

The Rational Kernel of Hegel's Philosophy

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The idealist system of Hegel's Philosophy constitutes a conservative, even reactionary aspect of his philosophy. However, his idealist philosophy is traversed by something of great value: the dialectic of Hegel is the first, in the history of philosophy, to have developed, as complete as it was systematic, the idealist dialectic. In this, he gave an account of the fundamental characteristics with the help of an idealist point of view. Marx noted that, 'The mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner.'¹

Hegel considered that the Absolute Spirit, Absolute Idea, resides in movement, in incessant transformation and development; in the existing movement and development of internal connections and reciprocal conditioning. Truth is concrete: development has its own laws; internal contradictions are their source of development. At the heart of development, a conversion of quantitative change to qualitative change operates. Knowledge is the process of the deepening and incessant concretization of the abstract toward the concrete; from the simple towards the complex.... These dialectical ideas are the progressive, revolutionary aspect of Hegel's philosophy.

1. *Le Capital*, postface à la 2e édition allemande, Editions sociales, p. 29. [Karl Marx, Afterword to the second German edition in *Capital*, Vol. 1, London, Penguin Classics, 1990, p. 103.]

I. The principle relative to movement and the independence of phenomena

Hegel held that reality, truth, that is to say, what he called Absolute Spirit, the Absolute Idea, is a process of movement, transformation and incessant development. Each stage, each aspect or link of this process is not fixed or isolated. Instead, there exists internal relations and living conversions between them: the one converts itself, passes necessarily to an other and necessarily brings about profound interconnections.

Engels noted that,

In this system—and herein is its great merit—for the first time the whole world, [the] natural, historical, intellectual, is represented as a process, i.e., as in constant motion, change, transformation, development; and the attempt is made to trace out the internal connection that makes a continuous whole of all this movement and development²

Hegel puts forward two basic requirements:

1. ‘The necessity of connection’
- and
2. ‘the immanent emergence of distinctions’.

Very important!! This is what it means, in my opinion:

1. *Necessary* connection, the objective connection of all the aspects, forces, tendencies, etc., of the given sphere of phenomena;
2. The ‘immanent *emergence* of distinctions’—the inner objective logic of evolution and of the struggle of the differences, polarity.³

2. Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Düring*, Editions sociales, p. 55. [Friedrich Engels, ‘General Introduction’, in *Anti-Düring*, Progress Publishers, 1947, retrieved 1 December 2008, <<http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/introduction.htm>>.]

3. V. I. Lenin, *Oeuvres complètes*, Editions de Moscou, t. XXXVIII; ‘Science de la Logique de Hegel’, p. 95. [V.I. Lenin, *Introduction in Conspectus of Hegel’s Science of Logic*, Progress Publishers, 1976, retrieved 1 December 2008, <<http://marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/cons-logic/preface.htm>>. Lenin’s commentary here corresponds to p. 55 of A.V. Miller’s translation of Hegel’s introduction of Hegel’s Science of Logic. G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller, Amherst, Humanity books, 1999, p. 55.]

These two passages from Engels and Lenin are in reality a succinct generalization of the dialectical thinking of Hegel. From this, we can see that the dialectical thought of Hegel, from the point of view of its most important content, is a thought of the internal relation and development of contradictions. Lenin indicated that the 'differences', the 'polarity', are contradiction. Hegel himself said that, the only understanding, the only reality (that is to say, Absolute Spirit or Absolute Idea), that philosophy should master and understand fall under two characteristics: these are the two principles of development and of the concrete. These two characteristics are mutually related. More than this, Hegel undertook their synthesis; he gave a definition for what he called truth or reality. He said, 'Thus the Idea as concrete in itself, and self-developing, is an organic system and a totality which contains a multitude of stages and of moments in development.'⁴ The concrete in question here designates the sum of the organic relations of different sorts where, according to the same expression of Hegel, make up 'the union of different determinations'.⁵ Hegel himself used an example for explaining the meaning of 'concrete': a bouquet of flowers is comprised of its different qualities, such as its smell, its shape, its colour, however, the bouquet of flowers is not the fortuitous gathering of these qualities; it is a unity [*ensemble*]. In a bouquet of flowers, these qualities are related to one another in an internal and necessary manner. The abstract that we ordinarily speak of is opposed to this concrete. That is why, in saying that this bouquet of flowers is concrete, we mean to say that it is a unity that connects these qualities in an internal way. On the contrary, if one abstracts away a particular quality from this bouquet of flowers, like colour, one separates it from the other qualities and colour would then become abstract. In short, the concrete is the internal relations, it is the unity. The abstract is the separation, the unilateral. Hegel considered the things of the world concrete; they are unities in different aspects, elements or qualities related in an internal way. Whether it is in the heavens or on earth, in the natural or spiritual world, there is nothing 'abstract' or isolated; if one isolates something in an absolute way, it would be without sense. For example, a colour absolutely isolated, abstract, outside of all form, all smell, and all quality, does not exist in reality. In the real world, if a colour is not tied to such a shape,

4. Hegel, *Leçons d'histoire de la philosophie*. [G.W.F. Hegel, 'Introduction', in *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E.S. Haldane, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1995, retrieved 1 December 2008, <<http://marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hp/hpintroa.htm>>.]

5. Hegel, *Leçons d'histoire de la philosophie*. [Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.]

such a smell, it would then be with another shape, another smell.... To put it simply, this is what Hegel means when he says that truth is concrete.

The second fundamental characteristic of truth is development. Hegel considered that, since truth is a varied organic unity, it also carries in itself certain contradictory elements, opposed elements, contradictions. This is why reality is not necessarily fixed or at rest, but can convert and contradictorily self-develop. Precisely because of this, Hegel added that truth is living; it is a movement and a process.

Hegel affirmed that the object of philosophy is truth-reality, having the characteristics outlined above, such that the sole goal of philosophy is to understand this truth, this reality. This is why Hegel considered 'philosophy as the apprehension of the development of the concrete'.⁶ It is science that understands this truth-reality. From this fundamental point of view, we can say that the content of the entire Hegelian philosophical system is the description of the process of the development of the concrete truth-reality. This is the description of the process of deduction and the reciprocal conversion of each stage, each link contained in concrete truth or reality. Let us take, for example, the first part of the Hegelian philosophical system, the logic. The fundamental spirit which traverses the description of logical concepts consists in examining them as reciprocally linked things, in development and in incessant conversion. For example, when Hegel analyses the two concepts of Being and Nothing, we see that Being is not a fixed or ultimate thing: it has to pass and to convert itself into the opposing Nothing. As such, a purely abstract Being is, on the one hand, a different concept, opposed to the Nothing, but on the other hand, a purely abstract Being has no determinations and no content; what then would its difference be with the Nothing? Also, we cannot, as it is done in metaphysics, consider that Being is Being and Nothing is Nothing and that, between the two, there is absolutely no communication. On the contrary, Being and Nothing are tied in an internal and necessary way; the former in self-development converts itself into the latter [NOTE A, see below p. 51].

Another example, the two concepts of Freedom and Necessity: they are not entirely cut off or separated from each other. If one considers that, to be free, it suffices not to be determined by necessity or, on the contrary, to not be free, it suffices to be determined by necessity, we should say that this point of view has not considered the problem by leaving aside the issue of connections: it opposes liberty and necessity abstractly

6. Hegel, *Leçons d'histoire de la philosophie*. [Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.]

and is thus in error. A freedom that does not include necessity in itself, or does not act through the function of necessity is nothing but a 'formal freedom'. One cannot but call it arbitrary and it is hence not true freedom. Freedom is essentially concrete, that is to say that it is strictly tied to necessity: it is the understanding of necessity. Only such a freedom is true freedom. Another example: Essence and Phenomena. Hegel noted: Essence and Phenomena do not exist isolated from each other. Phenomenon is the manifestation of Essence; if a phenomenon is such a way, it is due to its Essence; further, Essence does not exist outside of Phenomenon but rather in it. Otherwise put, in what phenomena manifest, there is nothing that is not interior to Essence, and there is nothing in Essence that is not manifest in phenomenon. Outside of Essence, there is no manifestation of this Essence, there are no phenomena. Outside of phenomena, Essence becomes an empty thing which has no sense. This is why, in order to understand Essence, we need to begin with the understanding of phenomena. The separation of Essence and phenomena, in going outside of phenomena to apprehend an abstract essence, an unknowable thing-in-itself, this is the metaphysical perspective that Hegel critiques. [NOTE B, see below p. 58] Further, we can also take the general, the particular and the individual as examples. Hegel considered these to be the three links of the concept which are inseparable and tied in an internal fashion. On the one hand, the particular cannot exist outside of the general, the general structures the nature and the essence of the particular. However, the general is also inseparable from the particular: it manifests itself through the latter, it traverses the latter, the general comprises itself through the particular, it has the particular as content. All generality seized outside of the particular is empty and not real. Strictly tied to the particular, this generality is called 'the concrete generality' by Hegel and the cut-off generality of the particular is called 'the abstract generality'. Hegel is for the former and opposes the later. What he will call 'individuality' is the union of the general and the particular.

In brief, the concepts and categories that Hegel examines in the *Logic* (Being, nothing, becoming, quantity, quality, degree, essence, identity, difference, contradiction, essence and phenomenon, necessity and contingency, possibility and reality...) are found in a constant movement, are intertwined, and are mutually converting; they transform and develop one another, there is a conversion of the one into the other. This is why we might say that the logic describes the process of movement, conversion, deduction and the incessant development of the concept.

We have done nothing here but take some examples from the *Logic*, but, certainly, Hegelian thought on connection and development is not limited to this work.

The method of metaphysical thought considers things as immutable and without intertwining internal connections. Hegel has very vividly critiqued this conception. He has indicated that the metaphysical method does not carry out and does not understand that, truth-reality is concrete and has multiple aspects; it takes the abstract and isolated concept as being able to express truth, it always seizes on an aspect of things and does not let it go while thinking that it has delivered the whole truth. When it examines something, it never wishes to give attention to the other and opposed aspects; the aspect that is seized is never reconnected with the others. This method misunderstands the organic unity of the aspects of truth, it often expresses many diverse superficial phenomena of a problem but it never truly understands the treatment of the essence from the grounds of its organic unity. This method is arbitrary, operating through opinion, it takes up an aspect and considers that every aspect can exist in a state of isolation; it considers that between such and such an aspect there is an unbridgeable barrier, without any conversion or reciprocal transformation. As such, Freedom and Necessity, Essence and Phenomenon, Possibility and Actuality, Necessity and Contingency, all these concepts are cut off from one another as mutually exclusive. Hegel argues that a method of unilateral thought such as metaphysics cannot understand truth-reality.

II. The fundamental principle of dialectics (Contradiction)

The two characteristics of truth-reality laid out in the above already contain the idea of contradiction in themselves. Outside of contradiction, there is no question of the concrete or development. Hegel argued that if truth-reality is in movement, in transformation, in development, it is not because of an exterior force but rather due to an internal contradiction. He affirmed that, at each stage, each link of the process of development of the Absolute Spirit, of the Absolute Idea, carries within itself internal contradictions. According to the example that he himself takes up, the phenomenon of life contains the contradiction between life and death. The metaphysical perspective argues that, since life is different from death, they are mutually opposed; there cannot be factors of death in the phenomenon of life. According to this point of view, if man should die, it is uniquely because of external causes. Hegel has indicated that life is a contradictory process, 'The living dies, simply because as living they bear in themselves the germ of death'.⁷ Since man cannot escape death, there is then, fundamentally, an internal cause. When there is a passage between the two, the conversion of a concept towards another, as Hegel describes in the *Logic*, it is not due to an external cause, rather a concept comprises the elements of another concept in nature and at the very interior of a concept which is (or are) opposed and different. It is for no other reason than an internal contradiction of the two aspects forced by the concept to convert and to pass into another concept. This process of conversion, movement and development of concepts described by the *Logic* in its entirety is also the process of auto-conversion, auto-movement and the auto-development of concepts. For example, if the concept of Being converts itself to the concept of Nothing, it is not because of an exterior force acting without internal interconnections with being, existing outside of being, that pushes it towards the conversion to the nothing, but rather because of the nature of this purely abstract Being, still without content, already carries the elements of this Nothing in contradiction.

7. Hegel, *Encyclopédie*, Vrin, p. 513. [Hegel, *Logic*, trans. William Wallace, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1975, § 92 A]

The same goes for the concepts of Identity and Difference, Essence and Phenomena, Necessity and Contingency, Possibility and Actuality: the source of their reciprocal conversion also resides in internal contradiction. For example, if identity converts itself into difference, this is not because of an exterior force which has no internal links in germination, but rather because the concept of concrete identity holds in itself the concept of difference in contradiction. It is for no other reason than the internal contradiction between two aspects that the concept of identity is forced to overcome itself and to convert itself into the concept of difference. [NOTE C, see below p. 60]

The same goes for the other concept and categories. In brief, in all concepts and categories, in all phenomena—otherwise put, at each stage of the link of reality or absolute spirit—there are internal contradictions, and, in this, each overcomes itself and passes into its contrary. Metaphysics considers contradictions as unthinkable or at least illegitimate [*pas normales*]. Hegel critiqued [NOTE D, see below p. 61] this metaphysical conception. According to this point of view, the principle of contradiction in formal logic does not permit us to affirm something while denying it; it is the elementary law that our thought should respect. If thought infringed upon this law of formal logic, it would mean that it is not ‘legitimate’ [*pas normal*] it is ‘unthinkable’. However, to understand the principle of contradiction in formal logic is not equivalent to rejecting the contradictions that exist in reality. Hegel affirms that in reality all concrete things are contradictory and, between heaven and earth, there is nothing that does not include contradictions or contrary characteristics. Hegel considered the contradictions that we speak of in the law of contradiction in formal logic as ‘formal’, they are ‘impossible’ contradictions and should be excluded. But real contradictions are absolutely different from what the principle of non-contradiction of formal logic would exclude. This type of contradiction is a necessary contradiction, one that is, ‘internal’ and for which, ‘it is ridiculous to say that contradiction is unthinkable.’⁸ Not only is this type of contradiction not an abnormal phenomenon, but it is ‘the very moving principle of the world.’⁹ It is ‘the universal and irresistible power before which nothing can stay, however secure and stable it may deem itself.’¹⁰ This is why, wherever there is

8. Hegel, *Encyclopédie*, p. 555. [Hegel, *Logic*, § 119 A2.]

9. [Hegel, *Logic*, § 119 A2.]

10. Hegel, *Encyclopédie*, p. 515. [The authors of the text seem to have given the wrong citation. Hegel, *Logic*, § 81 A1.]

contradiction, there is movement and development. Hegel railed against those who rejected contradictory things: ‘the usual tenderness for things, whose only care is that they do not contradict themselves, forgets here as elsewhere that in this way the contradiction is not resolved but merely shifted elsewhere’¹¹

Lenin indicated, ‘This irony is exquisite! “Tenderness” for nature and history (among the philistines)—the endeavour to cleanse them from contradictions and struggle.’¹²

11. Hegel, *Science de la logique*, Aubier Montaigne, T. II, p. 57. [Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 423.] This is taken up in Lenin XXXVIII p. 129. [Lenin, *Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic*, retrieved 1 December 2008, <<http://marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/cons-logic/cho2.htm>>.]

12. [Lenin, *Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic*.]

III. The principle according to which there is a conversion of quantitative change into radical qualitative change [NOTE F, see below p. 64]

Truth-reality develops, and from Hegel's point of view, this development is not only quantitative but qualitative; in effect, in the chapter on Being in the *Logic*, Hegel studied the laws of reciprocal conversion, the reciprocal relations between quantitative change and qualitative change. Hegel argued that quality and quantity are characteristics that ranged over everything. But there is a difference between quality and quantity. To summarize Hegel's own terms, quality is an inherent character in being while quantity does not directly apply. By the unity of quality and Being, Hegel means that quality is the determination that makes a thing a thing. A thing is what it is by its quality; if it loses its quality, it ceases to be such a thing. If there is such a quality, such a thing is; if there isn't such a quality, such a thing is not. As such, he concludes that quality is in unity with Being. To say that quantity is not directly unified with Being, this signifies that the greatness or the augmentation and diminution of quantity do not influence the quality of something, it does not influence whether it is or is not; the relationship between quantity and Being are external. [NOTE G, see below p. 66] However, while indicating the difference between quality and quantity, Hegel nonetheless underlines the close ties between the one and the other. For Hegel, the non-influence of quantitative change on quality holds only within certain limits. For example, regardless of the augmentation or the diminution of the temperature of water, it does not influence the nature of water itself. The same goes for the farmer who piles on the weight on his donkey: within certain limits, this does not influence the movement of the donkey. However, when the quantitative loading goes beyond the limit, it can bring change to one quality or another. Thus, if the quantitative rise of the temperature of water rises beyond certain limits, water becomes vapour; if it falls beyond certain limits, it becomes ice. All the same, if the farmer adds kilo after kilo on his donkey such that the burden mounts beyond certain limits, the donkey falls, unable to support the weight of the burden. Hegel

underlined that we should not take these examples as jokes, because they are actually rich in meaning. These examples illustrate the law of conversion between quantitative and qualitative change in a lively fashion. They show that, at the start, quantitative change is without consequence from the point of view of quality, but when this change reaches a certain degree, it leads to a transformation of quality. Hegel indicated that quantitative change is a gradual and progressive movement; qualitative change is a rupture in gradation. Here Hegel clearly demonstrates the idea of development by leaps, and attacks the metaphysical perspective in which movement is reduced to a pure quantitative change.

IV. The principle according to which knowledge is a process that goes from the abstract to the concrete, from the simple to the complex

The concrete that is in question here, we have already said in the above, designates a varying unity. Hegel considered the process of development of truth-reality, that is to say, Absolute Spirit, the Absolute Idea, as being at the same time the process of its self-knowing. He considered the process of knowledge as a process that goes from the abstract, the superficial, and the poor, toward the concrete, the profound, and the rich. That is why the whole process of absolute spirit, from its logical stage to the spiritual stage by its passage through the natural stage, is a process that becomes more and more concrete, and more and more complex: ‘the knowledge of mind is the highest and hardest, just because it is the most “concrete” of the sciences.’¹³ We will now discuss this with more precision by taking logic as an example. Hegel considered the movement of each concept, of each category in logic as a function of internal contradiction. Each concept holds within itself, its own contradiction, and, as this aspect of negation is in contradiction with itself, it is finally refuted and converts itself into another concept, another category. However, the sense Hegel gives to negation is not the metaphysical conception of negation, or simple overcoming. It is a question of overcoming the primitive given in conserving what is rational. This is why the term of negation has, at once, a sense of termination and conservation. It is for precisely this that the process of knowledge, the process of conversion and the deduction of concepts that Hegel speaks of is not a process of overcoming a concept for another, but a process of deepening, a progressive concretization and an incessant enrichment of content. For example, in logic, the starting concept, Being, has absolutely no determination, it is the most abstract and empty concept. Yet, in traversing the process of negation, Being converts itself into becoming and then again into quality. Of course, the concept of quality is more concrete, more profound and richer, compared to simple Being.

¹³. Hegel, no doubt, in a hard to find section of the *Encyclopédie*. [G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. William Wallace, Oxford, Oxford University of Press, 1971, p. 1.]

It thus expresses the idea that it comprises certain determinations that simple Being did not comprise. The same goes for the concept of degree: it is the last concept in the chapter on Being in the *Logic* and at the same time it is the richest and most concrete concept of this chapter because it does not only overcome the concepts of Quality and Quantity that preceded it, but comprises the two within it. It is the unity of Quality and Quantity. The same for the chapter on Essence: Reality [Actuality] is the last concept, it is at the same time the richer and the more concrete and it does not only overcome essence and phenomenon, it is the unity of the two. The same goes for the last concept of the last chapter of the *Logic*: the Concept, that is to say, the Absolute Idea, is the richest and most concrete of the whole of the *Logic*. It does not only overcome all the concepts and categories that precede it but it comprises everything in it. It is the unity of Being and Essence. All concepts and categories that precede it make up an integral part of it, as the links that constitute it. This is why the many parts of Hegel's logic are not simply the juxtaposition and the alignment of several concepts situated on an equal level, but actually different stages in a process of self-development, of self-knowing of the Absolute Idea. The definition of the Absolute Idea given here is the most abstract and superficial. Or, as it were, the knowledge that the Absolute Idea has of itself is the most abstract and empty. The concept of Essence is also not outside of the Absolute Idea, for, in reality, Essence is the Absolute Idea, but a rather inferior and less concrete stage of the Absolute Idea. The Absolute Idea is thus also Essence, but the definition that we have given for it is not very concrete, as it were, where the knowledge that the Absolute Idea has of itself is not very concrete. This is why the Absolute Idea is a great gathering of all its preceding concepts, and all these concepts are, in each one, stages of its self-development and at the same time its content. Outside of these stages, the Absolute Idea itself cannot but be empty and devoid of sense. This is why Hegel argued that in order to understand the Absolute Idea, it is necessary to understand each of the stages of its self-development. In order to understand the categories and ultimate and supreme concepts of logic, it is necessary to understand the whole system of its concepts.

We can thus see that the process of idea's self-knowledge in Hegel goes from the most abstract, superficial Being to traversing the process of a series of negations, passing from the stage of Being to the stage of Essence, and then from the stage of Essence to the stage of the Concept in order to finally stop at the Absolute Idea. The set of processes is the process of

deepening and a progressive concretization of the abstract towards the concrete, going from the simple to the complex: in this process, each category is relatively superior and more concrete, more profound than the preceding categories. For expressing this idea, we can take yet another particularly clear example: the conception of history in Hegel's philosophy. Hegel considered philosophy as the supreme form of the Absolute Idea. That is why the history of the development of philosophy follows a path that goes from the abstract to the concrete and from the simple to the complex. Hegel was strongly opposed to the idea of the history of philosophy as a conglomeration or an alignment of disordered opinions. It is inapt and superficial to conceive of the metaphysical schools in the history of philosophy as excluding and annihilating one another reciprocally, that a metaphysical system 'kills' another metaphysical system, throwing it out as if a metaphysical system were dead and no longer has value. For Hegel, if the philosophical systems in the history of philosophy did take the stage at previous times, if there were not some links between these systems of philosophy, they would not have had any content. If a system of philosophy could exist, it is, as far as the grounds are concerned, because all philosophical systems appear necessarily and develops from preceding philosophical thoughts.

Hegel held that there is only one truth. Philosophy is auto-philosophy, self-knowledge and the self-knowing of truth. Each philosophical system has this single truth as its content and is thus a particular stage in the self-development and the self-knowledge of truth. The first philosophical systems were the most abstract and poor. In these philosophical systems, we find the development of truth at an inferior stage; the content and the determinations of truth were still extremely abstract and poor. Then, the more recent the system of philosophy, the more it masters truth in a concrete and profound way. At each superior stage, the more the content is concrete, rich and profound, the more we find truth. These recent philosophical systems have made these preceding philosophical systems their real existing materials. In taking these for their point of departure, they have reworked and transformed them; the recent philosophical systems have thus not simply rejected all the preceding philosophical systems but have utilized them for enriching themselves, they have made them their links and constitutive elements. Thus they conserve them in overcoming them. This is why the most recent and newest philosophies are more concrete, richer and more profound; they are a 'mirror of the whole history'.¹⁴

14. Hegel, *Leçons d'histoire de la philosophie* [Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.]

Hegel thus argued that for understanding the last form, that is to say, the latest current in the development of philosophy, we should understand the history of its past developments. The study of the history of philosophy is the study of philosophy itself. [NOTE H, see below p. 68]

Hegel's idea that thought is a process of the abstract towards the concrete and of the simple towards the complex can be expressed in the following fashion: reality is concrete; it is the unity of plural determinations. However, truth does not reach this concrete except by having traversed a long process of development. The first stage of self-development and self-knowledge of truth is the most abstract, that which lacks the most content, its determinations are the most simple. Then, after the incessant pursuit of the self-development and self-knowledge of truth, these determinations or particularities become more and more rich; the content is thus more and more concrete, and so forth until it reaches its final form. At this moment, all the determinations or the preceding particularities become its constitutive elements, its indispensable and inherent content; they are comprised within it. Here, truth reaches its supreme and ultimate stage, that is to say the most concrete and richest stage. The idea that knowledge is a process that goes from the most abstract towards the concrete, from the simple to the complex, is expressed by Hegel clearly in this passage: 'cognition rolls onwards from content to content. First of all, this advance is determined as beginning from simple determinatenesses the succeeding ones becoming ever richer and more concrete. For the result contains its beginning and its course has enriched it by a fresh determinateness. The universal constitutes the foundation; the advance is therefore not to be taken as a flowing from one other to the next other. In the absolute method the Notion maintains itself in its otherness, the universal in its particularization, in judgement and reality; at each stage of its further determination it raises the entire mass of its preceding content, and by its dialectical advance it not only does not lose anything or leave anything behind, but carries along with it all it has gained, and inwardly enriches and consolidates itself'.¹⁵

In the *Philosophical Notebooks*, Lenin greatly approved of these passages. He says: 'This extract is not at all bad as a kind of summing up of dialectics'.¹⁶

15. This citation is taken from Lenin, *Oeuvres complètes*, t. XXXVIII, 'Notes philosophiques.' [Lenin, *Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic*, retrieved 1 December 2008, <<http://marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/cons-logic/cho3.htm>>. Cf. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 840.]

16. [Lenin, *Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic*.]

Here, we can see Hegel's rational kernel through what concerns knowledge as a process of the abstract to the concrete and the simple towards the complex: concrete things in objective reality are precisely the reciprocal connection and the sum of multiple aspects; they are organic unities having plural determinations and varied aspects. In order to really understand a thing, it is necessary to master these connections of organic unity between all these aspects. However, in the process of real knowledge, humanity cannot master all at once the organic unity of all these determinations of concrete things. The process of knowledge that humanity has of the concrete character of things, the process of knowing the organic connection of all these aspects of a concrete thing is long and winding. The goal of mastering these things is not reached without passing through the process of an 'abstract activity'. What is called here an 'abstract activity' is the act of extracting one aspect, one determination from a whole and to understand it in isolation. To take up Marx's example from *Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, the population is a concrete thing, it is an organic unity of many aspects, many determinations. But when we understand a population, we do not have any understanding of the different elements that constitute the population at the start; we only have a chaotic conception.¹⁷ So as to allow our knowledge to reach its goal, which is to master a concrete thing, the unity of plural determinations that is population, we should undertake these 'abstract activities', and analyse these 'chaotic conceptions' of population, analyse all the elements and determinations that constitute the population: for example, we examine the classes from the elements and determinations that constitute it, like wage labour, capital, and further we examine these elements to the point of all the elements and determinations that constitute waged labour and capital like exchange, the division of work, price... We should extract, with an increasing precision, the simplest elements and the determinations united in their origin in this concrete thing which is the population with the goal of knowing it. Yet, if one stops at the stage of 'abstract activity', we cannot then reach the stated goal of mastering the concrete thing. What we obtain at this stage is nothing but something abstract. The population is not at all a random gathering of elements and determinations such as class, waged labour, capital, etc. The population is always an organic unity of these elements and determinations. Also, for understanding concrete things, we should have a unified comprehension

17. [Cf. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, London, Penguin Classics, 1973, p. 100-108.]

of these elements and simple determinations, understanding the relations and the organic unity between these elements and determinations. It is with this sole condition that we can know the true face of the population, its rich contents and thus say that we have achieved a concrete understanding. From this example, we clearly see that the process described by Hegel, a process that goes from the abstract to the concrete, from the simple towards the complex, reflects, in effect, in an unconscious manner, the process of real knowledge. Such is precisely the rational kernel of Hegel's conception.

V. The principle relative to the identity of thought and of being and the coincidence between the logical and the historical

An important principle of Hegelian philosophy is the identity between thinking and being. [NOTE I, see below p. 72] Kant considered there to be an unbridgeable trench between thinking and being and that the true face of being (the 'thing-in-itself') is something that thinking or knowledge can never reach: it is something that is by principle unknowable. Hegel critiqued this point of view. He opposed the metaphysical rupture between thinking and being; he considered that if we were to radically separate thinking and the thing itself (being) and if we were to affirm absolute separation of the thing itself and knowledge, then we would always be reduced to a state of not being able to know things and we would never be able to resolve the question of how knowledge is possible. Hegel says that this point of view drives us towards doubt and despair. Hegel advances the idea that the true aspect of a phenomenon, or a thing, is necessarily what is known to us through correct thinking and thus things-in-themselves are knowable in principle. Hegel considered that the two contrary aspects of thinking and being are united in an internal fashion: on the one hand, being is the content of thought. Without being, thought would lack content, since it would be empty. On the other side, outside of thought, things or being would lose their dimension of truth. Thought is what seizes and brings about the essence of things. For Hegel, things are nothing but the exterior manifestation or the 'exteriorization' of thought. Further, what is 'exteriorized' is finally brought to be negated and to re-entwined with its primitive base—to the interior of thought -this is why thought and being are in reality two aspects of the same thing. However these two aspects are not situated on the same footing, such that, according to Hegel's perspective, thought is what leads, it is first, it is then followed by things, or being, as subordinate; they are the products of thought.

On the basis of this principle of identity between thinking and being, Hegel held that, in philosophy, there is also an identity between the theory that concerns being, that is to say, ontology, and the theory that

concerns the laws and the forms of thought, that is to say, logic. While, as in the identity of being and thought, thought is principal and being is secondary, Hegel then comes to consider that logic is the soul of ontology such that ontology has logic as a foundation.

Hegel held thought as first and being as second, and he made logic the foundation of ontology. This is manifestly the fundamental principle of Hegel's idealist philosophy. However, here the rational kernel of Hegelian philosophy resides in the fact that, at the interior of an idealist philosophy, he correctly guessed the unity of the laws of thought and the laws of objectivity, the coincidence of ontology and logic. As Lenin said: 'Hegel actually *proved* that logical forms and laws are not an empty shell, but the *reflection* of the objective world. More correctly, he did not prove, but *made a brilliant guess*'.¹⁸

More than this, the rational kernel of Hegelian philosophy also resides here in the fact that he underlined the 'active character' [*caractère agissant*] of thought. [NOTE J, see below p. 74] We know that human thought cannot only reflect the objective world but equally, by pushing forth from known objective laws, can act and have an influence on the objective world, thereby transforming what was only found in thought—like an ideal, project, program, etc.—into real being; the objective world is thus subordinated and belongs to it. The Hegelian point of view whereby things are the exteriorization of thought, where the exteriorized is negated and then returns to thought, develops this subjective activity of human consciousness in an idealist fashion.

Hegel's idea of the coincidence between the logical and the historical is the concrete manifestation, in his philosophy, of the principle of identity between of thought and being. Hegel held that, since there is an identity between thought and being, the process of the development of thought and knowledge, and the development of being advances side by side. The first is what we call the 'logical', the second is what we call 'historical'; the two coincides. Let us again take the examples in the *Logic* and in the conception of history in Hegel's philosophy: when we explained Hegel's idea in the above that knowledge is a process which goes from the abstract toward the concrete, from the simple towards the complex, we said that the development of the concepts of Hegel's *Logic* and the development of the history of philosophy follows this process that goes from the

18. Lenin, 'Science de la Logique de Hegel'. [Lenin, *Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic*, retrieved 1 December 2008, <<http://marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/cons-logic/cho3.htm>>.]

abstract towards the concrete, from the simple to the complex. Why do the two courses of development coincide? It is certainly not by chance. This is precisely the manifestation of the principle of the coincidence between logic and history. What we understand here by logic designates the process of the development of the history of philosophy. It is precisely from the basis of this principle that Hegel considers the historical order of appearance of philosophical systems and the order of the deduction of logical concepts as the same. From the basis of this principle, Hegel had roughly established parallel and corresponding relations between the order of logical concepts in logic and the order of the appearance of the philosophical systems in the history of philosophy. Thus, in logic, there is a category, Being; it is the most original category, the most abstract and the most poor. Corresponding to this category, there is, in the history of philosophy, the philosophy of Parmenides, for whom the fundamental principle is the Absoluteness of Being. Hegel considered the place where logic begins as the commencement of the history of philosophy. That is why a true history of philosophy always begins, for Hegel, with the philosophy of Parmenides. In logic, there is the category of 'becoming', and there is, in the history of philosophy, a corresponding philosophy, the philosophy of Heraclitus: it considers 'becoming' as the fundamental character of things. Along with this, in the history of philosophy, that which corresponds to the logical category of 'being-in-itself' is the philosophy Democritus. What corresponds to the logical category of substance is the philosophy of Spinoza; and what corresponds to the ultimate category, the supreme but also the most concrete, Absolute Idea, is the philosophy of Hegel himself. However, Hegel held that a total coincidence between logic and history is impossible, and that is why this sort of parallel relation and the correspondences described in the above are not absolute. For, in effect, real history always includes contingencies, it may have deviations, but, from a logical point of view, these are contingent phenomena, these are phenomena of deviation [NOTE K, see below p. 75] to be put aside. Also, what is logical, or under the purview of logic, is the placing contingency outside of real history. In speaking of the parallelism and the coincidence between the development of logical concepts and the development of the history of philosophy, Hegel underlines that these relations of parallelism and coincidence are not to be referred to 'but at a level of a whole', or 'approximately'.

We have only taken in the above the example of the history of metaphysics for explaining the coincidence of logic and history. In fact, for

Hegel, it is not only the history of the development of metaphysics that coincides with the development of logical concepts, it is equally the case that the history of the development of everything real; the process of the development of everything real is also a process that goes from simple to complex, where the content unceasingly enriches itself. Hegel considered everything present as a result of something in the past; the ultimate result of historical development is like a great stream of water, the further it flows, the greater its volume, that is to say, the content becomes more and more enriched.

In summarizing his thought on the coincidence between logic and history, Hegel thought, in rearranging everything, that history is nothing but the result of the development of logical concepts: this is clearly idealism. But the strict ties between the logical and the historical constitute the rational part of his philosophy. From the point of view of scientific materialism, the course of thought that goes from the simple to the complex (logic) corresponds to a real historical process. Marx's *Capital* is the best example of a study of the principle of the coincidence of logic and history. Marx first studies commodity then money, and then capital. Here, commodity is the simplest category. Money is more complex than commodity. Capital is more complex than money. According to the process of knowledge, if we do not first understand the simple things, we cannot understand the complex things; this is why such a process of examination that goes from the examination of commodity to that of capital is not incidental or arbitrary, but determined by the logical order of thought, by the necessity of the process of knowledge. But, on the other hand, logic is the theoretical expression of real historical development, and the process of deduction of categories that goes from commodity to money and from money to capital is also determined by real historical development. These three things appear, in real historical development, according to an order that goes from simple to complex, from the inferior to the superior—from commodity to money, from money to capital: the appearance of money is later than commodity and capital later than money. After having explained all this, Marx indicated: 'To that extent the path of abstract thought, rising from the simple to the combined, would correspond to the real historical process.'¹⁹

19. [Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 102.]

VI. The principle relative to the coincidence between logic and theory of knowledge

From this principle of the identity of thought and Being, Hegel held, on the one hand, that logic and ontology coincide, and on the other hand, that logic and the theory of knowledge also coincide. The theory of knowledge is the theory concerning the process of knowledge; the content of that knowledge is existent things (being). Logic is the theory concerning the forms of thought but Hegel held that the forms of thought studied by dialectical logic are not arcane and abstract formulas, cut off from the content of knowledge but are rather strictly tied to the content: to a precise content and form. The order of the forms of thought—concepts and categories—that Hegel's logic studies is then not at all arbitrary, but coincides with the process of the development of knowledge and, with that, the course of the deepening the incessant concretization of the content of knowledge. If Hegel's logic parts ways with the concept of Being, it is because the knowledge that we have of concrete things at the start is lacking and abstract. As such, when we have something like Being but cannot say anything about it, the content of our knowledge is thus the lacking and abstract; the logical category corresponding to this stage of knowledge is Being. The categories which follow Being all correspond, for Hegel, to the content of knowledge. And, in the process of knowledge, we first have direct sensible knowledge and only after this do we penetrate the essence of things. While in logic, the category of Being appears first and Essence follows afterwards, in process of knowledge, knowledge of quantity demands a deeper understanding than quality. While in logic the category of quality appears first followed quantity, in the process of knowledge, the knowledge of dialectical relations between such and such a thing is more profound than the simple understanding of a thing, here also we first have the category of a Thing and then that of Causality, etc. In brief, the development of knowledge follows a course that goes from the abstract towards the concrete, from the simple towards the complex. The deduction of logical categories follows the same course. The

two coincide. Even if the order of conversion of Hegel's logical categories is something forced or rigid, its logic as a whole lays out, in an idealist fashion, a rational dialectical thought of the coincidence between logic and the theory of knowledge.

For better understanding the coincidence between logic and the theory of knowledge in Hegel, we will approach more particularly the problem of different types of judgement in the logic of Hegel: as we have said in the above, concrete truth is, for Hegel, the organic unity of many determinations. From this fundamental point of view, Hegel affirms that judgement is not an category exterior to or parallel with concrete truth but the development of it, the exposition and the explication of the particularities or determinations that comprises concrete truth. Let's take the judgement: 'gold is yellow'. 'Yellow' is an exposition of a particularity of this thing that is 'gold'. From this perspective of judgement, Hegel, for the first time in the history of philosophy, had, in sticking close to content of knowledge [NOTE L, see below p. 78], distinguished three great stages and four main types of judgement.

The three great stages are that of Being, Essence and the Concept, corresponding to the three major parts of the *Logic*. The judgement at the stage of Being is the 'essential judgement'; the judgement at the stage of Essence comprises 'reflective judgement' and 'necessary judgement'; and the judgement at the stage of the Concept is called the 'conceptual judgement'. These four types of judgement are not at the same level and do not have the same value; there is a hierarchy, a given order. Each judgement that follows occupies a more elevated place than its precedent. Let us take for example (1) 'roses are red', (2) 'roses are useful', (3) 'roses are plants', (4) 'This bouquet of roses is beautiful'. According to the content of knowledge, the sense of the predicates, the four types of judgement become increasingly elevated: the first ('the roses are red') is the most inferior such that the predicate of this type of judgement does not layout anything but the particular direct and sensible qualities of the subject (roses, concrete things). For determining if the subject does or does not have this quality, it is sufficient to use our immediate sensations. For example, if we want to determine if the rose has this quality of redness, it is sufficient simply to use our sight. Hegel called these judgements 'essential judgements'. This type of judgement shows that the content of knowledge has not yet attained the essence of the thing, it is not but direct and immediate; this type of judgement is but a stage of Being, and we cannot say that it is equivalent to that of Essence.

The second type of judgement, such as 'the roses are useful', are called 'reflective judgement'. The account of the predicate of this judgment does not only concern the particular direct and sensible qualities but the determinations relative to certain connections of the subject. In effect, saying that 'roses are useful' bears the trait of the relation between roses and other things; this type of judgement accounts for the particularities of roses from their relation with other things. Hegel held that this judgement touched on the essence of things, such that, for him, the category of a thing is the 'reflection on itself' in a relation. This judgement manifestly gives an account the content of the subject in a more concrete and profound way. This judgement is thus at a level above essential judgment.

Higher than the 'reflective judgement' is the 'necessary judgement', such as 'roses are plants'. The account of predicates of this type of judgement are the relations between the substance and the subject; like the 'reflective judgement', it belongs to the stage of Essence, but it comprises more necessity, it more profoundly and more concretely accounts for the content and the particularities of the subject. This type of judgement is thus superior.

However, the judgement that most profoundly and concretely accounts for the content and particularities of the subject is yet a fourth type of judgement, the 'conceptual judgement'. This judgment shows whether a concrete thing (the subject) corresponds with its nature, with its concept, and to what degree it corresponds. Thus the predicates 'beautiful', 'true', 'good' ... For example: 'this bouquet of roses is beautiful', 'this house is good'. These judgements always compare a concrete thing to its concept, they compare 'this bouquet of roses' to the concept of 'rose'; they compare 'this house' and the concept of 'house'. Everything that corresponds to its concept, to its nature, is then beautiful, good and true. Also, when we say: 'this bouquet of roses are beautiful', it means that this bouquet of flowers has grown in conformity with its nature, to the concept of rose. When we say: 'this house is good', this means that this house has been constructed in conformity with the concept of the house. Hegel held that, by forming such a judgement, it is necessary to have the most profound and concrete knowledge of concrete things.

Hegel's classification may certainly seem a little forced and obscure. When, in particular, he makes the apodictic judgment the unique and supreme judgment, this is where we find a manifestation of the idealist nature of his philosophy; however, as Engels said: 'the inner truth and necessity of this grouping will become clear...'²⁰

20. [Friedrich Engels, *The Dialectic of Nature*, trans. Clemens Dutt, retrieved 1 December

His classification places the different forms of judgement at higher and lower levels according to the process of the deepening of knowledge and thus profoundly describes the process of knowledge that one finds with concrete truth which goes from the abstract and indigent towards the concrete and profound: when the content of our knowledge is only the immediate existence of the object, or nothing but the particular abstract and sensible qualities, when our knowledge is only superficial and abstract, the form of thought that we use, the form of judgement, is the most inferior judgement, the 'essential judgment'; when the content of our knowledge of being ranges over the determination of the relations of the object, when it penetrates the 'essence' of the object, when our knowledge is more profound, the more concrete, the form of thought that we use is 'reflective judgment' or even 'necessary judgment'. What the 'conceptual judgment' expresses is that we have the most profound and concrete knowledge of the object. For each sort of content of knowledge, there is a type of form of knowledge; the content of knowledge incessantly deepens itself and concretizes itself and the same goes for the form of knowledge; the whole of the conceptual system of Hegel's logic concretely demonstrates the principle of unity of the logic and knowledge. Of course, this principle is demonstrated by Hegel under an idealist form.

We have outlined in the above some important dialectical ideas of Hegel's system; in fact, the rational thought of the Hegel's philosophical system is much richer than what we have developed here. Even in the 'philosophy of nature', the weakest link in Hegelian philosophy, there are quite a few rational ideas. The ideas we cited when we spoke earlier of the natural stage are clear proof of this. In *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Engels said that it does not suffice to uselessly stop at the foot of the great edifice that is the idealist system of Hegelian philosophy, but rather, in penetrating it, we discover innumerable treasures.²¹ This praise by Engels is not at all excessive.

Even though what Hegel says is certainly not the dialectic of the objective world, in the dialectic of Absolute Spirit or Absolute Idea, in the process of reciprocal relation, mutual conversion, and the self contradiction of purely logical concepts, in a word, in his idealist dialectic, he divined

2008, <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1883/don/cho7c.htm>>.]

21. [Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, trans. Progress Publishers, Progress Publishers, retrieved 1 December 2008, <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1886/ludwig-feuerbach/cho1.htm>>.]

or, rather, he unconsciously reflected the dialectic of objective things themselves. For example, in Hegel's ideas with respect to movement and the incessant development of Absolute Spirit or the Absolute Idea, and the existence of internal relations in movement and development, we find that they unconsciously reflect the real situation of movement and incessant development of the real world where mutual and reciprocal relations condition all these phenomena. Equally, in Hegel's ideas on the self-movement of Spirit, of the Idea, where contradictions are the source of movement, and on idea of the reciprocal conversion of the two concepts 'quality' and 'quantity': these ideas also unconsciously reflected the real situation of internal contradictions and the transformations between quality and quantity in the real world. And even Hegel's ideas found in the process of the self-knowledge of Spirit, of Idea, a process that goes from the abstract to the concrete, from the simple to the complex, there again we find that they unconsciously reflect the process of deeper understanding and the incessant concretization of real human knowledge. And so forth.

In brief, in his idealist dialectic, in the dialectic of the concept, 'Hegel brilliantly divined the dialectics of things (phenomena, the world, nature)...'²²

He had unconsciously reflected the dialectic of objective things themselves; therein resides the 'rational kernel' of Hegel's dialectic and its great historical merit.

Before the construction of Marxist philosophy, there were two methods that concerned the question of the development of the sciences: the first was the metaphysical method; the other was the Hegelian dialectic. However, the old method of metaphysics certainly could not have stimulated the development of the sciences, it was already destroyed in Kant's theoretical schema and above all by Hegel; only the Hegelian method posed the problem of universality and the eternity of the dialectic development; it tried to make the world a process of movement, of transformation and incessant development, and to discover internal relations within them; it had 'an enormous historical feeling as a foundation'. When it comes to the study of problems, it often takes the point of view of development and relation; Hegelian dialectics was thus, at the time, 'among the existing logical materials the only material that is at least usable'. These are precisely the rational elements that Marx and Engels

22. [Lenin, *Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic*, retrieved 1 December 2008, <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/cons-logic/cho3.htm>>]

had assimilated from Hegelian dialectic when they had created dialectical materialism.

Hence, this is why the great Marxist-Leninist authors had highly appreciated the philosophy of Hegel.

However, the dialectic of Hegel, with respect to its essence, is fundamentally idealist [NOTE M, see below p. 80]. It is built from an anti-scientific basis; Hegel has only guessed the dialectic of objective things in his idealist dialectic and he did not have a scientific knowledge of the real objective process that appears dialectically. On the contrary, he had, under an idealist (mystical) form, fundamentally deformed this real objective process. This is why Hegelian dialectics 'in its existing form is unusable' and, in assimilating the rational part of Hegel's dialectical method, Marx and Engels thus thought that it was necessary first to make a radical critique of Hegel's method, and by penetrating and 'rejecting his idealist residue', the dialectic might appear under its original aspect.