

Laval théologique et philosophique



The Origin of Hegel's Dialectics

James Donaldson

Volume 25, numéro 1, 1969

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1020136ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1020136ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Laval théologique et philosophique, Université Laval

ISSN

0023-9054 (imprimé)

1703-8804 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Donaldson, J. (1969). The Origin of Hegel's Dialectics. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 25(1), 115–129. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1020136ar>

The Origin of Hegel's Dialectic

I

Historically the closest thing to Hegel's Dialectic in name and concept is Kant's Transcendental Dialectic and especially the second part of this, the Antinomies of Pure Reason, exposed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.¹ It would seem that the Kantian Antinomies are also the logical origin of Hegel's Dialectic, in the sense that they form a philosophical position whose implications and consequences, when worked out, led Hegel to his own conception of Dialectic as opposed to Kant. Indeed, Hegel indicates as much in section 48 of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, when he says:

... the Antinomies arise, not only in the four objects taken from traditional Cosmology, but in all objects of all genera, in all representations, concepts and ideas. To know this and to seize the objects in the light of this property belongs to the essential part of philosophical study; this property constitutes what will later on be called the *dialectical moment of the logical process*.²

"This property" which is to constitute the "dialectical moment of the logical process" is the fact, which Hegel supposes to have been proved by Kant, that the "categories of understanding" when applied to the world in reason's effort to know it as it is in itself beyond the range of limited experience lead to the affirmation of two opposite statements of the same subject, both of which are held to be proved with equal necessity.³ As a result of the Antinomies the world is taken to be both infinite in space and time as well as finite in space and time, divisible into ever divisible parts as well as divisible into indivisible parts (atoms), subject only to strict deterministic causality as well as compatible with the workings of a free-willing agent, and containing within itself only contingent, corruptible beings as well as containing a necessary, incorruptible being as its cause or one of its parts. Each of these four Antinomies contains contrary statements which cannot

1. Immanuel KANT, *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft* (Hamburg, 1956), Die Antinomie der Reinen Vernunft, A 426 - B 454.

2. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich HEGEL, *Encyclopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (third edition, 1830, Hamburg, 1959), section 48, p.72. All references to the *Encyclopedia*, as it will hereafter be called, are to the section headings which are standard regardless of the edition or translation. The lines quoted here are from the Introduction to the Logic, "The Attitudes of Mind towards Objectivity" first added in the second edition of 1827. All translations are mine.

3. *Ibid.*, section 48.

be simultaneously true. Yet, if they are proved with equal necessity, the mind's assent to one is indistinguishable from mind's assent to the other, so that if one is regarded as true, the other must also be regarded as true. But one contrary contains the negation of the other. Thus, if the world is made of parts infinitely divisible, the world must be likewise made of parts not infinitely divisible, which involves the contradiction of applying two predicates, the one of which includes the negation of the other, to the world.

For Kant, the contradictions of the Antinomies presented a problem which called for a solution. His solution, given in the section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* entitled "The Idealist Solution,"¹ is that neither of the contrary statements is expressive of the way things are in themselves. The "categories of understanding" are limited to knowing things as they appear to us in experience and cannot be stretched in their function as ideas of reason beyond the limits of experience. We cannot, concludes Kant, know things as they are in themselves.

For Hegel, on the other hand, this solution is "trivial," simply because it does not resolve the contradictions.² The contradictions are necessary and arise necessarily, that is, unavoidably in reason. Also, it is necessary that the "categories of understanding" be used, for reason has no others to apply. All ways considered, the contradictions of the Antinomies are necessary and their discovery is deemed by Hegel the "most important and profound step forward of philosophy in modern times."³ It is absurd to think that "material things" are free from the "blemish" of contradiction if reason is essentially contradictory, as the Antinomies prove it to be. To withdraw from the simultaneous affirmation of contrary predicates of the world would indeed free mind from contradiction, but it would also withdraw mind from any distinct knowledge of a specific object and reduce it to the pure self-identity of mind with itself which Kant had termed "transcendental apperception." Freeing mind from contradiction would leave it with a "thought which thinks nothing."⁴ The knowledge Kant describes is, therefore, non-knowledge and Kant's solution is inconsistent inasmuch as he inadvertently describes knowledge in terms of non-knowledge. Such is Hegel's criticism of Kant's "Idealist Solution."

The root of Kant's inconsistency is his postulating that we know things differently than they are. Our knowledge, as seen in the Antinomies, is contradictory, whereas things are not. But if we know things differently than they are, we do not know them at all, because what is

1. *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, Der transzendente Idealismus als Schlüssel zu Auflösung der kosmologischen Dialektik, A 490 - B 518.

2. *Encyclopedia*, section 48, remark.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

known is not what is. But the thing is the object of knowledge in the sense that the aim of knowledge is to know the thing as it is. Therefore, the knowledge described by Kant knows nothing. It helps none to say that certain stable and invariable elements are found in knowledge and are termed objective and that "object" is given a new sense by Kant, because, as Hegel says elsewhere, the objective element in thought, in Kant's interpretation of it, is still subjective in the truer sense that it provides no knowledge of things.¹ But such a knowledge which does not know its true object is non-knowledge; it knows nothing. Hence, Kant falls into the contradiction of postulating a knowledge which is not knowledge.

Aware of this contradiction, two avenues of escape are open. It is possible to say: we know things as they are, or: our knowledge is not contradictory—i.e., the Antinomies can be resolved. But the second hypothesis is ruled out by the assumption that the contradictions are necessary. Hence, we must assume that we know things as they are. But our knowledge is contradictory. Therefore, things, that is, what is real, are just as contradictory as our knowledge of them. Or, to put it in terms closer to those of Hegel, if reason is essentially contradictory, so is the real, in virtue of the dictum, announced by Hegel in the *Philosophy of Right*, "what is rational is real and what is real is rational."²

* * *

Hegel's conclusion in section 48 of the *Encyclopedia* is merely that Kant's Antinomies show that the function of reason is essentially contradictory and that these contradictions cannot be written off on the side of subjective determinations of mind; they are also objective determinations, because subject and object are one. But the Antinomies show this feature only in four objects of reason. The basic requirement of the Dialectic is that similar contradictions be found in every object of thought. To reach this further conclusion the mediation of other premises is required. The clue to the locus of where these premises are found is given in section 115 of the *Encyclopedia* where Hegel describes the "principle of identity." This section illustrates the "dialectical moment of the logical process" and shows how contradiction can be conceived to be found in every object of thought. The remark to section 115 gives the source of the "principle of identity" as abstraction. The following paraphrase of Hegel's reasoning brings out these points.

For Hegel the "principle of identity"—everything is identical to itself, A is A—is the positive expression of the more familiar

1. *Ibid.*, section 41.

2. *Ibid.*, section 6, remark; Cf. also, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Hamburg, 1955), p.14.

“principle of non-contradiction” employed in logic—A cannot be A and not A at the same time. But instead of a true law of thought, this principle is but a rule of “abstract Understanding.” It contradicts itself by its very form, because A as subject is not A as predicate. A both is and is not A. Furthermore, Hegel claims that rigorously followed out the principle of identity would permit only tautologous statements, such as, a planet is a planet, magnetism is magnetism, mind is mind. Ordinary speech, which seldom if ever engages in purely tautologous statements such as these, is set against this principle in such statements as “roses are red.” Besides identity there is a difference between subject and predicate.

For this difference between subject and predicate to be worthy of the “dialectical moment of the logical process” it must combine with identity in a contradictory fashion. Hegel thinks it does when it is shown that A is A implies A is not A, because A as subject is not A as predicate. While it is true that any relation of sameness, just because it is a relation, implies a diversity, this composition of identity and diversity does not constitute a contradiction, for two things may be the same in one way while different in others. Thus an isosceles triangle and a scalene triangle are the same figure inasmuch as they do not differ by a difference of figure; yet they are different as triangles and as different species of triangle must also be different individuals. Similarly, a rose is not redness, nor is this implied in the statement. Yet inasmuch as the rose is colored red, it is the same as what is colored red. Hegel’s explanation in terms of the “principle of identity” is wanting inasmuch as it is not evident why identity and difference must be combined contradictorily to constitute an example of the “dialectical moment of the logical process.” But, if it is granted that identity and difference do combine contradictorily, as Hegel wishes us to understand, it is evident that every object will show up a “dialectical moment of the logical process,” because every object is subject to the “principle of identity.” Hence, the question of the origin of Hegel’s Dialectic reduces to why Hegel should conceive the principle of identity to “contradict itself.”

The answer to this latter question is indicated in the opening paragraph of the remark to section 115:

Formal or Understanding-Identity is this identity insofar as attention is fixed on it and abstraction is made from the difference. Or rather abstraction is the positing of this formal identity, the changing of a concrete whole into the form of simplicity—it be either that a part of the concrete manifold be left out by the so-called process of Analysis and only one of the many characters be taken out of it, or that by leaving out their difference the manifold determinations are taken up into one.¹

1. *Encyclopedia*, section 115, remark.

Here Hegel ascribes abstraction to the viewpoint of Understanding, which is thought as restricted to a one-sided and finite view of reality in which each thing is considered only in itself and without its relation to others.¹ Each object, therefore, is considered only as identical with itself. But the principle of identity arises from abstraction. The reason can be given as follows in the example of Kantian philosophy. Once Kant had assumed that we know things differently than they are, in such a way that we do not know them at all, it followed that what is known is that which is abstracted. That from which abstraction is made, the thing, or as Hegel terms it here, the concrete whole of representation, is totally unknown, once abstraction has been effected. Hence, once the color of the rose has been abstracted from the rose it is unable to be related to the smell or feel of the rose, its fragrance, the thorniness of its branches or the fine texture of its petals. The redness of the rose is redness and only redness. The fragrance of the rose is fragrance and only fragrance, and so on with regard to the other qualities of rose or any other concrete thing. In abstracting the one quality from the other each is separated from its companions and the rose itself is lost. The rose existed only as a synthesis in perception of these various qualities, none of which was in the thing itself according to Kant.² Hence, rose is either the conglomeration of these qualities or the thing in itself. In either case rose is not red, thorny, or fragrant; these qualities exist only as known and as known the one is not the other and none of them is rose in either acceptance of rose: as a synthesis in perception or as thing in itself.

Abstraction dissolves the synthesis of perception and posits the principle of identity in the sense of allowing only tautologous statements. As such, abstraction is negation; what is abstract is what is not this other quality. Were it this other quality as well as itself, it could not be abstracted and considered apart. Nothing can be considered apart from what it is. Once, however, the synthesis of perception is dissolved, it cannot be re-constituted mentally through statements without predicating what is not rose of rose, saying a rose is red, fragrant or thorny, because to say these of a rose would be to predicate of it what it is not in the form of saying what it is. And as it is for the rose, so it is for every object of thought. This view of Understanding which comes from Kantian Philosophy explains why abstraction posits the principle of identity and why Understanding, ruled by that principle, is subject to a finitude and one-sidedness in its view of reality inasmuch as only one aspect of a multifarious whole can ever be considered at once. It also explains why Reason, as Hegel conceives

1. "Das Denken nur *endliche* Bestimmungen hervorbringend und in solchen sich bewegend, heisst *Verstand* (im genauern Sinne des Wortes)." *Encyclopædia*, section 25, remark.

2. Cf. *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, A 28 - 30; also B 45 sq.

it, in attempting to regain a knowledge of the whole in its multiple manifestations is involved in contradictions with respect to every object. Thus, the argument of section 48 is complete.

II

The analysis of Hegel's reasoning so far has shown that the origin of the Dialectic as he conceives it lies in his theory of abstraction as negation. This theory of abstraction arises, as it would seem from the conclusion of the first part, from the basic supposition of Kantian philosophy: we know things differently than they are. Hegel's Dialectic is, thus, a logical consequence of Kant's theory of knowledge. But to judge how necessary this consequence is and whether it is valid outside of the basic supposition of Kantian philosophy requires a broader view of the matter. Also the testimony of ordinary speech in constructing non-tautologous statements without the least awareness of their being contradictory casts a doubt on the veracity and conformity of the whole process, no matter how logical, with the reality of knowledge. These reasons prompt an independent investigation into the nature of abstraction, which, if not exhaustive of all the questions which might arise concerning abstraction, will seek to uncover the main problems and their solutions inasmuch as these have a special interest to the origin of Hegel's Dialectic. Hence, the second part of this study will be devoted to the question of abstraction in relation to our knowledge of things.

As principles to the following investigation, the following must be laid down. Abstraction is found only in a mind which gathers its knowledge from an inspection of things presented to sense.¹ In the divine or angelic mind, since there is no dependence on sensation, there is no abstraction. In the human mind abstraction functions so as to gain an intelligibility for things which these things do not have in themselves. In the human mind the object of knowledge is the thing presented to sense. Hence, abstraction must provide a knowledge relatable to those things in themselves. Otherwise, knowledge would become, as it did for Kant, non-knowledge.

* * *

"Abstraction" comes from the Greek *aphairesis* which originally meant "taking away" or "removing" as in removing the excess matter in sculpting a statue. In the statue a form or figure of an animal or man becomes recognizable as a result of this removal. In being

1. Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Ia*, q.55, a.3, ad 1: "Dicendum quod accidit universali ut a singularibus abstrahatur, in quantum intellectus illud cognoscens a rebus cognitionem accipit. Si vero sit aliquis intellectus a rebus cognitionem non accipiens, universale ab eo cognitum non erit abstractum a rebus, sed quodammodo ante res praeexistens."

known things become intelligible only by a removal of them in the mind from a different type of matter, that matter which is potency and the source of change in things. The reason is that things in themselves are subject to incessant motion and change. As individuals existing in nature they are subject to a specific place and time. Time, at least, implies a constant change in the "when" of the thing, so that as an individual, the thing is always other and other. Cratylus' dictum: it is impossible to step into the same river even once, is strictly true and it expresses the condition of things which makes them refractory to intelligence. Intelligence is understanding something and to understand something mind must touch the mainspring of necessity in it. What is necessary is unchangeable because it is what it is and cannot be other than it is. What is changeable can always be other than it is and can, by its changing, invalidate any knowledge previously formed of it. Things, therefore, as they are in themselves are unintelligible and become intelligible only in being abstracted from the individual and the motions and changes of the individual.

In being abstracted the thing becomes intelligible inasmuch as it becomes an object terminating the activity of intelligence. But the problem arises as to how this intelligibility gained through abstraction is an intelligibility of things in themselves. Cratylus, as a result of his reflection, denied the very possibility of knowledge other than sensation, because as known things are unchanging, so that the opinions formed of things, even if rightly formed at the outset, become false by the change in things. Cratylus' position is but another expression of the problem of how things can be known as they are in themselves, for if the changeable is known as unchangeable, it is known differently than it is.

Plato's solution, at least so far as described by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*,¹ was to postulate the existence of "ideas"—subsistent entities over and above the world of moving and changing things perceived through sensation. The "ideas" of Plato were substantially distinct from the things of sensible nature. As such they were exempt from change. Each idea corresponded to the common nature abstracted from the individuals presented to sense, man, horse, good, the same, the other, and so on. To these universal conceptions in human minds there corresponded man in himself, horse in itself, good in itself, a reality which was ever the same and a reality which was ever other than itself and so on. But Plato's solution, while it saves the requirements of intelligibility for the intelligence itself, loses this intelligibility for things in nature. These remain as unintelligible as they were before. Not only are they unintelligible in the sense of not being actually understood, but they possess no ground of necessity within themselves by which they could ever be understood. In Plato what is ever the same

1. *Metaphysics*, I, ch.6.

and necessary is substantially distinct from what is ever other than itself and contingent. There is, in his view, no possible way in which the contingent could have a necessary element or the necessary a contingent element, so that the contingent would be intelligible to some degree. However, a knowledge of something substantially distinct from the things presented to sense, no matter how similar it is to them, is no more knowledge of sensible things than knowledge of Henry is knowledge of Paul.¹ In this vein the "ideas" of Hume, which in contrast to those of Plato were representations of things in the mind, might be brought in by way of example, though the following remarks are not intended to be interpretative of Hume's philosophy. Hume's "ideas" were exact copies of the impression of things on sense. But if the Humean "ideas" are that which is known, since they are, as *in* the mind, substantially distinct from the things of which they are exact copies, a knowledge of the "ideas" would not be a knowledge of things outside the mind.² Knowledge must be directly in contact, so to speak, with things. Any third element, brought in as an object of knowledge, becomes an obstacle to the knowledge of things.

* * *

Aristotle's answer to Plato came in regard to the abstraction peculiar to mathematical objects. Plato had postulated, besides the ideas, another class of entities between the ideas and sensible things—mathematical beings. A mathematical being was like an idea in being separated from "sensible matter and motion"—that is, from the sensible and active and passive qualities which engage things in motion, alteration and change. On the other hand, the mathematical

1. Cf. ST. THOMAS, *Ia*, q.84, a.1: "Sed hoc (sc., Plato's theory of ideas) dupliciter apparet falsum... Secundo autem, quia derisibile videtur ut, dum rerum quae nobis manifestae sunt notitiam quaerimus, alia entia in medium afferamus quae non possunt esse earum substantiae, cum ab eis differant secundum esse; et sic, illis substantiis separatis cognitis, non propter hoc de istis sensibilibus iudicare possemus." Cf. also, *De Ente et Essentia* (Opuscula Philosophica, Spiazzi, Rome, 1954), c.3, n.16: "Similiter etiam non potest dici quod ratio generis vel speciei conveniat essentiae secundum quod est quaedam res existens extra singularia, ut Platonici ponebant; quia sic genus et species non praedicarentur de hoc individuo; non enim potest dici quod Socrates sit hoc quod ab eo separatum est, nec iterum separatum illud proficit in cognitione hujus singularis."

2. Cf. ST. THOMAS, *De Unitate Intellectus Contra Averroistas*, c.5, n. 255: "Si enim dicant quod intellectum est una species immaterialis existens in intellectu, latet ipsos quod quodammodo transeunt in dogma Platonis, qui posuit quod de rebus sensibilibus nulla scientia potest haberi, sed omnis scientia habetur de forma una separata. Nihil enim refert ad propositum, utrum aliquis dicat quod scientia quae habetur de lapide, habetur de una forma lapidis quae est in intellectu: utrobique enim sequitur quod scientiae non sunt de rebus quae sunt hic, sed de rebus separatis solum.

"Si enim intellectum esset non ipsa natura lapidis quae est in rebus, sed species quae est in intellectu, sequeretur quod ego non intelligerem rem quae est lapis, sed solum intentionem quae est abstracta a lapide." Cf. also, *Ia*, q.85, a.2.

being was like the things of sensible reality in that there was a multiplication of individuals under the same species.¹ But, according to Aristotle, it is not necessary to conceive these to be existences separated from the world of sensible things, because "abstraction is not falsification."² Whether or not angelic substances and substances akin to those conceived in mathematics do in fact exist as Plato thought is quite irrelevant to the present question in regard to abstraction, which is to know whether such "separated substances" must exist and be the direct objects of knowledge if intelligence is to have a lastingly true knowledge which satisfies the requirements of intelligence for necessity. Aristotle's answer is that intellectual knowledge does not require the supposition of the "ideas." What the mathematician knows are the quantitative aspects of material and sensible things, but he considers them in abstraction from matter and motion. In other words, the mathematician knows things differently than they are and yet his knowledge is still a knowledge of things presented to sense. To understand how abstraction does not falsify things and yet makes us know things differently than they are, the function of abstraction must be examined in comparison with the operations of intelligence.

* * *

The operations of the intelligence are two.³ First there is the operation whereby intelligence knows what something is by forming a definition of it. This operation is called by Aristotle "*intelligentia indivisibilium*"—an understanding of indivisibles. This phrase does not mean that the operation of the mind whereby definitions are formed is totally exempt from complexity. The composing of the differences with a genus to fit the species involves some mental composition.⁴ But the definition, composed of genus and difference, is simply a predicate, not a subject and predicate joined by the copula "is" or divided by its negative "is not." Of itself definition involves no actual predication and hence no actual truth or falsity. Only in the second operation of intelligence, called by Aristotle composition and division, is actual predication, affirmation and negation, and hence truth and falsity, involved.

Abstraction, whether of the universal from the singular or of the quantitative aspects of things from matter and motion or of the genus from the species or qualities from a substance, may be construed in either the first or second operation of the intelligence.⁵ Construed in

1. *Metaphysics*, I, ch.6, 987 a 30.

2. *Physics*, II, ch.2.

3. ARISTOTLE, *De Anima*, III, ch.6, 430 a 26-b 5.

4. Cf. ST. THOMAS, *In III De Anima*, lect.11, n.763.

5. ST. THOMAS, *Ia*, q.85, a.1, ad 1.

the context of the second operation of the mind abstraction falsifies the known by saying that it is as known, that is, either as separated from the other qualities of the thing or from matter and motion or as without change. So conceived what is abstracted is considered differently than it is in the thing, that is, as separated from the other qualities or aspects with which it is found in the thing.

However, in a sense even conceiving abstraction in the context of composition and division of the second operation of the mind is true, because *as known by sight* the redness of the rose is not the fragrance of the rose. Every composition or division of the mind corresponds to some being.¹ This being is not necessarily extraneous to the mind, but may be simply the being which the known has in the mind as known. Hence, in the qualified sense, *as known to sight*, the redness of the rose is not fragrant.

Properly, though, and without qualification the composition and division of mind refer to the being which things have in extramental reality as they are in themselves.² In itself the rose is red. Hence, conceiving the redness of the rose in an abstraction which takes place according to the second operation of the mind falsifies the known, because such an abstraction illegitimately identifies the known with the way it is as known and thus renders an identification of distinct qualities according to the way they are found in the thing impossible. Red as conceived is not fragrant, since as conceived and abstract both are apart and separate. If the way red and fragrant are as conceived is identified with what it is to be red and what it is to be fragrant, red cannot be predicated of the fragrant rose without the contradiction of saying what is not of what is.

* * *

That red is separate from fragrant in conception while conjoined with it in reality shows that any nature, that is, anything which can be understood,³ is capable of having a double mode of being: one as in the thing, the other as in mind.⁴ But this double being leads to a distinc-

1. ST. THOMAS, *In I Sent.*, dist. 29, q.5, a.1, ad 5: "Secundum Avicennam, tract. II *Metaph.*, c.1, de eo quod nullo modo est, non potest aliquid enuntiari: ad minus enim oportet quod illud de quo aliquid enuntiatur, sit apprehensum; et ita habet aliquid esse ad minus in intellectu apprehendente; et ita constat quod semper veritati respondet aliquid esse; nec oportet quod semper respondeat sibi esse in re extra animam, cum ratio veritatis compleatur in ratione animae."

2. ST. THOMAS, *In Boethii De Trinitate*, q.5, a.2: "Secunda vero operatio respicit ipsum esse rei . . ."

3. ST. THOMAS, *De Ente et Essentia*, c.1, n.3: "Hoc etiam alio nomine natura dicitur accipiendo naturam secundum primum modum illorum quatuor modorum, quos Boetius in libro *De Duabus Naturis* assignat; secundum scilicet quod natura dicitur omne illud quod intellectu quocumque modo capi potest."

4. *Ibid.*, c.3, n.18; *In II De Anima*, lect.12, n.378.

tion in the dictum: we know things differently than they are.¹ There is an ambiguity in the reference of the word "differently." It can be referred either to things, so that the sense is: things are different as known than they are in themselves. But this sense of the dictum leads to the absurdity that things as they are in themselves are unknowable, as seen with regard to Kant. Another way in which the dictum can be interpreted is that "differently" refers to the knowing of things, so that it is our knowing of things which is different from the things as they are in themselves. Thus as known things are in the mind, so that as known the thing *is* differently than it is in itself. As known it follows the mode of the intelligence, stable and unchanging; as in itself the thing follows its own mode, changing and subject to the constant flux of things in nature.

What is known need not be considered according to either of these modes of being. Indeed, the nature or whatness known may be considered *absolute*, as St. Thomas says,² that is, independently of how it is known or how it is in the extramental thing. Such a consideration belongs properly to the first operation of the mind by which definitions are formed. Definition, in not implying an actual predication, is absolved from stating any reference to being. Where composition and division must refer to the being of the thing either as known or as in itself, the formation of definitions is free from any reference to being of any sort, whether it be the being of the thing in itself or in the mind as known.

This freedom from being in the formation of definitions corresponds to an independence of the nature of the thing from the being which it has in this particular individual instance of itself and from the motions, changes, generations and corruptions of this individual. What it is to be a house is independent of this house being or not.³ Similarly it is independent of the production of this house, for the production of this house does not produce what it is to be a house. At the same time intelligence, in understanding the whatness of house, touches on the root of any necessity which a house has. If a structure is to be a house, it must have a roof, because a house is constructed for

1. ST. THOMAS, *Ia*, q.85, a.1, ad 1: "Cum ergo dicitur quod intellectus est falsus qui intelligit rem aliter quam sit, verum est si *ly aliter* referatur ad rem intellectam. Tunc enim intellectus est falsus, quando intelligit rem esse aliter quam sit. Unde falsus esset intellectus, si sic abstraheret speciem lapidis a materia, ut intelligeret eam non esse in materia ut Plato posuit (cf. *ibid.*, q.84, a.1).—Non est autem verum quod proponitur, si *ly aliter* accipiatur ex parte intelligentis. Est enim absque falsitate ut alius sit modus intelligentis in intelligendo, quam modus rei in existendo; quia intellectum est in intelligente immaterialiter, per modum intellectus; non autem materialiter, per modum rei materialis."

2. *De Ente et Essentia*, c.3, n.17; also, *Quaest. Quodl.*, q.2, a.1; also, *In V Metaph.*, lect.9, n.885.

3. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, VII, ch.15, 1039 b 25; ST. THOMAS, *In VII Metaph.*, lect.15, n.1608.

the purpose of protecting men and animals from the rain and sun. A house would not be a house without a roof and various other parts, such as walls, doors, windows and so forth, as the variations of climate necessitate for the purpose of protecting the inhabitants of the house. In like manner what it is to be a triangle is to be a closed figure composed of three straight lines. That the figure be movable or malleable or sensible or active or passive in any way is unessential to its being a triangle, though in another sense of being, as being in *rerum natura* it is perhaps impossible to produce a triangular shape which is not also malleable. But these sensible qualities are irrelevant to the properties which are demonstrated of the triangle in geometry, all of which are rooted solely in the notion of what it is to be a triangle. Thus to know whether a triangle has its three angles equal to two right angles it is necessary only to know what it is to be a triangle. The perception of necessity in things does not exclude a radical contingency in the actual existence of those things, either. For neither houses nor triangles would ever have come into existence without the industry and mental labor of human beings, none of which ever had to exist either singly or as a whole. Yet if either is to exist it must be what it is.

* * *

Anything can be abstracted from the concomitants among which it is found in nature so long as abstraction is carried out according to the exigencies of the operation of intelligence by which we know what things are. Hence, properly defined abstraction is the considering apart of things found together in the same substance.¹ In this definition of abstraction there is an essential relation to the thing in regard to two aspects. First, abstraction implies a distinction, a saying this is not that.² But not every thing which is distinguished is said to be abstracted. Socrates is distinct from Plato, and this is recognized in the statement, "Socrates is not Plato." But Socrates is not said to be abstracted from Plato, because Socrates and Plato do not form a single substance in reality. Only those qualities found conjoined in a simple substance can be abstracted. Secondly, not everything which can be distinguished in a thing is abstracted from, because abstraction is for the purpose of understanding what the thing is. For example, animal, as a concept, is distinct from the concept man. Father is distinct from son not only in concept but in existence. Yet man cannot be abstracted from animal, so as to understand man as not being animal, because what it is to be

1. ST. THOMAS, *In Boethii De Trinitate*, q.5, a.3: "Haec autem distinctio recte dicitur abstractio, sed tunc tantum quando ea, quorum unum sine altero intelligitur, sunt simul secundum rem."

2. ST. THOMAS, *Cont. Gent.*, I, c.71, n.605: "In ratione distinctionis est negatio: distincta enim sunt quorum unum non est aliud."

a man includes within itself what it is to be an animal. Nor can father be abstracted from son, because what it is to be a father is to have a son. Abstraction, carried out in the context of the first operation of the mind can consider the nature of this particular thing in isolation only from those things which do not go into making it what it is.

On the other hand, abstraction in the context of the second operation of the mind necessarily equates abstraction with the distinction which occurs as one of the "moments" of the process of abstraction. Abstraction contains a distinction of the various parts of a thing precisely because we cannot grasp the multifarious qualities presented all at once to sense except by isolating one after the other and recombining them, this time as distinct the one from the other. We rise to greater abstractions in order to attain a more distinct knowledge of the particular and less abstract thing. But this distinction and the denial it implies belong to the process of abstraction and are distinct from the conception formed as a result of the process of abstraction as becoming is from being. To construe abstraction in the context of the second operation of the mind confuses the becoming of the abstract concept with its being and reduces abstraction to the operation of purely distinguishing for the sake of distinguishing. As such, abstraction loses its proper finality which it has in the first operation of the mind. It becomes negation and as it is pursued, instead of gaining intelligibility for things, it removes knowledge further and further from the understanding of concrete, multifarious things. And since abstraction in the context of the second operation of the mind identifies the negation of distinction with the essence of what is known, this sort of abstraction fills the "content" of concepts with negations the further it progresses.¹ The end result of such an interpretation of abstraction can only be the initial triad of Hegel's Logic, being as identified with non-being. For being is the most abstract concept and therefore that from which nothing further can be abstracted. As such it has no positive "content" but is pure negativity, the negativity of mind in the subjective operation of division, saying this is not that. More properly this negativity is called *denial* in English or *verneinen* in German. In no wise does it imply of itself a real non-being or a real force independent of a finite, human mind. Human mind is the only one which uses denial as it is the only one to use affirmation, for only a mind which abstracts knows concrete wholes according to a succession of concepts which it alternately separates and composes to form a notion of the whole.²

Thus, Hegel's first triad follows logically on the supposition that abstraction is simply negation or denial. Being, as the most

1. Cf. Ernst CASSIRER, *Substance and Function, Einstein's Theory of Relativity* (Dover, 1953), p.18, "The negative process of 'abstraction.'"

2. Cf. St. THOMAS, *Ia*, q.58, a. 3 and 4.

abstract concept, is essentially pure denial or "not-being" as Hegel says in the *Wissenschaft der Logik*. The same interpretation of abstraction reveals Hegel's criticism of Kant's "thing-in-itself."

The *thing-in-itself* (—and under *thing* must be understood also mind and God) expresses the object inasmuch as all that it is for consciousness, all feelings and distinct thoughts, are *abstracted* from. It is easy to see what is left—the *completely abstracted*, the wholly *empty*, denominated only as *that which is beyond*. It is the *negative* of representation, feeling, and distinct thought, etc. It is so easy to make the reflexion that this *caput mortuum* itself is but the *product* of thought, the thought which pushes forward to pure abstraction, of the empty I, which makes this empty identity of itself with itself its own object. The negative determination which this abstract identity contains as object is likewise developed in the Kantian Categories and is something just as known as that empty identity. One must wonder on this, having so often read again and again, that one knows not what the *thing-in-itself* is; and there is nothing easier to know than this.¹

The "thing-in-itself" is that which is unknowable. That is, no knowledge can be gotten of it through abstraction, because it is what is "left over" after everything knowable has been abstracted from it. It is, then, not an irreducible reality, but simply the power of denial of mind itself projected over and against mind as the alienation of mind: mind as non-mind. But the "thing-in-itself" is not non-mind, but mind, not in the original sense in which Kant took it as standing over and against mind and distinct from it, but as mind and non-mind identified. Hegel's criticism of Kant's "thing-in-itself" is the first and radical negation of negation which ends in the identification of subject and object.

* * *

The identification of the knowing subject and object suppresses the distinction between the being of the thing as known and the being of the thing as it is in itself. As such it reinforces the interpretation of abstraction as negation. But abstraction as negation is the supposition which stands in the relation of premise to the conclusion that knowing subject and object are one. Hegel's reasoning is, therefore, circular.

Hegel's reasoning is equally circular when put in terms of the argument of section 48 and Kant's dictum: we know things differently than they are. If this dictum is construed to mean things are different as known than they are in themselves, abstraction can only be interpreted as negation. This latter proposition is proved: if the thing as it is in itself is unknowable, what is known can only be considered as known. But as known the fragrance of a rose is not red and red is not fragrant, this quality as conceived apart from that quality is not that

1. *Encyclopedia*, section 44, remark.

other quality. That is, abstraction is necessarily construed as negation, because an absolute consideration of natures is impossible, once the possibility of knowing things in themselves is denied, for such a consideration supposes that things can be other than as known, so that their being as known is not essential to them. But what cannot be considered in any other way or separated from a thing is essential to that thing. Hence, when the knowability of things in themselves is denied, the mode of being of the thing as known becomes inseparable and essential to that thing. Hence, assuming things as they are in themselves to be unknowable leads to abstraction necessarily being conceived as negation. But the real reason why things are unknowable, when this statement is properly analyzed, is that abstraction has been conceived of as negation, for at the outset it was urged that things are unknowable because our knowledge of them is contradictory, whereas things are not. But the contradictions have been shown to arise because abstraction is conceived as negation. The argument when seen in the light of the origin of Hegel's Dialectic is manifestly circular. Hegel's Dialectic is indeed a consequence of Kantian philosophy, but Kantian philosophy when seen in the light of the origin of Hegel's Dialectic reveals itself as merely one step in an argument which lacks the cogency necessary for a true understanding of reality.

James DONALDSON.

