophy is not able to be a system. In other words, science, art and religion should be explicated separately since theory and practice are separate. In other words, life does not penetrate cognition and vice versa. Therefore, as I delineated earlier, although Kant attempts to philosophize science, art and religion within a historical perspective of human subjectivity, the inherent philosophical gap between thing-in-itself, i.e. Being, and human's subjectivity does not allow his philosophy to arrive at a totality in which there is not only a systematic co-dependence of subject and object but also a historical context of such a relationship.

Kant provides a framework of revolutionary subjectivity based on which the relation of subject and object is dependent on a transcendental theoretical subjectivity, on the one hand, and he also discovers, as I demonstrated earlier, the universal idea of history in which a practically autonomous subjectivity acts as free agent through history grasped as a universal idea, on the other hand. The next step is the unity of theoretical and practical subjectivity within an absolutely holistic Subjectivity. Such absoluteness requires a systematic philosophy, and Hegel provides a system of philosophical science that it is able to explicate subjective and objective spirituality of humanity through history. The last manifestation of this system is philosophy. What happens in the last stage of Hegel's System is a unity of art and religion as philosophy within the Absolute Spirit. He states: "This science is the unity of art and religion." (Hegel, 2010: 267)

How is philosophy as the last stage of the Absolute Spirit, but nonetheless still open to further possibilities of the future? In other words, I have to raise two essential questions as to the problem of Hegelian absolute. First, how should an absolute be at the last moment of the Absolute Spirit? Second, how can it be still open, although it is the last moment of the process of Spirit? The second question is the problem of the identity of beginning and end, which Hegel puts it as the core of his systematic conception of philosophy. Starting point and outcome are one and the same thing, they indeed converge each other in a circular movement, but outcome is the final moment encompassing all mediated moments within itself. It curves in a circular movement and returns to the starting point.

Natural consciousness takes up its manifestation as phenomenal knowing in the *Phänomenologie*, and absolute knowing goes over to the content of the system of the *Enzyklopädie* as the system of its absolute determination, due to the reciprocal necessity that the subject knows not only itself absolutely but also the absolute as subjectivity.

The mediation of absolute knowing presented by the system in the *Enzyklopädie* accounts for itself as philosophical self-consciousness, but presents formations, i.e. configurations, which are systematically antecedent to this philosophical cognition and are determined by this result as their presupposition. This means that the logical place of these formations within the system is a function of the self-conscious totality moving between presupposition and result. For instance, *Das Recht* and *Die Moralität* are systematically antecedent to *Die Sittlichkeit*. This relation is not a historical succession but it is a dialectical interdependence. The result of the system

is philosophical self-consciousness, which encompasses all previous formations within itself.

II. From Absolute Knowing to the Absolute Spirit as Philosophy

Robert Grant McRae discusses the function of philosophy as the final presentation of Hegel's system that it is the conceptual basis upon which I build my interpretation of the Absolute Spirit. He discusses the relation of speculative presentation to historical evidence, which is important to introduce the function of the Absolute Spirit within Hegel's system. According to him, the only formal discussion of historical configurations in the *Philosophie des Geistes* occurs in that section of objective spirit dealing with the interaction of nation-states and the *Weltgeist*, and we must assume that all historical phenomena are meant to be understood within the context of the nation-state as the over-riding hermeneutic principle. He is sure that much of the prior discussion of the spiritual formations that constitute absolute knowing obviously has its foundations in historical evidence, and he says that it is vital that we understand the relation of speculative thinking to this historical evidence if the content of the system is to invoke the interest of natural consciousness. He concludes that the discussion concerning the historical determination of the nation-state has crucial implications for the national basis of philosophic presentation. (McRae, 1985:117)

He states that the relation of speculative presentation to historical evidence poses a number of crucial questions. Are the appearances of formations in history already implicitly determined from the dialectical standpoint, and if so, is the *Philosophie des Geistes* both a history and a logic of these spiritual formations? He asserts that the succession of spiritual formations that present the mediation of the absolute subjectivity is strictly a dialectical succession, and no direct reference is made by Hegel to their appearing in time. While it is tacitly accepted, for instance, that the "absolute as ideal" is in particular a Greek appropriation of the absolute, the historical content of this appropriation is used merely as an external access to the discussion of the place of this formation within a dialectical process. Historical formation is based on, but not identical with, the absolute ontology presented by the system. (Ibid: 117-118)

He states that the historically objective content that makes up the presented formations is found in experience, content first presented by the empirical sciences in the formulation of general determinations and laws. The reception of these concrete materials into speculative thought at the same time brings thought out of itself. Speculative thought, then, owes its development to the empirical sciences, while giving this concrete material the necessity and universal form of the freedom of thought. He refers to Hegel's assertion, (118) "The fact becomes a presentation (*Darstellung*) and reproduction by the original and complete independent activity of thought". (Ibid: 118)

McRae continues to delineate how these "facts-become-configurations", i.e. spiritually historical formations, must constitute a system if their mediation is supposed to be absolute. He states that based on Hegel's conception only the system is scientific because its development (*Entwicklung*) is in-itself. In other words, Hegel's definition of system is a self-related whole, and its content has its justification only as a moment of the whole. Outside of this systematic shape, any thinking of the

mediation of the absolute subject is ungrounded presupposition and merely subjective certainty. Speculative thinking is the mediation by thought of the empirical content necessary to absolute knowing, an empirical content made necessary by the systematic descent to its absolute presupposition. According to McRae, Hegel asserts that the presented content of absolute knowing exhibits the presentation of a circle, which closes with itself, and has no beginning outside of the infinite subjectivity of thought itself. This absolute knowing is completely satisfied, and is in a sense final, when the totality of its mediation accounts for, and is at the same time accounted by, its subjective presentation. (Ibid: 118)

Again, to build my interpretation of the position of philosophy within Hegel's system McRae's thick description of philosophy is very helpful. He entitles the position of philosophy within Hegel's system as "philosophic presentation". According to him, if we tentatively concede the efficacious supersession of natural consciousness by philosophy we do not, on the other hand, know how philosophic presentation appears to this natural consciousness as its true self on the level of consciousness. The hypothesis he wishes to put forth is that philosophy appears as a complete response to a requirement that becomes self-apparent to natural consciousness. However it seems that this requirement, which precedes philosophy occurs only at a specific moment in the process of spirit, and is always related to the demands of a specific people, such that one must speak of philosophy as intrinsically a local response. (Ibid: 126)

He asks that what is this requirement that brings about this appropriation of the absolute, and in what sense is the system a "true" response to this requirement? He states that the moment of philosophy as what pure thought wills to resolve is a starting moment neither arbitrary nor subjective, but determined by the totality of a comprehended epochal requirement. (Ibid: 126) Accordingly, the history of philosophy is an epochal speculation manifested along with the other historical configurations.

He states that speculative thinking is connected to the history of philosophy in two basic ways: (i) it is a result, and comes at the end of a determinate spiritual epoch; (ii) it contains the principles of previous philosophies raised from their contingent appearances, and repeats them in a systematic form, i.e. in their truth. (Ibid: 131) According to him, Speculative thinking is situated by the history of philosophy since the system looks back and comprehends its principles, raising that historical contingency to subjectivity, and the realization of this subjectivity through the historical configurations defines the determined horizons of an epoch which has achieved self-consciousness. Not only speculative thinking, but also philosophy in general, the Philosophy, looks back on its genesis and encompasses previous principles. He reasserts what Hegel has already asserted that why the latest philosophy, and not only speculative thinking, is the most concrete and true at any point in history. (Ibid: 132)

Thus far, I have provided a general description of Hegel's articulation of philosophy based on what McRae depicts. I should delineate my account of Hegel's formulation of philosophy as the last presentation of the System. According to my interpretation, the fundamental element of Hegel's history of philosophy is sublation, *Aufhebung*. Therefore, I should explicate my own conceptualization of *Aufhebung* in order to show the possibility of such an approach to Hegelian concept

of philosophy. *Aufhebung* means negation, gathering and ascending at the same time. But nonetheless it could be considered from a different point of view so as to grasp a certain sort of openness. It negates itself internally; and it keeps both oppositions together in a different way from both; and finally, although it goes beyond the previous situations, dialectic is not a linear progressive movement of *λόγος*. It is a dialogue between two oppositions within a two-sided dependent relationship instead. What Kant's universal idea of history is able to do is to define a brand new relation of freedom and history as context of the actualization of this freedom, but it still remains an abstract context of freedom since it does not actualize its own formations. Contrariwise, Hegel extends the relation of freedom and history in order to discover human's inherent dependence on actualized formations of history within which *Geist* always realizes itself. This raises a vital question that whether or not philosophy as consummation of art and religion is totality of *Geist*. To answer it, I require consider if philosophy as the last manifestation of the Absolute Spirit is enclosed totality of all contingencies of history within "the Concept" fully actualized.

There would be two approaches to interpret Hegel's concept of the Absolute Spirit. First, it might be accepted as totality of history since Hegel's philosophy can demonstrate all actualized formations of history. Second, it might be criticized, as Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx does so based on rejection of absolute positivity as negation of negativity. They criticize Hegel's absolute as self-supporting positivity. This might be a kind of reading Hegel's absolute idealism in which they attempt to do so deliberately. I attempt to delineate my own interpretation that would be another sort of reading Hegel's text focusing on his own philosophical context.

What makes philosophy a self-supporting positivity of all human activity is that it is based on the speculative thought (*Speculation*). Speculative thought is the process of philosophical actualization that it is able to gather all contingencies within its own realm of freedom. I attempt to explicate two concepts as to the speculation: first, how this inherent freedom of philosophy is able to encompass all contingencies within its own free activity; second, how Hegel's conception of philosophy considers the insufficiency of thought to grasping new contingency of reality, but he presupposes that the speculative thought can finally overcome such an insufficiency due to the absolute idealistic framework of his philosophy. Therefore, I should excavate some hidden potentialities within Hegel's own understanding, which is a non-Hegelian negativity of this absoluteness, although with regard to his own conception of philosophy as such.

There are four layers of any original philosophical enterprise that they consist of principles or foundations, method or approach, instructions or doctrines and insights or original takes. Maybe each philosophical attempt starts with insights and ends with instructions or doctrines. I have to ignore some of Hegel's instructions so as to discover some hidden insights on which commentators usually do not concentrate. It might be Hegel's own "unfinished consummation of philosophy". Although his philosophical 'foundations and instructions' that I have delineated in the previous chapters lead him to the totality of philosophy, some of his astonishing 'insights' might help us to reach an unusual understanding of his conception of philosophical absoluteness.

First and foremost, I should expound what philosophy is and how it functions as the most contentful from of absoluteness. According to Hegel, "it is unified into

the simple spiritual intuition, and then elevated in it to self-conscious thinking. It is the concept of art and religion (*Begriff der Kunst und Religion*)". (Hegel, 2010: 267) Philosophy as the last movement of the absolute subjectivity consists of two subjective movements: "first, the subjective withdrawal into self, then the subjective movement outwards". (Ibid: 267) Philosophy as a special sort of cognition is indeed the recognition of faith as its own content. Hegel formulates that religious belief (*Glaube*) and knowing (*Wissen*) in general do not contradict each other. On the contrary, belief is a special formation of knowing. Absolute knowing as realized in the Absolute Spirit obtains its implied unity and the self-certainty of its objective content from the associated movement of religious belief. According to Hegel, The subjective consciousness of absolute spirit is essentially in-itself a process, the immediate and substantial unity of which is the belief in the witness of the spirit as the certainty of objective truth.

According to Hegel's original insight, that all religious representations of the absolute have understood it in a monotheistic or pantheistic way is based on their conception of the absolute as *substance*, though it should be regarded as *subject* and *soul instead*. (Ibid: 273) Such an insight concerning the absolute subjectivity derives from Kant's Copernican revolution, although Kant could not consider this absolute subjectivity throughout the course of history. I already delineated his formulation of the sociality of subjectivity so as to prepare the most crucial pre-Hegelian source for Hegel's philosophy of the absolute.

Subjectivity of the absolute allows speculative thought to regard it as two-sidedly relational dependence of manifold and one, i.e. the world and God, or finite and infinite. This dependence has also the other outcome that is what grasps the absolute is complete and incomplete at the same time. This would be a hidden implication underlies Hegel's own text that it should be re-interpreted. I attempt to discover and highlight it in order to support my reading against any one-sidedly oriented interpretation of the Hegelian understanding of the absolute.

Hegel's canonical presupposition is that the Concept is truly concrete unity. He concludes, starting from this presupposition, that the Absolute Spirit should be the most concrete unity, i.e. the most fulfilled concept. Therefore, philosophy, the Science as such, is the most concrete concept. (Ibid: 274) According to Gillian Rose, the subjective movement of philosophy as the absolute has a social import since it has two potentialities to thinking and failing to think itself (the absolute) at the same time. (Rose, 2009: 218) This is what I clarify later. For the moment I should explicate that how this concomitant aspects of philosophy derives from the Hegelian negativity.

III. Philosophy as Absolute

Philosophy is supposed to be the encompassing, final outcome of the Spirit, but nonetheless a certain sort of 'absolute negativity' unexpectedly emerges at philosophy itself. This endless negativity is not 'bad infinity' Hegel hates. It is substantial force to which Hegel's own outcome opposes, although his text, even within its own Hegelian context, can lead us to find it.

Negativity constructs the absolute as long as it functions as negativity. In other words, the absolute is not constructed unless negativity negates positivity. Therefore, philosophy as the absolute knowing continues to encompass all determinations of

positivity as long as it negates them. But if philosophy becomes fixed negativity as merely encompassing all possibilities, there would be no philosophy. If Hegel already knows it, he discovers it for the first time, why should he deliberately appeal to the absolute as an actualized fixed end?

The reason he asserts that philosophy is to look back on all moments of the process of knowing, on all moments of history as well, is that only from the standpoint of the end it is possible to explicate all previous moments. That is to say, cause is conceptually prior to effect within Hegel's systematic perspective. According to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, life is always traumatic since the act of knowing always clarifies every moment of its process from the next situation it experiences. If the process of knowing does not have the last point of its process, it can never clarify what has happened in the last moments; therefore, it can never explicate its process in a total way. Hegel discovers that only in the final stage the System can explicate the whole process of knowing, life and reality itself. Accordingly, only in and within philosophy the System can expound the truth of all previous moments retrospectively. What can do this retrospection is not reflection. The act of speculation is the only act that is able to speculate, and it is the presentation of philosophy. Speculation has to look back on all previous moments of the System to truly know all of them. Philosophy is the only standpoint within which it is possible to do such a retrospective process, and that is the exact reason why Hegel is the first philosopher whose philosophy is a retrospective interpretation of all previous philosophies. According to him, philosophy as the System is not but the history of philosophy as the whole. Likewise, the process of knowing is not but the history of the process as the whole.

Hegel, according to his absolute idealism, presupposes that we can stand at the last moment of Spirit to explicate all previous moments. But nonetheless from a non-Hegelian standpoint, every last moment is an endless moment that continues. Our standpoint as the last moment is the only way to clarify some aspects of the past, on the one hand, and it obscures the past at the same time, on the other hand. Accordingly, there is no such a last definitive perspective. I want to show that in Hegel's own text there is such a hidden non-Hegelian theme which underlies the idealistic framework of his philosophy deferring any specific commentary of Hegel's absoluteness of philosophy.

IV. Absolute as Negativity

Gregor Moder classifies all accounts of negativity in the contemporary philosophical trends. According to him, there are some vital discussions concerning the problem of negativity that along with the problem of transcendence seems to be the most crucial problem of any contemporary philosophical investigation. He distinguishes two sorts of negativity at the level of being derived from Gadamerian and Deleuzian conceptions of repetition. "Firstly, negativity works either as some irreducible flaw or limit of existence itself. Secondly, it is an intrinsic capability of being to transform itself, a self-transformative or self-producing capability". (Moder, 2017:127)

Hermeneutic conception of understanding can explicate the endless process of understanding only from the perspective of the immediate hermeneutic experience where the sentence is always in the process of its enunciation and interpretation, as though it never truly ends but only stops being uttered, which it is supposed to be

interpreted in and with another utterance. Contrariwise, the Hegelian conception of philosophy as the last step of the System cannot be thought without the “absolute punctuation mark”, i.e., the absolute end. The fluidity of the being/thought must reach the crystallized form that is the definitive articulation. Such an absolute end can produce not only misinterpretation but also interpretation itself. This is the only way it can produce a true surprise. The definitive, crystalized form of philosophy produces excessiveness, i.e. a surplus meaning as something more than what was supposed to present. (Ibid: 141) It is the exact point at which I have attempted to arrive.

This is a very important point that it needs to be considered. As Moder states, Hegel understands philosophy as the end. It is conclusion of all previous syllogisms expressed within the System. According to Hegel, being conclusion does not nevertheless entail to stop the movement itself. Why does it happen? Or how do I fortify such an unusual interpretation? According to the *Philosophy of Spirit*, philosophy is the unity of intuition and totality. Art presents absolute spirit in different shapes of intuition, and religion presents it in a totality of representations (*Vorstellung*). Philosophy is self-conscious thinking; that is, it is “cognized concept of art and religion, in which the diversity in the content cognized as necessary, and this necessity cognized as free”. (Hegel, 2010:267)

It is appropriate moment to discuss the structure of syllogisms. The famous Hegelian formulation of identity is: Reality is rational and reason is real. If it is the case, philosophy as the last form of the Absolute Spirit is the most rational and the most real at the same time. Furthermore, it is the only thing in which there is the highest possibility to explicate reality and reason at the same time. The Absolute Spirit is experiencing three moments within philosophy, which are three syllogisms connecting both logic and nature. The categories of pure thought and the contingent sensuous forms are connected to each other through three syllogisms of philosophy.

The first syllogism is that of externalization and contingency in which nature is put as the middle term between the essentialities of thought and the mediated moments of Spirit. Philosophical investigation becomes self-conscious of how it has to confront this connection. Thought determinations should be externalized as contingent formations of time-space continuum. In this appearance (*Erscheinung*) of philosophy Spirit is confronted with its *essence* through the mediation of its own externality. Hegel states: “The first appearance is constituted by the syllogism that has the logical as its ground, its starting-point, and nature as the middle that joins the mind (spirit) together with the logical. The logical becomes nature and nature becomes mind (spirit). Nature, which stands between the mind (spirit) and its essence, does not in fact separate them into extremes of finite abstraction, nor does it separate itself from them into something independent, that as an other only joins together others; for the syllogism is determined within the Idea, and nature is essentially determined only as a transit point and negative moment and in itself the Idea; but the mediation of the concept has the external form of transition, and science has the form of the progression of necessity, so that only in the one extreme is the freedom of the concept posited as its joining together with itself”. (Ibid: 276)

In the second syllogism, spirit is the mediator that joins nature with the logical categories. It is the appearance of philosophy as self-reflecting mediator. Philosophy is subjective cognition aiming at freedom. It wants to liberate itself from the

contingency of nature in order to be free at the essentialities of thought. In other words, philosophy reflects on itself so that it becomes aware of how Spirit determines sensory contingencies of nature as essentialities of a pure Idea. This appearance (*Erscheinung*) happens only through a self-reflective act of Spirit. Hegel describes such a reflection in this way:

“In the second syllogism this appearance is sublated in so far as this syllogism is already the standpoint of the mind itself, which is the mediator of the process, presupposes nature and joins it together with the logical. It is the syllogism of spiritual reflection within the Idea; science appears as a subjective cognition, whose aim is freedom and which is itself the way to produce its freedom.” (Ibid: 276)

The third syllogism of philosophy, i.e. the Science has logic (philosophy) or the Idea as the middle term with Spirit as presupposition and nature as destination. As Hegel describes it: “The self-judging of the Idea into the two appearances determines them as its (self-knowing reason's) manifestations, and in it a unification takes place: it is the concept, the nature of the subject-matter, that moves onwards and develops, and this movement is equally the activity of cognition. The eternal Idea, the Idea that is in and for itself, eternally remains active, engenders and enjoys itself as absolute mind”. (Ibid: 276)

The third syllogism is the appearance of the Science as the Concept which is both Idea's subjective activity and its being objective (*Dasein*). Now the problem of relationship between these three presentations of philosophy appears. What can elucidate the connection of three syllogisms has been put in these statements:

“This finitude of the End consists in the circumstance, that, in the process of realizing it, the material, which is employed as a means, is only externally subsumed under it and made conformable to it. But, as a matter of fact, the object is the concept implicitly: and thus when the concept, in the shape of End, is realized in the object, we have but the manifestation of the inner nature of the object itself. Objectivity is thus, as it were, only a covering under which the concept lies concealed. Within the range of the finite we can never see or experience that the End has been really secured. The consummation of the infinite End, therefore, consists merely in removing the illusion which makes it seem yet unaccomplished. The Good, the absolutely Good, is eternally accomplishing itself in the world: and the result is that it needs not wait upon us, but is already by implication, as well as in full actuality, accomplished. This is the illusion under which we live. It alone supplies at the same time the actualizing force on which the interest in the world reposes. In the course of its process the Idea creates that illusion, by setting an antithesis to confront it; and its action consists in getting rid of the illusion, which it has created. Only out of this error does the truth arise. In this fact lies the reconciliation with error and with finitude. Error or other being, when superseded, is still a necessary dynamic element of truth: for truth can only be where it makes itself its own result”. (Hegel, 1830:264; Hegel, 2010:282)

The quoted sentences clarify what is the whole, i.e. the end and its relationship to finite objects at every moment of the process. Catherine Malabou presents an argument in order to show how the meanings of *Aufhebung* and *aufheben* can answer the question of the absolute end. She suggests a formulation of *plastic operation* by which *aufheben* and *Aufhebung* refer to preservation and suppression at the same time.

But Hegelian scholars usually have not considered this very literal meaning of these two words for interpreting Hegel's absolute end. She puts it:

“What must be demonstrated is the fact that Hegel does indeed restore the essential dialectical performativity of the *aufheben* and *Aufhebung*, that he in effect ‘sublates’ *aufheben* into *aufheben*, *Aufhebung* into *Aufhebung*”. (Malabou, 2005:145)

She called suppression and preservation as two modalities of dialectic. They are virtual and imaginary forming the energy of dialectic. (Ibid: 146) According to her formulation of plasticity, suppression and preservation themselves are involved in a double suppression and a double preservation in order to reach absolute form, i.e. the Science. She describe this formulation:

“At the same moment, the determination thus simplified exists as a type, an exemplar – mourning its individuality – and a particular essence – mourning its universality. To produce this ontological residue involves a double suppression and a double preservation. Suppression occurs through the work of habit, with its blunting and flattening effects, and through sacrifice, or alienation. Preservation has involved two forms of permanence: the virtuality created by re-actualizing, and the singularity which, in its disappearance, has left itself behind as an interiorized trace”. (Ibid: 153)

She renders Hegel's totality completely plastic, i.e. a total place in which each thought-determination re-discovers its own unique and appropriate position within the process. Accordingly, she concludes that only an absolute form can present the totality of this plasticity. She puts: “In this way, the ‘customary-sacrificial’ economy determines the resting place of spirit, and that is nothing other than the System, or ‘absolute form’. (Ibid: 154)

Malabou understands the meaning and the function of the Absolute Knowledge, which is the Absolute Spirit, from the spirit's perspective as ‘absolute sublation’. She clarifies how being absolute are identical with being retrospective due to its own dialectical characteristic. She states: “Far from enforcing a violent stoppage of the dialectical progress, the advent of Absolute Knowledge will imply instead the exact opposite: its metamorphosis. Dialectical sublation will become absolute sublation – its own absolutation.” (Ibid: 155) Philosophy in the third syllogism looks back on its own process which is indeed its own systematization. What it must to be considered is that the absoluteness of the Absolute Spirit is necessary to complete the process of Spirit. Furthermore, the absolute form cannot be absolute but as retrospective or retroactive movement.

It has been explicated how the Absolute is an internal totality to complete the System as the Science, i.e., the whole. What is of crucial importance to support the second part of my interpretation concerning the ongoing process of the absolute lies in the last sentence of the third syllogism where Hegel clarifies that the concept “eternally engenders itself as absolute spirit. The substantial problem is that whether or not the Absolute Spirit is engendering itself retrospectively. Is there any possibility to proclaim that the Absolute Spirit can also be prospectively engendering itself in a radically new way?

Malabou refers to the meaning of *ablegen*, to abrogate, in order to argue for how abrogation stands along with sublation. As she describes, *ablegen* means to take away, to remove and to discard, which indeed supplements the function of dialectical sublation at the last moment of Spirit. Abrogation is *Aufhebung* of *Aufhebung*, sublation of sublation, which is indeed absolute sublation. It is a self-working of

Aufhebung by which dialectical sublation frees itself from its own sublation. That is to say, “sublation frees itself from a certain type of attachment.” (Ibid: 156) The act of sublation as negativity supersedes and preserves each formation of Spirit at the same time. Now within the last formation of the Absolute Spirit, i.e. philosophy, there is no external formation to be superseded and preserved. What happens in this last moment is that philosophy as negativity turns towards itself. It negates the negativity itself, not a certain sort of formation. Does this negation of negativity entail the cancelation of negativity? The openness of sublation demonstrates that the answer to this question is that negativity is still working as internal drive of thought/reality.

Malabou stresses that the traditional gap, which is logical and chronological at the same time, between thinking and thought, i.e. subject and object is abrogated, *aufgeben*, not in a new formation of that gap but due to the suspension of the gap as such. Such a suspension suspends the Kantian ‘synthetic unity of Cartesian I think’ and makes it fluid and supple within an open perspective without any fixed I. (Ibid: 157-158) The fluid and supple perspective is what Kant’s kingdom of ends could not bring to the fore due to the lack of such a historical perspective. Kant could not demonstrate why human rationality must arrive at a final moment of rationality unless he presupposes history’s own orientation to actualize and realize itself. But Hegel sets a long historical journey to demonstrate how such a total perspective is not only possible but also actualized at the present. Rationality realizes itself as both absolute and open to the future.

The openness of Spirit refers to the suspension of subject/object gap. Accordingly, the Absolute Spirit goes inside towards its own determinate formations so as to dissociate itself from all of them. If it is the case, at least to Hegel it seems to be so, philosophy is the most conceptual formation and the third syllogism of the System is the fullest presentation of the Absolute Spirit. When Spirit comes to appear as its own fullest formation there would be no further external determination of the Absolute Spirit. From now on, the Absolute Spirit stands at a flexible perspective to see all the previous determinations coming to the fore. Thinking who thinks on itself as thought sees all its content from within in a flexible perspective. This is a specific situation in which suspension of all fixed perspective occurs in a radically new way.

As Malabou (Ibid: 156-157) refers to the preface to *the Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel has already described such fluidity or suspension of all determinations, which I insist to call ‘suspension of perspectives’ rather than ‘suspension of subject-object gap’ Hegel puts it:

“Thoughts become fluid (*die Gedanken werden flüssig*) when pure thinking, this inner immediacy, recognizes itself as a moment, or when the pure certainty of self abstracts from itself – not by leaving itself out, or setting itself aside (*auf die Seite setzen*), but by giving up (*aufgeben*) the fixity of its self-positing, by giving up not only the fixity of the pure concrete, which the ‘I’ itself is, in contrast with its differentiated content, but also the fixity of the differentiated moments which, posited in the element of pure thought, share the unconditional nature of the ‘I’”. (Hegel, 1977:20)¹

‘Suspension of perspectives’ does not entail the closure of all perspectives. On the contrary, it means absolute sublation of all perspectives. Such an absolute

sublation makes 'the I' as the fullest as well as the most mediated Self without attachment to its determinate perspectives. Rather, it is able to grasp any further possible perspective in the future. It is the Concept that moves onwards and develops. The Concept which engenders and enjoys itself as absolute spirit. "Onwards" should be considered from the standpoint of 'sublation of perspectives' so that it can be interpreted not only as retrospective act but also as prospective and ongoing movement. How is it possible? It is possible only within 'sublation of perspectives' or the negation of negativity.

'Sublation of perspectives' or absolute sublation seems first of all to be a bad infinity. But nonetheless it performs a certain sort of negative standpoint in which there can be an absolute limit to consider all determinations and formations of Spirit. It is a 'from now on' refers not only to the past but also to the future. What occurs as accident in the future is grasped by the totality of absolute sublation insofar as to be speculated as necessary.

Seeing from a determinate perspective cannot grasp the totality of each singular moment. But 'From now on' is a sublation of previous perspectives, which enables speculation to see all previous moments along with their perspectives in a negative way. There is therefore no last and final 'from now on' since it is not a meta-perspective, i.e., meta-historical but it is a flexible totality of perspectives. Accordingly, there would always be multiple 'from now on' to grasp speculatively reality as totality.

There is a crucial point to which I should pay attention. Malabou understands the situation of absolute sublation and abrogation as "the dual process of suppression/preservation detached from the subject-object relation". (Malabou, 2005:159) Her interpretation has two aspects without which it would be impossible to distinguish the process of the *Aufhebung* from that of the bad infinite (Ibid: 160): first, it refers to *automatism* of the System, i.e. Spirit itself, which means the condition of auto-determination and auto-momentum; second, it refers to the suspension of subject-object attachment. I agree with the former but totally disagree with the latter. From the absolute sublation point of view the subject-object inter-dependence would not be cancelled but it would be overwhelmed into a fluid perspective. Philosophy as the last moment of the Absolute Spirit does not entail the rejection of the subject-object relation that is necessarily ontological condition of knowing the world. In other words, the process of knowing the world always occurs within the world itself. Therefore, the subject-object inter-dependence is an insurmountable mutual relation, although philosophy as absolute knowledge can suspend all specific determinacies of the relation in order to see all determinations and formations within the process of the relation as such. In other words, philosophy indeed suspends any determinate subject-object relation through which we have seen the very relation. It suspends all previous perspectives attached to those subject-object relations in order to arrive at a flexible perspective detached from all of them. This is the exact meaning of 'from now on' from the Absolute Spirit standpoint. Accordingly, there would always be possible to appeal to such a point of view to grasp the true meaning of what has happened in the past logically and chronologically.

Absolute sublation does not entail absolute cancellation of subject-object relation but it refers to the suspension of any determinate perspective in which there

is a specific formation of subject-object inter-dependence. This would be a substantial difference between Kant's kingdom of ends as the final stage of history and Hegel's Absolute Spirit as the totality of 'here-now'. Kant's idea of history is abstract due to the lack of the past within the present. His general idea of history is as much as abstract that it cannot explicate the present by seeing what happened in the past. On the contrary Hegel's idea of history is as concrete as possible due to its fullness of the past within the present. Kant discovers the substantial importance of 'here-now' as a fundamental task of philosophy of history, but its conception of 'here-now' could not grasp the totality of 'here-now' through history, which his philosophy is supposed to do so. Accordingly, his conception of 'here-now' still remains abstract and dissociated from the past. Hegel finishes the task of totalizing 'here-now' within a historical framework. His conception of historical subjectivity allows him to totalize 'here-now' within a 'from now on' perspective. The absolute sublation is not a meta-historical point of view free of subject-object relation but it is the totality of all subject-object formations within a flexible fluidity of all perspectives. That is, it is 'suspension of all perspectives'.

I want to use a metaphor to clarify my main claim concerning the 'suspension of perspectives'. We can consider a play in which characters are seen in the first act as deciding what they will do in the future. In the second act we see the characters in the future when they have followed their own decisions with success or failure. In the third and final act we see them in the first act again. How do we judge their acts and decisions? We consider these three acts from three perspectives. In the first act we consider their decisions from their own decisions point of view. In the second act we consider their deeds from the standpoint of their acts' results. In the final act we consider their decisions in the first act and their success and failure in the second act not from the first and second perspectives but from a radically new perspective in which we are able to detach ourselves from the two perspectives attached to the previous scenes.

Such a new perspective suspends those former perspectives in order to see them retrospectively and retroactively. Retrospection is indeed a certain sort of retroaction based on which it becomes free from attachment to a specific limited perspective. Therefore, it is able to grasp reality of the same singular event from a speculative total standpoint. Accordingly, the singular event is now seen as individual, which bears universality within its own particularity. This would be the Absolute Spirit's own perspective that it is called by finite spirit as 'suspension of all perspectives'. Sublation of sublation is indeed a certain kind of negativity, i.e. the negation of negativity, which leads finite spirit to a retrospective perspective suspending any positive determinate perspective. Such a suspension is in fact the fluidity of the perspectives going inwards deeper and deeper towards inside to see the previous layers from a radically new perspective. But nonetheless this inwardness should be considered as moving onwards since it might be grasped by new 'from now on' perspective. The absoluteness of absolute sublation has the potentiality of being suspended, although it is absolute from this 'from now on' perspective.

I should finally concentrate on the verb "to engender" (*erzeugen*), which Hegel uses in the last sentence of the third syllogism. What does engender mean from the third syllogism standpoint? Spirit in its philosophical presentation functions not only retrospectively but also prospectively, i.e. open to the future. Consequently,

according to Hegel, although philosophy is the most concrete form of subjectivity, i.e. absolute form that it can conceptualize reality in the fullest formation detached from any determinate subject-object relation, it does not cease. It is still open to the future when Hegel uses *erzeugen*. It engenders not only the hidden layers of the previous moments, when they are free from a specific object-dependence, but also moves onwards. Spirit has some hidden potentialities, and its next philosophical manifestations are able to grasp concrete universalities of those potentialities when they will be actualized. Consequently, “to engender” is the sign by which Hegel emphasizes on the ongoing movement of *Geist*, and philosophy is the only way to conceptualize *Geist*'s actualizations in the future.

Conclusion

The absolute is the process per se, not the final goal. That is, the realization of the finality of the process within the trajectory of the process, appropriated in advance by the sociality of reason and made concrete within human lives, human means, human ends, human struggles, and absolutely in human history as contingent necessity and necessary contingency (*Zufälligkeit*). This contingent necessity is rooted in causes which are themselves only external circumstances. Philosophy is the process of the conceptualization of this process itself. Therefore, it is the realization of the finality of its own process within the trajectory of its own process, appropriated in advance by the sociality of speculative thinking. This is the exact meaning of the openness of the Absolute Spirit.

Notes:

1. See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 20

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