

A Consideration of Hegel's Philosophy According to Popper and to the Neo-Popperian Inversion Theory of Truth

Peter Lugten 

Independent Researcher, USA. Email: pclugten@gmail.com

Article Info

Article type:

Research Article

Article history:

Received 11 December 2025

Received in revised form 20 January 2026

Accepted 22 January 2026

Published online 14 February 2026

Keywords:

Hegel, Popper, Truth, Falsehood, Knowledge, Correspondence Theory, Inversion Theory.

ABSTRACT

This paper shows how Hegel's misconception of truth and knowledge misled his ideas of Absolute spirit, dialectically reinforced dogmatism and irrational historicism toward his disastrous conclusion of a "totalitarian playbook". Analysis by Hegel scholars is presented and contrasted with Popper's Critical Rationalism-based critiques. Hegel held a version of Correspondence for everyday truth plus a deeper "philosophical" truth, similar to essence, which could be unified with consciousness. This is compared to Popper's anti-essentialism. Hegel's dialectical theory is contrasted to Popper's falsificationism. Popper showed that dialectical method produced historical relativism. Hegel's Philosophy of Identity, yielding the dialectical Idealism of "what is reasonable must be real", led to "might is right" with emergence of nations by fighting for domination on the stage of history. Popper credited Hegel with formulating the "playbook of totalitarianism", used lethally by followers of Hegelian Left and Right. Inversion Theory claims the word "true", implying completeness, certainty, and self-consistency, is applicable only to the objective world. Perception of it, acquired by an evolved biological process (Active Subjectivism), incorporates essential falsehood, yielding "best knowledge" of reality. It solves problems related to the regulatory, statistical, evidentiary, inconstant and even indexical nature of knowledge. Only the Inversion theory exposes the errors of dialecticism: since it involves subjective concepts, it is impossible for a true synthesis plus its negative antithesis to give a true synthesis. The historical process of the Zeitgeist contains falsehood, the cunning of reason to move the spirit forward is uncertain, and nobody can perform the truth for their time.

Cite this article: Lugten, P. (2026). A Consideration of Hegel's Philosophy According to Popper and to the Neo-Popperian Inversion Theory of Truth. *Journal of Philosophical Investigations*, 20(54), 587-604. <https://doi.org/10.22034/jpiut.2026.21264>



© The Author(s).

Publisher: University of Tabriz.

Intruduction

Georg W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) is regarded as an important philosopher in the Western canon, with many biographies and books of philosophical analysis written about him, exuding his praises. For example, “Hegel”, by [Raymond Plant \(1999, 3\)](#): “Hegel is a pivotally important figure in the history of western philosophy and his work is immensely wide-ranging. It was and still is pervasively influential in a wide number of fields: in the central areas of philosophy itself; in political and social theory; in aesthetics; in the philosophy of history; and in the philosophy of religion...”.

[Charles Taylor’s “Hegel” \(1975, 3\)](#) has him reconciling tensions between the Enlightenment’s humanism and the cosmic, more God-oriented Romanticism through the creation of a universal rationality that overcomes the contradictions inherent in reality. “It was a problem of uniting two seemingly indispensable images of man, which on one level had deep affinities with each other, yet could not but appear utterly incompatible”.

The purpose of this paper is to show that the entire edifice of Hegel’s philosophical opus is without merit. Several reasons for this have already been indelicately described by such philosophers as Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard and Popper. For instance, Popper wrote of the “presumptuously scribbled nonsense of Hegel, produced, as it was, with a boundless, though justified, confidence in German stupidity” that “The question arises whether Hegel deceived himself, hypnotized by his own uninspiring jargon, or whether he boldly set out to deceive and bewitch others. I am satisfied that this latter view is the case...” ([Popper, 1945, 27-28](#)). But in *this* paper, I will show that Hegel’s conception of the meaning of “truth” was wrong, and that everything he derived from this fundamental misunderstanding was consequently disastrous. These conclusions become obvious once one examines Hegel’s work through the lens of the neo-Popperian Inversion Theory of Truth.

Hegel’s concept of truth

It should come as no surprise that Hegel did not profess any straight-forward understanding of the concept of truth. I have summarized the writing of five authors as to Hegel’s conception of the meanings of truth, knowledge and falsehood.

According to [Giovanna Miolli](#), Hegel’s understanding of truth is also and equally a theory of the self-knowledge of the concept ([Miolli, 2018](#)). The concept has to posit its own content - and to recognize this content as its reality. The kind of reality that concerns Hegel is not empirical but rather consists in the logical content (thought-determinations) that the logical form generates through its own development. In this sense, truth (the idea) is the (posited) identity of the absolute form and its own content. Hegel’s conception of truth presents an ontology that is at the same time an epistemology. Hegel conceived of philosophical truth as the identity of truth and certainty. Hegel’s understanding of truth is that it is not something “static” but instead posits itself through a dialectical process of self-development and self-knowledge, in which negativity and self-reflection play an essential role.

David James (Hegel, 2007, 13-15) notes that Hegel identified the apparent independence of the “object as being-in-itself” with truth, but rejected the idea that we might not be able to really know the object as it is in itself, insofar as that our knowledge might not correspond to how the object is independently of our cognitive relation to it. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel “develops his own account of the relation of consciousness to its object which allows us to think of the relation of consciousness to the object and the object of knowledge itself as being united in a single experience”.

The distinction between “being-for-another” (the subjective) and “being-in-itself” (the objective) falls within consciousness itself, so that experience unifies our knowledge with the truth of the object. Hegel, notes James, employs the terms concept and object to describe this distinction, which are reversible insofar as the truth of the object is identical to the concept of its essential nature. However, if experience of the object leads to refutation of the conscious conception of the essence of the object, both a different conception and a different object must emerge. Failure of the unity of concept and the object’s essence arises because it is forced to invoke the universal order of its self consistency, the universal “I”, to justify its concept of the object’s essential nature, when the object doesn’t include the idea of universality. This recognition leads to a higher stage of consciousness.

[Mark Alznauer \(2023\)](#) gave us this explication of Hegel’s idiosyncratic truth notions:

Hegel, in his *Encyclopaedia Logic*, claims we ordinarily think of truth as a matter of the agreement of one of our representations with what it is a representation of (which here he calls the “content” of the representation) at least in consideration of simple propositions or judgements. If we judge “this rose is red”, we represent the rose as red; this judgment is correct only if the rose we represent as red has the quality of being red. Hegel’s definition of “correctness” is close to the traditional definition of “truth” ...cognition acquires a truth value only when it takes the form of a theoretical judgment, one that predicates something of an object.

Hegel lacks a well-developed account of what makes a judgment or proposition correct, but agrees it to be important practically and in the empirical sciences. It is not to be confused with truth in the deeper philosophical sense, which is the subject matter and aim of philosophy. Truth, then, is an agreement of an object, or content, with itself or with its own content. It is a relation that something has to itself, not anything else. This is rejection of the correspondence theory in favor of an Identity theory of truth: a proposition is true iff it is identical with a fact.

In this way, it eliminates the appearance of a gap between mind and world, as seen in correspondence theories. Furthermore, truth isn’t a property of our representations of, or thoughts about, certain contents or objects (i.e., correspondence, and identity theories) but is a property of those contents or objects themselves. So truth applies directly to the objects being thought about (the truth-bearers). Truth is a way of assessing the objects about which we make judgments by determining whether they have the right self-relation.

As examples, Hegel offered “a sick body is not in agreement with the concept of life and so too a theft is an action that does not correspond to the concept of human activity” (EL section 172 Z). Also, a true friend acts according to the concept of friendship, and a true state conforms to the concept of a state. The truth-bearer is a spatiotemporal individual that instantiates a concept: true if it corresponds to its own concept, bad or untrue if not. It isn't the judgment that is untrue but its logical form. Truth is the accordance of the thing with its essence.

Alznauer continues: The contrast between truth pertaining to propositions and pertaining to things is a contrast between a view regarding truth as requiring a predicate (roses are red) and one regarding truth as pertaining to thought-determinations (concepts) themselves. Individual concepts can be evaluated as true or false apart from their use in propositions. The proper concern of logic is to assess the individual thought-determinations in terms of their truth or ability to capture the truth. Hegel suggests we may view the untruth of concepts as a matter of internal contradiction.

The role of contradiction in Hegel's logic is controversial. Some take it to be the negation of propositions, and say Hegel's view is a form of dialetheism: a proposition and its negation can both be true. Others say Hegel has ontologized the notion of contradiction, applying it everywhere. Alznauer favors the view that primary bearers of contradiction in Hegel's logic aren't propositions or things but pure concepts like being, substance and identity.

The typical philosophical examples of contradictory concepts are “square circle”, or “wooden iron”. But this leaves Hegel with a definition of truth as merely being non contradictory, which is far from showing objects to actually exist. Some say Hegel ignores this distinction, conflating thinkability with being. Alternatively, the adequacy of concepts can be measured against a standard that includes infinite objects like God and the teleological conception of life. Defective concepts can be characterized as untrue (incapable of expressing the infinite), and nondefective ones true. A concept is untrue if it cannot be predicated of the absolute or used to characterize things as they are without generating a contradiction. Otherwise, it is true, although there is only one such concept: the absolute idea.

Tal Meir Giladi (2022) pointed out that even though things have a truth-value for Hegel, the latter is always negative. Hegel's criterion of “philosophical truth” is intended to examine the truth-value of thought-determinations, and things never fall under this definition. Thought-determinations, as “objective thoughts”, may be compared to Plato's Forms, or Kant's Categories, but they can be true or false.

The “business of logic” is to examine the truth-value of the thought-determinations: to determine which are the forms of the infinite, and which of the finite (EL: section 24A, 62)¹. True thought-determinations are internally coherent. “God alone is the true agreement of

¹ EL refers to *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline Part 1: Science of Logic*, trans. K. Brinkmann and D. Dahlstrom. Cambridge University Press, 2010

the concept with reality" (EL: section 24A, 62). Unlike God, "all finite things have an untruth: they possess a concept and a concrete existence that is, however, inadequate to the concept". By God, Hegel meant a thought-determination, not a thing, which is the absolute idea, the truth, that objectively corresponds to the concept (EL section 21R, 283). No individual thing can serve as a universal example as it will not be identical to all others of the same type. Hegel gives true friends, true states, and true works of art as imperfect illustrations of philosophical truths, only "to some extent in the ordinary use of language".

Aliosha Bielenberg explains it as follows (Bielenberg, 2021): Objective knowledge for Hegel consists in this process of spirit (becomes the object, for this movement of becoming an *other* to *itself*, which is to say, of becoming an *object* to *its own self* and sublating this otherness) alienating itself and then reuniting and coming round again. In other words, knowledge is produced by the dialectic, the motor of history... Being as subject is the proposition; being as object is the negation; and coming round again brings itself to its conclusion. Together, this dialectic constitutes science...Objective truth, as with Kant, is produced by the unity of subject and object...But Hegel makes the case that judgements do not happen in an instant. Instead, objective knowledge is a matter of the *whole* of the movement.

In summary, Hegel seemed to allow for a version of the "correspondence theory of truth" for everyday purposes and for the empirical conduct of science. This was capable of providing "correct", but not "true" propositions and statements about the world. He argued for a separate, "philosophical", or deeper truth, that applied not to judgments about the real, objective state of affairs, but to the objective object (according to Alznauer), or thought-determination (according to Miolli, Alznauer & Giladi) being true in relation to itself, or, in other words, its "essence". Indeed, this essence or truth within the object becomes identical to or unified with the concept of it within our self-consciousness (as explained by James).

Following Aristotle, philosophers have maintained that the "essence" of an object is those defining, universal qualities it must possess in order to be understood as that object. Knowledge, to Hegel, appears to be a bizarre dialectical process involving the spirit alienating and resolving itself in a roundabout fashion, and falsehood presumably includes incorrect ideas, in terms of the correspondence theory, and finite, defective concepts, internal contradictions that do not coincide with their essence, or the absolute idea.

Popper takes issue with the idea of essence, writing that essentialism opposes science (Popper, 1945, 14). Science progresses not through the gradual accumulation of essential information, but by advancing theories in response to problems, testing them, and replacing older, less adequate ones. Outside of mathematics and logic, there are no proofs, no definitions to encapsulate the essence of things, just refutations. As a nominalist, Popper holds that definitions are a mere shorthand for describing the complex objects of our theories. Statements about these are never true, but approach nearer to the truth as we discover and fix the weaknesses of our theories.

I will show that conventional ideas about truth, never mind Hegel's ideas, have caused philosophers to mistake the nature of truth, knowledge and falsehood: this can explain their disagreements not only with each other but with common sense. This paper contends that a neo-Popperian epistemological theory - the Inversion Theory of Truth - is alone able to generate self-consistent rational philosophies

Hegel's Knowledge, Spirit, the Absolute, and Dialectical movement

Hegel, while still a student in Tubingen, together with Hölderin and Schelling, was concerned with what he perceived as deep divisions in societal attitudes, particularly "bifurcation between man and God; between man and society, between man and nature, and, indeed, the division within the individual's own personality between reason, imagination and feeling" (Plant, 1999, 11).

For whatever reason, late eighteenth-century German intellectuals had developed a strange idealization of the ancient Greek polis, considering it to have integrated religion into the daily moral, artistic and poetic lives of its citizens. This resulted in a common, harmonious sense of purpose and community, in which men could maximize their potentials and powers to become whole men. Conventional Christianity removed God to the distant Heavens, sapping, Hegel thought, the social spirit and unity of society with its focus on personal salvation.

Hegel also wanted his philosophy to be historical (Plant, 1999, 24-7). This historical development he supposed to be teleological: a rational process toward the goal of "Absolute Knowing, or the spirit that knows itself as Spirit", which "appearing in the form of contingency, is History, but... it is the science of Knowing in the sphere of appearance: the two together, comprehended History, for alike the inwardising and the Calvary of absolute Spirit"¹.

Plant explains: the deep rationality uncovered en route to Absolute Knowledge follows from the action of God united with human life and history, which Hegel conceived of, in his *The Science of Logic* (1812-13), as the Absolute Idea. God is transformed into the Absolute Idea, linking divine to human. It is the organizing principle of human existence, which becomes embodied in the forms of human experience, becoming Spirit. When fully comprehended, through a dialectical process that transcends understanding to arrive at Reason, it is Absolute Spirit. "Absolute Knowledge is the transcription of the religious idea of the role of the Holy Spirit when we have a comprehensive understanding of the indwelling of God in this process" (Plant, 1999, 27).

Furthermore, "an understanding of...namely the world of nature and human history in its manifold forms is itself a study of the nature of God" (Plant, 1999, 33). Hegel was "profoundly concerned with the fragmentation of the common life of society and the fragmentation of the self which was unable to achieve a comprehensive interpretation of

¹ Plant cites *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, Clarendon Press, Oxford

existence" (Plant, 1999, 56).

Hegel graduated from Tübingen in 1793 with a certificate stating that he was a man of "good parts and character", well up in theology and philology, but with no ability in philosophy (Caird, 1968). As if to prove his teachers right, he instituted the "dialectical movement" in Western thought.

According to dialecticism, every condition of thought or of things leads irresistibly to its opposite, uniting with it to form a higher, more complex whole. A *thesis* proffered is contradicted by an *antithesis*. *Synthesis* of the conflicting views absorbs and supersedes them, elevating them and preserving them in reconciliation. Therefore, to Hegel, philosophy's task is to understand the potential unity behind diversity. These stands opposed to scientific theories, which assume that contradictions are impermissible, and when discovered, must be resolved by changing the theory. Popper accused Hegel of preaching that contradictions were desirable (Popper, 1945, 39).

For instance, Hegel might oppose the thesis "men have a right to Freedom" with the antithesis that "men have a duty to the State". His synthesis could be that since it was the responsibility of the state to ensure men's freedom, men's duty to the state was the source of their freedom and hence freedom had no right to conflict with duty. Reasonable as that sounds, it could equally well read that since men's duty to the state is derived from men's desire to protect their right to freedom, the State should impose no duty on men that would impinge on their freedom.

Hence dialecticians cherry-pick the messages that suit their politics. Because contradictions are merely absorbed, not eliminated, no progress is made. Hegel's aim with the contradictions is to stop rational argument and scientific, intellectual progress. Not only can any criticism be absorbed this way, but through a "dialectical twist", it can be turned against its critic. Therefore, it is futile to contradict the dialectician; a situation Popper refers to as "reinforced dogmatism" (Popper, 1945, 40) critiqued the "three-beat rhythm of dialectics", comparing the *dialectic triad* to the scientific method: comparing alternative solutions to a problem (antitheses) with the existing theory (thesis), eliminating by trial and error the less favorable theories (Popper 1963: chap 15). To be fertile, contradiction must be eliminated. Synthesis emerges as unity of opposites, dissolving and incorporating the conflict between thesis and antithesis at a higher level.

The process is then repeated, advancing forward. But this differs from development of a theory by trial and error. Rather, he "suggested that the struggle between an idea and its criticism or between a thesis and its antithesis would lead to the elimination of the thesis (or, perhaps, of the antithesis) if it is not satisfactory; and that the competition of theories would lead to the adoption of new theories only if enough theories are at hand and are offered for trial" (Popper, 1963, 314).

Popper acknowledged that dialectics preserves within the synthesis some valuable parts of thesis and antithesis, such as, in the history of science, the merger of the corpuscular with the wave theory of light. But thesis doesn't "produce" antithesis: antithesis develops from

criticism of thesis. The consequent scientific inquiry, iff successful, “produces” the synthesis. This synthesis will include new elements missing from the thesis and the antithesis, not predictable by any dialectic of the two.

Popper critiqued the dialecticians’ idea that contradictions are thus key to arriving at synthesis, so much so that they demand, in the name of a new “dialectical logic”, the rejection of the logical law of the exclusion of contradictions. He shows how this would allow the “logical deduction” of any made up statement, as well as its opposite (Popper, 1963, 316-319). He also criticized as unnecessarily confusing their use of the terms thesis, negation of thesis, and negation of the negation, and their use of “contradiction” when “conflict” would be less misleading (Popper, 1963, 322-323). He considered it best to avoid using the term dialectic at all, when we really mean trial and error (Popper, 1963, 323). Popper was adamant that any dialectical synthesis that admits contradictions loses all value, and would result in “a complete breakdown of science” (1963: 317).

Hegel and German Idealism

Hegel and his school put forward a theory of dialectics which exaggerated its significance in a dangerously misleading manner, Popper maintained (1963, 324). Hegel’s philosophy followed from the legacy of both Immanuel Kant and the German Idealism movement, where Idealism is a belief that the objects of our experience are, in some way, dependent for their existence on our mental apprehension of them. (This viewpoint, egocentric to the point of being delusional, implies that if you, the reader, did not exist, then my existence as writer of what you are now reading would be at best compromised if not altogether extinguished).

Kant discussed the so-called (in his day) “*rationalist*” view of Descartes that scientific ideas can be explained without reference to experience, by using our reason, by virtue of the compelling lucidity of true ideas (Popper, 1963, 324-327).

Hence every reasonable proposition must be a true description of the facts. Kant contrasted this to the *empiricist* contention that only experience enables us to distinguish between true and false scientific theories. He showed that when trying to construct a system of pure reason, one could always argue to the opposite effect at the same time. Therefore, experience would always be necessary to decide between arguments. Nonetheless, Popper criticized the notion of the world being “mind-like” as a solution to Kant’s problem, by suggesting the analogous answer to the question “How can a mirror reflect my face? Because it is face-like” - obviously preposterous.

Kant’s perspicacity on the rejection of what was then called rationalism notwithstanding, German philosophy soon reverted to metaphysical systems of pure reason (Popper, 1963, 325).

Hegel claimed "That which is reasonable must be real". His Philosophy of Identity said because reason and reality are identical, the world is not merely mind-like, the mind *is* the world. About this philosophy, Popper wrote: “I do not intend to waste the reader’s time by attempting to make sense of it... {it} is nothing but shameless equivocation, and, to use

Hegel's own words, it consists of nothing but 'fancies', even imbecile fancies'" (Popper 1945, 40). Hegel disregarded the contradictions that concerned Kant, and claimed that reason must contradict itself. Because Kant showed that any thesis that couldn't be "verified" by experience couldn't be distinguished from its antithesis,

Hegel maintained that all rationality must work with contradictions and antinomies (Popper, 1945, 8). It followed that if reason must develop through the dialectic of thesis and antithesis, then so must reality. In Hegel's dialectical Idealism the world imitates the dialectical nature of thought. The subsequent dialectical Materialism of Karl Marx dropped Hegel's idealism but retained the doctrine of the dynamic forces of historical development (Popper, 1963, 333).

Hegel in the court of the King of Prussia

Hegel, whatever his sincerity, used his dialectical arguments and his barely penetrable verbosity to serve Frederick William III of Prussia. In 1818 he was appointed to the chair in philosophy at the University of Berlin and also to the Board of Examiners of the Royal Academic Board of Brandenburg, tasked with reforming the educational curriculum into a modern humanism, reducing the dominance of the Catholic Church (Plant, 1999, 8-9). He justified the existing order with the following dialectic: "What is, is good. Since there can be no standards but existing standards, it is the doctrine of might is right" (Popper 1945, 41).

Indeed, as James points out, Hegel's understanding of "right" extended beyond judicial laws to "any existence in general which is the existence of free will", or "all the determinations of freedom" (James, 2007, 35). Each stage of right is more concrete, "more truly universal" than its predecessor, and the final stage, the sovereign state, is the most so, since it contains all the others (James, 2007, 66-8). He linked his theory of right to world history, showing that history is governed by a rational process fully commensurate with freedom.

Perhaps, mindful of the excommunication of Spinoza for espousing an impersonal *Zeitgeist*-like world spirit, Hegel might have disguised his ideas within convoluted language to avoid being banned in turn. But he took pride in the obtuseness of his writing, claiming that to understand any of it, one first had to understand all of it. He invented a technical vocabulary for the writing of *Phenomenology*, noted Pinkard, though it never caught on, leaving it hard to compare to other works. Anyway, he was appointed to the position of Philosopher to the Court of Prussia so that he could imbue rather radical students with a deeply conservative ideology.

James (2007) identifies freedom as a single theme that pervades his entire system of logic, philosophy of nature and philosophy of spirit. He and his young friends from Tübingen were strongly influenced by the French Revolution as it broke out in 1789. In its aftermath, both Kant's and Hegel's philosophy were meant to complete the stages of the world's historical progress toward freedom.

Terry Pinkard (2001) pointed out that French patriotism, following Napoleon, had emerged as an inspirational force for the first time. Because progressives sought a united Germany in place of the Holy Roman Empire, Hegel employed historicism to analyse the notion of transforming fatherland into nation-state (he even styled his hair after Napoleon).

Although considered to be the father of historicism, it is doubtful that Hegel would win plaudits for his non-European history today. (Pinkard 2017) in Chapter 3, “Hegel’s False Start: Non-Europeans as Failed Europeans”, described Hegel’s history as lazy, racist and with an analysis fundamentally mischaracterizing aspects of China, India, Persia and Egypt. But Pinkard excused this as a way Hegel argued against views commonly held to be his own, including, Pinkard asserted, the incorporation of institutions into a divine synthesis of the state.

According to Popper, Hegel viewed history as a developing process that stood in opposition to mechanistic materialism or the naturalism of the Enlightenment. He described history as a dialectical process whereby a World Spirit, or *Zeitgeist*, passing through successive stages, i.e., from oriental despotism through Greek and Roman limited democracy to the absolute German monarchy, and its landed nobility, is fulfilled by realizing its idea (Popper, 1945, 47-48).

Here thesis, antithesis and synthesis represent family, civic society and the state. The truth of this was proved through the Philosophy of Identity, whereby all that is reasonable is real, and vice versa. Everything that appeals to reason in its latest stage must be true for that stage (1945, 42). The idea, or essence of the Spirit is freedom, in the Kantian sense of freedom to follow one’s moral duty (certainly not immature, negative libertarian freedom (Evans, 2021)). Also, Spirit is Reason, an abstract rationality equivalent to the expression of God. Reason’s antithesis is nature, and the synthesis of reason and nature is the collective mind of humanity.

The “Great Man”, or individual as subject of history, is used by the cunning of reason to move the *Zeitgeist* forward; the individual as object is the victim of history. People become the instrument of Absolute, acting, according to the Spirit of their Age, to perform, without being conscious of it, the Truth for their Time. Each stage in this forward movement is exemplified by a particular peoples or nation, representing, for its time, the highest expression of the Spirit. The Spirit has progressed from only the absolute ruler being free through civilizations where some men were free, to Christian Germany, where all were free (Popper, 1945, 47). Indeed, as Taylor noted, we now “seem to have come to a climax... The struggle of finite self-consciousness with absolute self-consciousness seems to have come to an end... World history ‘seems to be at its goal’ (SW, xix, 690)” (Taylor, 1975, 533). Improbable as that seems, in retrospect.

Hegel’s Freedom, *Zeitgeist*, Historicism and “Totalitarian Playbook” Pinkard (2017, 42-44) described infinite ends as those which can never be finally accomplished, including freedom and justice. In his philosophy of history, a need for understanding develops into a conception of justice, then into a conception of the need for freedom. This includes a

struggle over authority, at the basis of the dialectic between mastery and servitude, which crystallizes into the “universal self-consciousness” (Evans, 2021).

Hegel held that history progresses rationally, according to a purpose, teleologically but not predetermined, as per his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Berlin 1822-1830*. There is reason in history because ‘reason rules the world’; hence history is the progress of reason, which he compared to Christian providence. This, in turn, reveals God’s governance, understood as the execution of His plan. In Hegel’s view, God’s, or the Geist’s purpose is the realization of the consciousness of freedom. It evolves to attain consciousness of itself, freedom being its very nature, unveiled through human consciousness in culture, art, philosophy and religion. But the world spirit hasn’t a predetermined aim; history emerges through contingency and is understood retrospectively: quoting Hegel: “The owl of Minerva flies only at dusk”.

Hegel declared that the flux of events through history occurred not as a degeneration from a Platonic a priori essence, but instead that events self-move towards a Final Cause. Hegel’s Final Cause, according to (Popper, 1945, 47-61), was identified as the absolute Ideal, and the progress towards it, dialectical. In every stage is a conflict which is only resolved through the strife of opposites. While each stage of history is inevitable and exists as of right through the agency of the “Zeitgeist”, nonetheless, each stage of history is impermanent and will change.

Hegel's Philosophy of Identity was used to generate doctrines of State jurisdiction. Since the Ideal was Real, and since Ideas sprung from Pure Reason, Reason existed as a Reality. Therefore, all that existed as Real did so by necessity, and must be reasonable as well as good. Because there can be no standards but existing standards, the claim of Might to be Right followed from historical, thus factual, standards.

Following the return of a reactionary government to Prussia in 1815, Hegel was able to bolster medieval feudalism (threatened by the French revolution) by claiming that the “Collective Will”, or Spirit, of the nation determined its hidden historical destiny. Each nation must “emerge into existence” by asserting the individuality of its essence or spirit through a process of fighting for world domination on the “Stage of History”. Therefore, such maxims as “The Universe is to be found in the State”, “The State is the Divine Idea as it exists on Earth”, “The State is the march of God through the world” and “The History of the World is the World’s Court of Justice” became applicable. Popper claims this led to the destruction of Kantian German liberalism, through opposition to not only liberty and equality, but to the brotherhood of man and humanitarianism.

Popper blamed Hegel for encouraging blind obedience, nationalism, totalitarianism, intellectual dishonesty and poor standards of philosophical judgment (Popper, 1945, 49) He wrote of Hegel’s historical and evolutionary relativism - “in the form of the dangerous doctrine that what is believed today is, in fact, true today, and in the equally dangerous corollary that what was true yesterday (true, not merely believed) may be false tomorrow” (Popper, 1945, 60).

Popper credits Hegel with innovating the entire playbook of modern totalitarianism (Popper, 1945, 62). A chosen race is an incarnation of the spirit as a chosen nation, destined for world domination. It is a natural enemy of all other states, and must assert itself through war.

Popper quotes Hegel's reactions to a Kantian proposal of eternal peace through federal union: "Certainly not. The state must appear in immediate actuality as a single nation. This independency...reduces disputes between them to terms of mutual violence, to a state of war". "States may enter into mutual agreements, but they are, at the same time, superior to these agreements - they need not keep them". "State is exempt from morality - is a-moral. But war is good in itself, with an ethical element". And "War protects the people from the corruption which an everlasting peace would bring upon it...Successful wars have checked internal unrest...win peace at home through war abroad. (These and the following are all from Philosophy of Law, quoted by Popper (1945, 65-69) and (Popper, 1945, 73-74).

Through the "cunning of reason", the spirit incites the passions of Great Men to great actions, fulfilling the March of History. "...herein lies the justification and merit of heroes...however cruel they may have been...But so mighty a form must trample down many an innocent flower; it must crush to pieces many an object in its path".

In subsequent generations, German philosophers divided into two camps. The Hegelian Right declared that the status quo was legitimized by its very existence and may justly be preserved by any means. The Hegelian Left saw in history the justification for overthrowing the present regime to usher in the inevitable new age. This acceptance of a *Zeitgeist* was the fore-runner of those errors in Marxism that Popper was able to demonstrate in (1945, chap 13-23). Specifically, the idea that a "Spirit of the Age" follows predictably from the past to the future is logically false. If one could predict the future from the past, one would be able to predict future knowledge, obviously impossible, since then it would be present knowledge.

Furthermore, if history were predetermined, we wouldn't expect unintended consequences of actions, and if the future were predictable, we would be able to anticipate and plan for them. In "The Poverty of Historicism", Popper notes that "the...belief that it is the task of the social scientist to lay bare the law of evolution of society in order to foretell the future...might be described as the central historicist doctrine" (Popper, 1944, 105-106). He listed the following problems with historicism .

- I. A description of an entire society would require an indefinite amount of data. If we can't know the present, we can't know the future.
- II. Our history is unique, not described by a law. Though its study may reveal trends, these are not laws and need not apply in the future.
- III. Attempts to control human unpredictability in social life and its institutions lead to tyranny.
- IV. Natural or social laws may preclude certain potential futures, but can't narrow the range of possible outcomes to one.

- V. It is impossible to know the future course of history when that course depends on scientific knowledge, the growth of which cannot be predicted.

[\(Popper, 1944, 108\)](#)

Popper also criticized historicism for often requiring the remodeling of humanity to become fit for the new society, an arbitrary requirement that can be prone, given stubborn human nature, to failure [\(1944 §21-24\)](#).

As development progresses, any law of development may apply differently or disappear. The aims of society are not merely the aims of historical impetus, but should be a matter of debate and free choice for each society. The result of not doing this is the frustration of the historically predicted path by unforeseen, unintended consequences. Attempts to minimize these by centralizing power only represses dissent and honest feedback from dissatisfied citizens when problems arise. If input from the populace isn't sought, it becomes impossible to tell how the experiment is working (until it is too late). Popper was against grand schemes. His preference was for "piecemeal social engineering", addressing limited problems with close attention to feedback, reassessing plans when necessary.

Problems with the Correspondence Theory of Truth

The concept of "truth" is fundamental to philosophy, meaning that misconceived ideas of its meaning can render absurd any construction built on it. Karl Popper's Critical Rationalism was built upon the Correspondence Theory of Truth, and this worked only through the acknowledgement that true knowledge can be approached increasingly closely but never obtained. I will demonstrate the inadequacy of the Correspondence Theory, starting with an example taken from [\(Popper, 1945, 370\)](#): For any sentence "x", "x" is true if, and only if, it corresponds to the facts, x. This he exemplified as: "Smith walked into the pawnshop at 10:15" is true if, and only if, Smith walked into the pawnshop at 10:15.

Popper chose a statement of historical fact to serve as his example of how a true statement, corresponding to the facts, x, gives a complete, certain and coherent account of x. As [\(Lugten, 2024\)](#) indicated, there are other types of "true" statements, each problematic with regard to our criteria for "truth". There are contemporary facts, such as "The Tower of London overlooks the Thames", but the Thames is not the same at successive moments, and neither is the Tower. There are claims held as fact by religious believers, such as "Thor has a hammer named Mjolnir", but fantastical statements can't be held as true without compelling evidence. Likewise, there are scientific statements of fact, both historical and quotidian, such as "Birds evolved from dinosaurs", or, "In the Sun, hydrogen is converted into helium", or "Water boils at 100 degrees centigrade at sea level".

If we could watch the Cretaceous period condensed into a day, who could point to a creature, and exclaim "This is the first bird!"? A complete description of a nuclear reaction must include the uncertainties involved with quantum happenings. "Water" is a mixture of H₂O and "heavy water", in which hydrogen is replaced by deuterium. Water and heavy water have different densities, freezing and boiling points [\(Popper, 1945, 374-375\)](#).

Additionally, according to the concept of “indexicality”, water can boil at any temperature in other corners of the multiverse, so this statement is about ourselves, not water: it says that we happen to inhabit a region where water has this property. But can the word “Smith” correspond to the person Smith? “Smith”, the word, has not changed since appearing in the appendix of (Popper, 1945) while Smith the person surely matured and gained wisdom with age, and by now, he may have died. There is doubt about his self-continuity, as in the ship of Theseus riddle, as well as to his mental condition; he could be entering a plea that he was temporarily insane at the time. The prosecutor must also prove that it was exactly 10:15 when Smith entered the pawnshop. Can a “true” statement, which might later be contradicted, about a person, who is now a changed person, have any meaning? Statements which correspond to the truth are nevertheless uncertain about themselves. Granted, “true” statements exist, but they are smeared with a blur of inherent uncertainty. True statements are thus impossible to make, or to recognize if we should find one. A stopped clock is exactly, precisely correct twice a day, but its precision is counterbalanced by its message being so blurred that it cannot tell you what time it is.

Popper categorized the “truth of a statement” as being regulatory, such as the measurement of a length. No ruler will give you the exact length, down to a molecular level, but measurements can be close enough to suit our purpose. Statements have what Popper (1945, 391-396) called “truth content”, but they also have an “information content”. A statements’ truth content depends on how well it approximates the facts, while the information content depends on how restrictive is its claim. The less likely a statement is to be correct, the more surprise, or information it contains.

Although the truth content cannot exceed the information content, a very precise statement, with high information content, can be far from the truth (Lugten, 2024) gives as an example the time of day. At 10:15, the precise statement “It is ten o’clock” is false, but it agrees correctly that it is neither 8 am nor 2 pm. It has to blur only 15 minutes to qualify for a high truth content, while the truth content of more distant statements like “It is 8 o’clock”, require more blurring to be accommodated. It has a high information content because of its precision, in stating an exact time instead of a range, but the truth content is reduced by the amount of blurring necessary to accommodate the actual correct time. It is, nonetheless, more useful than the “true” statement “It is between 7 am and 3 pm”.

False information only 15 minutes’ inaccurate bests a true statement that is 8 hours vague. It accommodates our quest to know the time with a smaller degree of blurring. It has a higher “knowledge content”. Content is inversely proportional to likelihood. Paradoxically, the true statement with the highest information content would be so accurate, with so little blurring, that the likelihood of its being measurable would approach zero.

We are now very far from common usage, and, indeed, the dictionary definition of “truth”, which pertains to statements that are 100% complete, certain and self-consistent. This confusion has led to the construction of convoluted philosophical theories on erroneous foundations. These undesirable consequences are solved by the Inversion Theory of Truth.

Together with Popper's Criterion of Demarcation between scientific knowledge and metaphysics, and his principle of falsifiability, these ideas eliminate self-contradictions and inconsistencies in fallacy-ridden philosophies that still disrupt people's lives today.

The Inversion Theory of Truth

Popper divided our Universe into World 1 and 2, objective and subjective, as well as World 3, representing the realm of objective knowledge (Popper, 1972). This framework is useful for locating the concepts of truth and knowledge. The Inversion Theory of Truth, as an inversion of the Correspondence theory, considers usage of the word "truth" to apply to objects and events in the objective state of World 1, as in the saying "The truth must be out there". It places knowledge in World 2, or the "subjective state". There is a process which transfers World 1 objects and events to become World 2 knowledge - a process by which the object/event is subjectivised. I call this neurological process Active Subjectivism.

The knowledge accrued is different from and can never be "of the" truth. People may then transfer, by speaking, writing or building something, World 2 knowledge into World 3, where it becomes objective knowledge. It isn't the truth, even though it has been objectified back to World 1, because knowledge always carries the imprint of its initial active subjective process. Objective knowledge may then interact intersubjectively with other people, including future generations, whereupon it is re-subjectivized through listening, reading, or being experienced. The sensory processing involved in Active Subjectivism evolved to focus on our fitness for survival and reproduction. The resulting experience is "representationally inexact". It cannot be identical to the objective world, and I call the difference "Essential falsehood", or "representational inexactitude". It has benefited from natural selection to become an *improvement* over what a more direct, or neutral experience would be like.

There is yet another realm where the word truth applies: the world of our intra-subjective personal experience. This includes our emotional sensations including our moods, aspirations, sentiments and affections. Sensations such as joy, fear, hunger and love are an aspect of experience we discern through introspection, and they have an objective quality in that they refer to aspects of the physical status of our bodies. Therefore, it can be true for me to state the subjective experience that "My toe hurts", or "I'm happy", and romantic philosophers can know the joy of True Love.

However, these reports are special cases of Active Subjectivism which cannot be directly experienced by others. It must be understood that introspective truth is not the same as "revealed truth", as in Absolute knowledge directly instilled into our brains by God. If a God could bypass Active Subjectivism to directly install knowledge into our brains, then for all we know, he could create the entire experience of our being alive and introduce it into our brains, a situation similar to Idealism known as solipsism, or the melt-down of philosophy.

Hegel's problematic relationship to the truth

Hegel, for ordinary purposes, relied on a version of the Correspondence theory of truth, except that he called this kind of truth “correctness”. His “philosophical truth”, in which an object is true if it agrees with itself, or its own content, has been described as an Identity theory (a proposition is true iff it is identical with a fact), such that truth applies to the “truth-bearers” being thought about (Alsnauer, 2023), i.e., objects in the objective state. This may seem like a foreshadowing of the Inversion theory, except that Hegel offers no version of Active Subjectivism to get from objective to subjective in an appropriately inexact way. Also, he seemed to also apply truth to thought-determinations, or concepts, which are subjective (Miolli, 2018), (Alsnauer, 2023), (Giladi, 2022).

Hegel's philosophical truth has been compared to an object's (or concept's) identity with its “essence”, a concept which Popper has shown to be philosophically useless outside of logic and mathematics. Science cannot attain an understanding of an object's named “essence”, it can only name things that it has developed flawed understandings of: nominalism rather than essentialism.

Hegel, in defiance of science, had a relativist view of the truth, whereby yesterday's truth could be false tomorrow. While this is a feature of statements under the Correspondence theory of truth, the Inversion theory maintains the sanctity of truth within the objective realm. What we can “know” subjectively of the truth contains essential falsehood, and may be super-essentially false as well, i.e., mistaken, or a lie. It happens to be our “best knowledge” at the time, determined to be so through a process of conjectures and attempts at falsification, famously described by Karl Popper (1963, 36-7). This process is the replacement specifically of problematic portions of a theory, or thesis if you will, by a theory that, having been tested, appears better able to solve that problem.

The new theory is not “produced” by the problematic one, nor does it “produce” a synthesis. Instead, discards and replaces that which failed. As Popper noted, in science, contradictions are impermissible, while Hegel avers that they are desirable. Because of these contradictions, it is possible for there to arise a Hegelian political “right”, and a Hegelian Political “left”, out of the same dialectically twisted, or, perverted, theory of history.

This perversion is even further exacerbated by Hegel's Philosophy of Identity, claiming that because reason and reality are identical, mind is matter, and both reason and reality develop dialectically. This yields an Idealism, which, taken to its *reductio ad absurdum*, means that *you* don't exist unless my mind creates you.

Conclusion

By combining Dialectics with Identity, whereby the synthesis of state out of family and civics is proved by “all that is reasonable is real”, Hegel is able to construct his vicious and bellicose notion of Historicism. However, he was defining “truth”, he was sure that everything that appeals to reason must be true for that stage of history. People perform the Truth for their Time, but the forward movement of the spirit is dialectical. Historicism is

also supposed to be scientific, and Karl Marx turned this into a key selling point of his communism. To Popper, this was all nonsense, because, as he showed, you cannot have a science without admitting the possibility of being mistaken. Clearly, a theory that insists on its absolute truth, no matter whether that leads to the right or to the left, cannot be falsified and is not scientific. But Popper's Criterion of Demarcation, which delimits the region of thought to which science applies, does not include the ideas of metaphysics. To show Hegel to be metaphysically wrong, we need the Inversion Theory of Truth.

The Inversion Theory demands our acceptance on faith of one basic truth: that the human mind, individually and collectively, can understand the world sufficiently well to be able to solve any problem eventually, even if each solution generates new problems. In fact, any truth theory that avoids solipsism must adopt this faith, but metaphysical theories tend to add extraneous demands such as a faith in God, or the *Zeitgeist*, etc.

According to the Inversion Theory, the objective world can't be subjectively known perfectly. Understanding of it is built on essential falsehood, and proceeds, through a series of tests, to try to eliminate subjective super-essential falsehood. Since dialectics involves subjective concepts, we cannot admit that a true thesis plus its negation in an antithesis give rise to a true synthesis. Instead, an essentially false thesis, plus a (possibly super-) essentially false antithesis, must yield a false, or even super-essentially false synthesis. Consequently, the metaphysical edifice of Hegel's Historicism must collapse into essential- and super-essential falsehood, whereupon it can reside with Marxism inside the dustbins of history.

References

- Alznauer, M. (2023.) Untrue concepts in Hegel's logic. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 61(1) Jan. ohn Hopkins University Press, pp. 103-126. Project MUSE. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2023.0004>
- Bielenberg, A. P. (2021). Jan 25. alioshabielenberg.com Accessed September 8, 2024
- Caird, E. (1968). *Hegel*. Hamden, New Haven, CT. Archon Books. Chapter 1
- Evans, L. (2021). Hegel on history. *Philosophy Now*, Jul 27. https://philosophynow.org/issues/129/Hegel_on_History
- Giladi, T. M. (2022). Hegel's truth: A property of things? *Hegel Bulletin*, 43(2):267-277. <https://doi.org/10.1017/hgl.2022.7>
- James, D. (2007). *Hegel; A Guide for the Perplexed*. London. Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Lugten, P. (2024). An evaluation of Kant's transcendental idealism using the inversion theory of truth. *Journal of Philosophical Investigations*, 17(45), 159-174. <https://doi.org/10.22034/JPIUT.2023.57752.3578>
- Miulli, G. (2018). Hegel's theory of truth as a theory of self-knowledge. *Hegel-Jahrbuch*, Vol 11. No 1, pp 128-133 <https://doi.org/10.1515/hgjb-2018-110124>
- Pinkard, T. (2001). *Hegel: A Biography*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- Pinkard, T. (2017). *Does History Make Sense? Hegel on the Historical Shapes of Justice*. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press.
- Plant, R. (1999). *Hegel*. The Great Philosophers series. New York. Routledge.

- Popper, K. R. (1944). *The Poverty of Historicism*. Revised 1957. London. Routledge.
- Popper, K. R. (1945) *The Open Society and its Enemies: Volume 2*. Revised 1963. Princeton, NJ. Princeton University Press.
- Popper, K. R. (1963). *Conjectures and Refutations*. London. Routledge.
- Popper, K. R. (1972). *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, C. (1975). *Hegel*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

