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**Beyond Hegel: Levinas and The Persistence of
Skepticism**

by

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy**

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	1
Abstract	2
 Part One – Hegel and Self-Accomplishing Skepticism	
I - Introduction	3
II – The Different Forms of Skepticism and Their Relationship to Philosophy	5
III – The Self-Accomplishing Skepticism of the <i>Phenomenology of Spirit</i>	29
 Part Two – The 19th Century Post-Hegelian Skeptics	
I - Schelling's Skeptical Criticisms of Hegel	
(i) – <i>Positive Philosophy and Skepticism</i>	36
(ii) – <i>The Hegelian Response to Schelling</i>	50
II - Feuerbach and the Persistence of Sensible Singularity	
(i) – <i>Sensible Singularity and Skepticism</i>	72
(ii) – <i>The Hegelian Response to Feuerbach</i>	86
III - Kierkegaard and the Paradox of Ethical Singularity	
(i) – <i>Kierkegaard's Skeptical Relation to Hegel</i>	101
(ii) – <i>The Hegelian Response to Kierkegaard</i>	117
(iii) – <i>Kierkegaard and Levinas</i>	128
 Part Three – Levinas and the Persistence of Skepticism	
I – Introduction	142
II - Levinas and Phenomenology	146
III - Levinas and Hegel	155
IV - Levinas's <i>Totality and Infinity</i>	165
V - Derrida's 'Violence and Metaphysics'	180
VI - Levinas and Skepticism	190
VII - Derrida's 'At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am'	212
VIII - Death in Hegel – A Scandal	220
(i) <i>Levinas's Reading of Hegel's 'Phenomenology'</i>	224
(ii) <i>Levinas's Reading of Hegel's 'Logic'</i>	239
IX - Conclusion – A Persistent Skepticism	247
 Bibliography	250

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ABSTRACT

The first part of our thesis will explore the nature and history of the development of Hegel's reconciliatory self-determining philosophical science, by demonstrating how Hegel radicalises and reformulates the essence of skepticism as the principle of determinate negation. We will attempt to elucidate precisely why the persistence of external skepticism represents nothing more for Hegel than abstract dogmatism and philosophical naivety. In the second part of our thesis we will concentrate upon early 19th century post-Hegelian skeptical responses to Hegel's speculative idealism. We will argue that Schelling, Feuerbach and Kierkegaard all attempt to disrupt what they see as the oppressive self-satisfaction of Speculative Reason by elaborating a skeptical attack upon Hegelianism in the name of the particular. Each thinker attempts to articulate a skeptical opposition to what they respectively argue to be Hegel's illegitimate effacement of the particular within the totality of speculative reason itself. They each seek to return to an irreducible point of entry take Hegel back with them, to take him back 'outside' of the system of reason and return him to the particular. We will begin by analysing Schelling's attempts to confront Hegel with the 'Real Being' he accuses Hegel of effacing from the very beginning through the illegitimate identity of thought and being. We will then examine Feuerbach's attempt to deconstruct Hegel's dialectic of sense certainty in an effort to return Hegel to the irreducible sensory quality of Being. We conclude this part with an analysis of Kierkegaard's arguments for what he understands as the 'paradox' of faith. We will show that Kierkegaard's efforts are aimed at bringing Hegel into proximity with this paradoxical faith in order to demonstrate his failure to comprehend the true nature of faith. The skeptical attacks of all three thinkers will be rigorously examined in the light of Hegel's understanding of the relationship between skepticism and philosophy that we will have outlined in the first part of our thesis. Our aim will be to show precisely how and why they ultimately fail to articulate a radically heterogeneous skeptical position with regard to Hegel's speculative idealism. By demonstrating the precise nature of their failure we will set the scene for our discussion of Levinas's skeptical relation to Hegel in the third part of this thesis. It will be our contention that Levinas successfully elaborates a response to Hegel's speculative reason that clearly continues upon the trajectory initiated by the three 19th century post-Hegelian skeptics that we have examined, and that what ultimately marks his success in articulating a genuinely heterological thought will be the extent to which he precisely avoids the failures we have identified.

PART ONE - HEGEL AND SELF-ACCOMPLISHING SKEPTICISM

I - Introduction

One of the gestures associated with the development of post-Kantian German Idealism is the supposed 'radicalisation' of skepticism. We will attempt to show how such a gesture is developed by Hegel's thought whereby skepticism is radically reformulated, internalised and elevated to the level of self-consciousness and then progresses to a genuinely systematic and scientific philosophy. The importance for Hegel of the relationship between skepticism and philosophy is evident from his early philosophical work. In 1802 Hegel published a substantial and lengthy article entitled 'On the Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy, Exposition of its Different Modifications and Comparison of the Latest Form with the Ancient One' in the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*¹. In this article Hegel responds to Schulze's skepticism.² H.S. Harris in his introduction to the English translation of the article describes it as 'the falling stone that started an avalanche in his intellectual development'.³ Hegel clearly denies that Schulze's skepticism has any real significance, and argues rather that the important element of skepticism for philosophy is to be found in a more *thoroughgoing* skepticism. In fact the only significance Hegel seems to accord to the modern variant of skepticism is the degree to which it can be juxtaposed and counterpoised to genuine skepticism. Such a juxtaposition facilitates Hegel in formulating a complex account of the relationship between genuine or authentic skepticism and philosophy. We will argue that one can discern in this article the very origin of Hegel's mature understanding of the relationship between authentic skepticism and philosophy. Indeed, one can recognise a remarkable continuity throughout all of Hegel's major work with the views argued

¹ G.W.F. Hegel, 'On the Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy, Exposition of its Different Modifications and Comparison of the Latest Form with the Ancient One' in G. di Giovanni & H.S. Harris eds., *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, translated, with Introductions by G. di Giovanni & H.S. Harris (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Revised Edition 2000) (Hereafter BKH)

² In 1792 Gottlob Ernst Schulze reintroduced a variety of Humean skepticism in the wake of Kant, in a work that appeared anonymously under the title *Aenesidemus, Oder Ueber die Fundamente der von dem Herrn Prof. Reinhold in Jena Gekleierten Elementar-Philosophie*. This work presents itself as a dialogue between Hermias, a proponent of transcendental philosophy, and Aenesidemus, a Humean skeptic. It consists largely of a critical examination of Reinhold's *Elementarphilosophie*, but is also an attack upon Kant himself.

³ Ibid, p.259

for in this article; particularly in relation to his understanding of Ancient and so-called Modern skepticism, their relationship, and the superiority of the former.⁴ What emerges from this early paper is the very beginning of his understanding of the role skepticism performs within speculative reason itself, i.e. the principle of dialectic as the true activating principle of self-movement in reason. We will begin by outlining in detail Hegel's arguments in this paper before turning our attention to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a work Hegel characterises as a "self-accomplishing skepticism"⁵. We will examine how Hegel attempts to reclaim the very essence of Ancient skepticism as the negative-critical aspect (or principle of dialectic) inherent within genuine speculative philosophy as such, which is understood by Hegel as the movement of 'the grasping of opposites in their unity or of the positive in the negative.'⁶

⁴ See, for example, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, #59, p.36, #79, pp.50-1, #197-230, pp.119-138; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, #32, addition, pp.69-70, #39 Zusatz., p.80; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, pp.328-373; *Philosophy of Right*, #31, p.60

⁵ I adopt this translation following R. Williams' footnote in his work *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other* (Albany: SUNY, 1992): 'The German is "Dieser sich vollbringende Skeptizismus" which both Baillie and Miller translate misleadingly as "thoroughgoing skepticism." As if Hegel were a thorough skeptic. The verb "vollbringen" does not mean "thorough," but rather "to accomplish, to effect." In view of the reflexive form it is better translated as self-accomplishing.' P.117

⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic* p.56

II - The Different Forms of Skepticism and Their Relationship to Philosophy

Hegel's essay 'On the Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy, Exposition of its Different Modifications and Comparison of the Latest Form with the Ancient One' is ostensibly a review of G.E. Schulze's *Critique of Theoretical Philosophy*. In the course of this essay Hegel distinguishes between three distinct forms of skepticism: Ancient Greek skepticism (particularly Pyrrhonism), Academic skepticism (particularly Platonism), and the modern variant of skepticism (represented here by Schulze). Hegel maintains that authentic Pyrrhonian skepticism should be recognised as having no positive side and existing as an absolutely corrosive force of negativity. He suggests that the Academic skeptics are best understood as incorporating this type of genuine skepticism as the element of dialectic within a coherent system or programme of philosophical reason, whereas the contemporary variant advocated by Schulze merely postulates a form of skepticism that opposes theoretical, speculative or metaphysical philosophy and upholds a form of empiricism derived from Hume. Hegel's aim in this essay is to understand why the modern variant of skepticism has developed as fundamentally anti-philosophical. For Hegel the anti-philosophical rhetoric of contemporary skepticism represents a degradation of the essence of authentic skepticism and its relationship to philosophy. He argues that by returning to the absolute negativity of authentic Ancient skepticism one is able to reformulate a relationship between skepticism and philosophy whereby the negativity of genuine skepticism is recognised as being internal to reason rather than opposed externally to reason.

Hegel begins his essay by outlining how Schulze, in his *Critique of Theoretical Reason*, attempted to provide an exposition of theoretical, speculative or metaphysical philosophy, discover its 'original sin' and then bring skepticism to bear upon it. He identifies Schulze's target as philosophy conceived as 'the Science of the highest and most unconditioned causes of all conditioned things whose actuality we are otherwise certain of.'⁷ For Hegel what such a view amounts to is the idea that through the use of reason a cognition of 'real things' is supposed to be acquired, or that there are things *beyond* or *behind* the mere appearances of things which are discoverable through abstract principles and concepts rather than given *in* experience. Schulze's

⁷ Schulze, *Kritik* 1, pp. 26-27, cited by Hegel, BKH, p.317

understanding of theoretical, speculative or metaphysical philosophy is, Hegel claims, unnecessarily crude. In this respect Schulze's positive skepticism resembles the Humean prototype in the way it construes theoretical or metaphysical philosophy, and more importantly its refusal to go beyond what it takes to be the indubitable 'facts of consciousness' or the 'given'. For Schulze, as it was for Hume, the 'given' in consciousness has 'undeniable certainty'. Such skepticism, Hegel argues, is insufficiently radical to deserve the name, and is itself vulnerable to an older and more authentic negative skepticism. For Hegel a skepticism that is not truly radical is neither genuine nor coherent and merely co-exists with the dogmatism of everyday common sense and ordinary consciousness.

However, Schulze argues in the *Critique of Theoretical Philosophy* that the variant of skepticism he advocates in opposition to philosophy represents a more genuine and perfect form of skepticism than the ancient form. Thus, he claims that contemporary positive skepticism is explicitly directed against the judgments peculiar to philosophy itself, i.e. those judgments concerning the 'grounds' outside the compass of the knowledge given by experience. For Schulze the ancient skeptical form itself is nothing more than the contemporary variant imperfectly realised. Schulze's justification for this view is that the older form of skepticism also acknowledged a basic cognition of appearances through the senses together with a general conviction of the existence of things by 'which every rational man has to be guided in his active life.'⁸

Hegel thinks that Schulze seriously misrepresents the spirit of ancient skepticism here and he sets about restoring its genuine and implicit virtue. Hegel cites the ancient Greek skeptics Pyrrho and Aenesidemus in support of this effort. Pyrrhonian skepticism was a highly developed practice of argumentative enquiry that aimed to disclose the worthlessness of all forms of dogmatism associated with the indubitability of sensory appearance. Such a corrosive form of skepticism became formalized according to a number of modes, tropes or patterns of argument, of which the ten modes or tropes of Aenesidemus are the most conspicuous. These patterns, which result in *epochē* (a complete suspension of judgment and the cessation of all

⁸ Ibid, p.595, cited by Hegel, BKH, p.320

definite assertion beyond the mere acknowledgement of immediate appearances), constitute the very essence of skepticism for Sextus Empiricus in his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. It is, he states:

'A capacity for bringing into opposition, in any way whatever, things that appear and things that are thought, so that, owing to the equal strength of the opposed items and rival claims, we come first to suspend judgment and after that to *ataraxia* (tranquillity, freedom from disturbance).'⁹

Conflicting appearances cannot be equally true or equally real; there remains a need for a criterion of truth in order to determine which one should be accepted. However, the skeptic demonstrates that there are no intellectually satisfactory criteria that we can trust and use. The skeptic is left with conflicting appearances and opinions, and is unable to discover any reason for preferring one to another; therefore he is bound to treat all as having equal strength and being equally worthy (or unworthy) of acceptance. Such is the outcome of the skeptic's discovery of the equal strength (*isotheneia*) of opposed or equipollent assertions. The skeptical sequence for Sextus Empiricus is conflict, undecidability, equal strength (*isotheneia*), *epochē*, and finally *ataraxia*. There is an implicit acknowledgment of appearances within this realm of ancient skepticism, but Hegel argues it is merely a pragmatic acknowledgment, which has no significant philosophical implications as far as he is concerned. Thus, mere statements regarding appearances are neither true nor false, and certainly do not imply an absolute indubitability regarding appearances of reality in the way Schulze suggests:

'It and the limited consciousness, fulfilled with its 'facts' is not set up as the principle of an indubitable certainty in general opposition to Reason and Philosophy, least of all as bragging against them. Rather this conviction was designed as the smallest possible tribute that could be paid to the necessity of an objective determining [world].'¹⁰

⁹ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, translated by R.G. Bury (London: Heinemann, 1933) I, p.8

¹⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, BKH, p.320

Contrary to Schulze's argument, the ancient Pyrrhonian skeptics did not elevate the pragmatic consciousness of appearances to the rank of a knowledge objectively asserted. Hegel cites Sextus Empiricus to clarify this point, and shows how he argued that we live by pragmatically taking account of phenomena, in accordance with the ordinary understanding of life, but without making any fundamental theoretical commitment or assertion:

'Adhering, then, to appearances we live in accordance with the normal rules of life, undogmatically, seeing that we cannot remain wholly inactive.'¹¹

Hegel argues that for Sextus Empiricus it is merely a psychological 'fact' that we cannot doubt the phenomenon that presents itself, the very appearing of the appearances as such. However, for the skeptic it must remain a mere phenomenon. We cannot but accept it as the guide for our actions, but it may in fact mislead us, thus our psychological conviction can never be any real guarantee of truth in the way Schulze maintains. Hegel attacks Schulze's view that the real target of ancient Pyrrhonian skepticism was not the indubitable certainty of sense perceptions but the *facts* placed *behind* and *beyond* them by dogmatic metaphysical philosophers. Hegel asks:

'What would the ancient sceptics have said to a bastard offspring of this kind, a skepticism which can come to terms with glaring dogmatism?'¹²

By resituating Pyrrhonian skeptical concerns firmly back within the realm of dogmatic indubitable certainties regarding sensory appearances, Hegel is able to demonstrate the absence in genuine skepticism of any polemical opposition to philosophy. In fact Hegel argues that in order to discern the genuine strength of skepticism it is necessary for one to go back and reconfigure the entire relationship between skepticism and philosophy. One must begin to read that relationship otherwise than mere perpetual opposition in the way Schulze had maintained. Indeed, Hegel argues, one must pursue the original insight of the Academic Skeptics

¹¹ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I, p.23 For an excellent account of Pyrrhonism and its lack of theoretical commitment see: M. Williams' 'Scepticism Without Theory' in *Review of Metaphysics* 41 (March 1988), pp.547-588

¹² G.W.F. Hegel, *Ibid*, p.322

regarding that relationship, i.e. that 'skepticism itself is, in its ownmost heart, at one with every true philosophy.'¹³ Thus, he claims, the absolute negativity of authentic skepticism is not an opponent or nemesis of philosophy, but an integral element *within* genuine philosophical reflection and method. It must, he argues, be recognised as the necessary negative, critical and introductory element of genuine speculative philosophy. Skepticism and speculative philosophy thus go hand in hand; skepticism is not so much 'directed against philosophy as for it.'¹⁴

Hegel distinguishes the ancient form of skepticism into two distinct types, one directed against reason and another that is not. The extreme form of skeptical detachment associated with ancient Pyrrhonism, i.e. the maintenance of a pure negativity in relation to knowledge, forms the latter type, whereas skepticism directed against dogmatically maintained argumentation forms the essence of the former. For Hegel this division of distinct skeptical approaches became blurred by Sextus Empiricus' 2nd century account of Pyrrhonism. Sextus, despite initially acknowledging the existence of a distinction, conflated the Pyrrhonian skeptical tropes that maintain a pure negativity in relation to knowledge *per se* with those skeptical tropes explicitly concerned with opposing forms of dogmatic argumentation. Hegel argues that genuine Pyrrhonian skepticism must be distinguished from a type of ancient skepticism confined to opposing dogmatism, and that Sextus clearly failed to maintain this distinction. Indeed, for Hegel, it is Sextus' original conflation that accounts for the historical slide towards the anti-philosophical stance of skepticism represented by Hume and Schulze. Thus it is Hegel's contention that from Sextus' conflation of the two types of ancient skepticism into one form, i.e. skepticism as opposition to dogmatism, the essence of skeptical opposition becomes reconfigured as a fundamentally anti-philosophical one. Indeed, Hegel argues, it is the uncritical maintenance of Sextus' original conflation which acts to historically submerge or efface the genuine radicality of ancient Pyrrhonian skepticism and which, in turn, explains how skepticism is able to develop historically from being a force opposed to dogmatism to being a form of dogmatism opposed to philosophy. This development represents for Hegel the degradation of the spirit of genuine skepticism towards its utterly moribund contemporary manifestation within the work of Schulze. He writes:

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid, p.330

'The turning of skepticism against philosophy, as soon as philosophy became dogmatism, illustrates how it has kept in step with the communal degeneration of philosophy and of the world in general, until finally in these most recent times it has sunk so far in company with dogmatism that for both of them nowadays the facts of consciousness have an indubitable certainty, and for them both the truth resides in temporality; so that, since the extremes now touch, the great goal is attained once more on their side in these happy times, that dogmatism and skepticism coincide with one another on the underside, and offer each other the hand of perfect friendship and fraternity'¹⁵

For Hegel the first set of skeptical tropes discussed with Sextus Empiricus's account belong to the older authentic negative Pyrrhonian skepticism and, 'like all philosophy generally'¹⁶ are primarily directed against common-sense ordinary consciousness. The second set are directed toward or opposed to dogmatism and subsequently philosophy *per se*. Hegel argues that these tropes were developed much later than the original Pyrrhonian tropes of Aenesidimus and were a distinct feature of Sextus Empiricus's account of Pyrrhonism. Significantly, for Hegel, they became conflated with the first set in Sextus Empiricus. The original set of tropes provide a means, Hegel argues, by which one might liberate oneself from being mired in finitude through a strategy of indifference:

'In the face of this indifference everything that the phenomenal world, or the understanding offers, grows shaky, and in the shaking of everything finite, according to the skeptics the *ataraxia* secured by Reason enters.'¹⁷

Hegel claims it is through the standpoint of *absolute* skepticism that the skeptic is able to discern amidst the chaos and confusion of appearances what is true, i.e. the 'equanimity that is secured by reason, the natural possession of which constitutes the difference between beast and man.'¹⁸ For Hegel the positive side of such absolute skepticism resides in its character as absolute neutrality or indifference to the

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid, p.331

¹⁸ Ibid

necessity of nature. The ten original tropes associated with ancient skepticism are simply and solely aimed at the dogmatism of common-sense ordinary consciousness. All of them, he claims, are concerned only with the finite, and the understanding, or the cognition of the finite. As a consequence this type of skepticism is not in any way directed towards philosophy, but against ordinary common sense that holds fast to the given, the fact, the finite, and adheres to it as certain, as secure, as eternal. The basic skeptical tropes undermine this certainty but in a way that is close to ordinary consciousness itself, i.e. they themselves call upon appearances and finite cases for assistance, and recognise their untruth by way of their diversity, along with the equal right of all of them to count as valid. He argues that such a movement signals in itself the very beginning of philosophy in that it represents the very initiation of the 'elevation above the truth which ordinary consciousness gives, and the presentiment of a higher truth.'¹⁹ Therefore the truth of absolute negative skepticism for Hegel resides in its ability to elevate the freedom of reason above the necessity of the given in appearances. Skepticism treats that necessity as nothing, but at the same time, he claims, 'honours that necessity supremely.'²⁰

Hegel now turns his attention to the later tropes of skepticism presented by Sextus. These five skeptical tropes concern the evident diversity of common opinions and of the teachings of philosophers, which lead to the presence of irrevocable and insurmountable incommensurability between various philosophical ideas; the presence of an infinite regress, i.e. for one grounding principle a further ground is required, for this still another again, and so on *ad infinitum*; the demonstration of the necessity of relationship; the right to begin with any assumption or presupposition; and the demonstration of circularity whereby that which is to serve as the proof of another proposition itself needs, for its own proof, the proposition to be proved by its means. He argues that these tropes are not aimed specifically at ordinary consciousness alone; rather they are aimed more generally at dogmatism and ultimately philosophy. For Hegel 'the intent of these five tropes is quite distinct from the tendency of the first ten, and...they only concern the later orientation of skepticism against philosophy.'²¹ He recognises the strength of these tropes against

¹⁹ Ibid, p.332

²⁰ Ibid, p.333

²¹ Ibid, p.335

what he terms 'dogmatism on finite bases', but argues that they are useless when brought against philosophy since they themselves contain reflective concepts:

'The five later tropes of skepticism, which make up the genuine arsenal of its weapons against philosophical cognition, are wholly and exclusively related to [the] complete fixation of their dogmas and dividing lines.'²²

Thus when these tropes are brought into opposition to philosophy he argues that 'they fall apart internally, or are themselves dogmatic.'²³ The two-fold nature of the type of dogmatism attacked by these later tropes of skepticism is a point reiterated by him much later in an illuminating passage from the *Encyclopaedia Logic*:

'Dogmatism has its first antithesis in skepticism. The ancient sceptics gave the general name of 'dogmatism' to any philosophy that sets up definite theses. In this wider sense skepticism also counted properly speculative philosophy as dogmatic. But in the narrower sense dogmatism consists in adhering to one-sided determinations of the understanding whilst excluding their opposites. This is just the strict "either-or".'²⁴

Dogmatism in the narrower sense posits something as absolute by removing it from relation, qualification and conditioning. In this sense it consists in the abstraction or removal of something from all context and relation. It lifts its absolute out of context, and seeks to maintain it in fixed opposition to, or abstraction from, everything else. Dogmatism is thus one-sided and exclusive. When understood in this narrower sense it is roughly equivalent to the operation of the understanding for Hegel, which he characterises as employing a discursive analytical procedure. For him the very essence of such a narrow form of dogmatism is its abstraction from, and suppression of, relation, and the strength of the later tropes of skepticism emerges when it is brought to bear upon it. The tropes correct this dogmatic suppression of relation by allowing 'the opposite moment, from which dogmatism has abstracted, [to] make an appearance and so produce an antinomy.'²⁵

²² Ibid, p.332

²³ Ibid, p.335

²⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic*, #32, addition, pp.69-70

²⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, BKH, p.335

It is important for us to understand, however, that when Hegel considers this type of skepticism and its opposition to philosophy *per se* he rejects its claims for two reasons. First, such claims are powerless against genuine speculative reason precisely because they are themselves tropes of reason, and as such become inscribed within the totality of speculative reason. Secondly, such skepticism when brought into opposition with philosophy displays the same abstract one-sidedness or dogmatism that it aims to effectively displace. Thus Hegel argues:

'As directed against Reason, on the other hand, they retain as their peculiar [character] the pure difference by which they are affected; their rational aspect is already in Reason. So far as the first trope (of diversity) is concerned, the rational is always and everywhere, self-identical; pure inequality is possible only for the understanding; and everything unlike is posited by Reason as one [and the same].'²⁶

The very movement of heterogeneity and incommensurability associated with skeptical equipollence itself (posited in the first trope as the notion of diversity in reason) is actually wholly within reason itself. The equipollent heterogeneous moment is itself a moment of reason posited in opposition to another, dogmatically abstracted moment of reason, and cannot be otherwise. For this reason Hegel argues that skeptical equipollence cannot articulate an otherwise than reason absolutely opposed to reason. Reason itself is characterised by him as fundamentally One, as self-identity, as relationality itself, whereby all the heterogeneous moments of rational skeptical equipollence can be demonstrated to be moments of self-relation. Thus skepticism fails to articulate a valid opposition to speculative philosophy.

Having dealt with the first of these five later tropes of skepticism Hegel turns his attention towards the fourth and fifth tropes. He argues:

'Since the rational is relation itself, the [terms] stand in relation to each other, which are supposed to ground one another, when they are posited by the understanding, may well fall into the circle, or into the fifth, the trope of reciprocity; but the relational itself does not, for within the relation, nothing is reciprocally grounded. Similarly the

²⁶ Ibid, pp.336-7

rational is not an unproved assumption, in accordance with the fourth trope, so that its counterpart could with equal right be presupposed unproven in opposition to it; for the rational has no opposed counterpart; it includes both of the finite opposites, which are mutual counterparts, within itself.²⁷

Hegel claims that it is not a matter of reason having to ground itself in such a way that it necessarily falls into undecidability or circularity. Rationality just *is* relationality itself, not a mere *moment* of relation. Hence there is no element *of* reason itself that *is* reciprocally grounded by its 'other', in the way that specific moments within reason may be shown to be so grounded by other moments. For Hegel reason can never have the characteristic associated with the fourth trope, i.e. that of a mere assumption or presupposition to which another assumption or presupposition could just as easily and justifiably be taken up. He argues that what skeptical equipollence genuinely challenges here is the ultimate validity of any dogmatically assumed positions within rationality by demonstrating that another dogmatically assumed position can just as easily be posited in opposition to the original. However, he shows that both the original *and* the equipollent assumption or presupposition are related as moments of reason itself. As such, no equipollent assumption or presupposition opposed to reason, or site outside of reason, could itself be articulated in an effort to demonstrate the view that reason *per se* has itself merely the status of an arbitrary assumption or presupposition. Hegel now uses these insights to consider the second and third of these later five tropes of skepticism and summarily dismisses them as representing any kind of real challenge to reason in the following passage of the essay:

'The two preceding tropes [second and third] both contain the concept of a ground and a consequent; according to which one term would be grounded by another, since for Reason, there is no opposition of one term against another, these two tropes become as irrelevant as the demand for a ground that is advanced in the sphere of oppositions, and repeated endlessly (in the second trope, of the infinite regress). Neither that demand, nor the infinite regress, is of any concern to Reason.'²⁸

²⁷ Ibid, p.337

²⁸ Ibid, p.337

For Hegel such a form of skepticism merely masquerades as a form of absolute negativity when it explicitly opposes itself to philosophical reason *per se*. It represents, he argues, a degenerate, abstract form of dialectic, precisely because it operates with those tropes merely concerned with abstracted moments of reason itself, or the finite element of reason. Thus when it attempts to bring itself to bear upon philosophical reason *per se* it attempts to pervert the genuine infinity of reason into a notion of finitude:

'Since these tropes all involve the concept of a finite [world], and are grounded on that, the immediate result of their application to the rational is that they pervert it into something finite; they give it the itch of limitedness, as an excuse for scratching it.'²⁹

Having provided an account of the historical decline and degeneration of skepticism into its modern Schulzian variant Hegel returns in the essay to the issue of genuinely radical skepticism. What remains admirable for him about Pyrrhonian skepticism is its persistence and maintenance despite inevitably refuting itself through the self-reference of its own absolute skepticism. Thus, by demonstrating absolute uncertainty through the negative process of equipollence it must inevitably undermine its own claims for such uncertainty. Such extreme skepticism is itself openly refuted in its movement towards the notion that 'nothing is certain', yet persists as the absolutely negative force of equipollence despite refuting itself. This is the most profound and significant element of genuinely negative skepticism for Hegel³⁰ as he comes to reconsider its relationship to, and function within, speculative philosophy. Clearly genuinely negative skepticism does not aim to elevate itself to the point of becoming a dogmatic doctrine; rather it aims to persist as the force of the negative, ever present to corrode and undermine all forms of dogmatic and abstract certainty by asserting their opposites via equipollence and demonstrating their equal validity. These assertions are of course themselves open to being subjected to the negative force of equipollence, as are indeed any assertions whatsoever. Therefore, authentic negative skepticism actually resists positing any positive assertions outside of its corrosive negative stance. Hegel writes:

²⁹ Ibid, p.337

³⁰ It is also for Levinas the most significant aspect of skepticism, as we will demonstrate later in this thesis.

'Since it holds back altogether from expressing any certainty or any being, it does not, on its own account, have any thing, any conditioned [being] of which it could have knowledge; and it is not obliged to shove either this [empirically] certain thing, or another one that would be behind it, into the shoes of philosophy, in order to bring about its fall. Because of the orientation of skepticism against knowing in general, it is impelled, since it sets one thought against another, and so combats the 'is' of philosophical thought, to sublate the 'is' of its own thought likewise, and thus to keep itself within the pure negativity.'³¹

Through what he calls the sublation of the 'is' contained within its own movement, skepticism becomes consciously self-referential (i.e. consciously self-refuting), and thereby expresses for Hegel its very height. However, in the very attempt to maintain such a radical negativity in *opposition* to objective reason, skepticism becomes inevitably perverted into a form of solipsistic self-certainty. In doing so skepticism ceases to be genuinely skeptical, and ironically becomes itself a target of the truly radical, negative, objective and genuine skepticism. Such a movement, from the seemingly unsustainable objectivity of radically self-referential skepticism towards the conceit of a seemingly sustainable subjectivism within skepticism, represents for Hegel the key to understanding the dissolution of the truth of skepticism. Such skepticism rests, he claims, upon the 'sundering of the rational, in which thinking and being are one.'³² He argues that this sundering of the rational and the insistence upon the opposition between thinking and being, i.e. the understanding made absolute, constitutes the 'endlessly repeated and universally applied ground of this dogmatic skepticism'³³, and indeed represents the ground for the persistence of skepticism within the post-Enlightenment era. For Hegel this degeneration of skepticism must be understood as emerging from a stubborn refusal to recognise the truth of the positive within itself. This becomes evident at the very moment skepticism recognises its self-refutation by the very negativity that it posits as a universal principle.

³¹ Ibid, p.337

³² Ibid, p.339

³³ Ibid, p.339

Hegel argues that genuine ancient skepticism is a negative force directed against the certainties of ordinary consciousness. However, Sextus, in his account of Pyrrhonism, conflates this genuine skepticism with a skeptical opposition to philosophical dogmatism. For Hegel this type of skepticism inevitably becomes dogmatic in so far as it persists in an absolute opposition to philosophical reason. The positive truth of genuine negative skepticism emerges as the recognition of it as the free, critical, negative element of dialectic implicit within philosophical reason. Genuine skepticism cannot be sustained as abstracted from philosophy; the choice, Hegel argues, is clear and stark – either recognition of its necessary inclusion within philosophical reason or degeneration into the merely dogmatic type of subjective skepticism associated with Schulze. [For Hegel genuine speculative reason necessarily involves a genuinely skeptical equipollent dimension that functions internally to de-absolutise the dogmatic and abstract claims of the understanding. Such a dimension clearly emerges within Hegel's mature philosophical works, first at the phenomenological level in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* where it serves to de-absolutise distinct historical shapes (or *Gestalten*) of consciousness and self-consciousness, and then later to de-hypostasise the distinct categories at the logical level in the *Science of Logic*. Thus, Hegel argues, skepticism is not ultimately opposed to speculative philosophy, but joins the efforts of speculation in opposing dogmatism in precisely the narrower sense, namely the dogmatism that subsists through the suppression of relation. Equipollence becomes a recognizable characteristic of the operation of what Hegel comes to characterise as the principle of immanent dialectic. There it becomes incorporated within the principle of what we will term 'auto-equipollence', and has a *positive* and *determinate* speculative significance. This is the idea of the self-generation of opposites or self-othering, together with the notion of the self-overcoming of that differentiation whereby an absolute identity itself comes to be constituted by difference. Thus as Hegel will come to write in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*:

'What is genuine and speculative is precisely what does not have any such one-sided determination in it, and is therefore not exhausted by it; on the contrary, being a totality, it contains the determinations that dogmatism holds to be fixed and true in a state of separation from one another united within itself.'³⁴

³⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic*, #32, addition, p.70

Clearly for Hegel the absolute negativity of genuine skepticism is not an opponent or nemesis of philosophy, but an integral critical element within genuine philosophical reflection and method. Skepticism and speculative philosophy thus go hand in hand; skepticism is not so much 'directed against philosophy as for it.'³⁵ When articulating this view within the essay on skepticism Hegel cites the testimony of Diogenes Laertius regarding the influence of Pyrrhonism on ancient philosophers. Relying upon the evidence of such testimony, Hegel writes:

'True philosophy necessarily involves a negative side of its own...which is directed against everything limited, and thereby against the heap of the facts of consciousness, and their indubitable certainty.'³⁶

Hegel argues that Schulze disregards this type of skepticism, preferring to maintain his polarised version of separated negative skepticism, i.e. skepticism vs. dogmatism as philosophy. He traces Schulze's fault back to a misrepresentation of a division identified by Sextus Empiricus's between the philosophy that included skepticism within itself as part of its methodology, and the skepticism that separated itself off and posited itself as opposed to dogmatism. The former Sextus identifies as the 'Academics', which presumably would have included Plato (indeed Sextus maintains that there is a 'great measure of agreement between the Academics and skepticism.'³⁷) As we have seen, Schulze presents the separated form of skepticism as being fundamentally anti-philosophical, and completely disregards Academic skepticism.

For Hegel, however, following Sextus Empiricus's insight regarding the 'Academics', Plato's *Parmenides* represents the realisation of the consonance between genuine ancient negative skepticism and philosophy. In the quest for truth undertaken within that dialogue, and the strategy Plato has Parmenides recommend to Socrates, there is a rejection of specific doubts regarding the truths of the understanding and its modes of cognition, in favour of a much more thoroughgoing and rigorous doubting. Indeed, Hegel maintains 'it is intent on the complete denial of all truth to this sort of

³⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, BKH, p.330

³⁶ *Ibid*, p.323

³⁷ *Ibid*, p.330

cognition'³⁸, in favour of a much profounder notion of truth. This more profound notion of truth emerges when Parmenides says to Socrates:

'You must not only hypothesize, if each thing is, and examine the consequences of that hypothesis; you must also hypothesize, if that same thing is not.'³⁹

And:

'Concerning whatever you might ever hypothesize as being or as not being or as having any other property, you must examine the consequences for the thing you hypothesize in relation to itself and in relation to each one of the others, whichever you select, and in relation to several of them and to all of them in the same way; and, in turn, you must examine the others, both in relation to themselves and in relation to whatever other thing you select on each occasion, whether what you hypothesize as being or as not being. All this you must do if, after completing your training, you are to achieve a full view of truth.'⁴⁰

Parmenides' comments to Socrates come in the first part of the dialogue, just after the young Socrates has been allowed to articulate his theory of forms. Parmenides criticises Socrates' philosophising as not being sufficiently liberated from the parochial values of ordinary opinion, and claims that when Socrates talks of the good, the just and the beautiful he loses himself in their particular features and does not truly think of them as forms. Parmenides insists that one must consider the consequences of positing not only the *being* of the chosen subject but also its *not being*. Through this insistence he claims to undermine the partisanship of the advocate in favour of the uncommitted 'indifferent' spirit necessary for genuinely philosophical thinking. Thus, to entertain the possible not-being of 'X' is to put a check on any unquestioning presupposition that 'X' is. Parmenides' strategy should have the effect of liberating one's thought about 'X' from the grip of a dogmatic commitment to it as it first appears, and of enabling the detached and open-minded attitude that is a prerequisite to genuine rational reflection.

³⁸ Ibid, p.323

³⁹ Plato, *Parmenides*, translated by M.L. Gill & P. Ryan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1996) 136a, p.139

⁴⁰ Ibid, 136b-c, p.140

For Hegel the type of skeptical *epochē* advocated by Plato's *Parmenides* does not constitute an abstraction from or opposition to reason, but is itself the negative side of the genuine cognition of the Absolute. It is thus the very principle of genuine negative dialectic, which produces Reason itself as its Positive side. Hegel acknowledges that Plato's *Parmenides* initially appears wholly negative but argues that to conclude thus is to ignore the way that it functions as the necessary propaedeutic toward the 'purification of mind, and freedom of spirit' which clears the way for the 'letting be' of the genuine truth of reason. Hegel argues that the type of skepticism that emerges from Plato's *Parmenides* is one 'implicit in every genuine philosophical system, for it is the free side of every philosophy.'⁴¹

Michael Forster in his book *Hegel and Skepticism* argues that Hegel's views here regarding Plato's *Parmenides* are erroneous, claiming that when writing of this and other Platonic dialogues Hegel 'radically misunderstands them, reading into them his own dialectic method and its purposes in a very unconvincing way'.⁴² He argues that 'Hegel in effect reads his own dialectical metaphysics into works which...generate contradictions merely as *aporia* to be resolved later.'⁴³ However, it is our view that such a reading of Hegel is deeply flawed. To recognise the full extent of Forster's error it is necessary for us to briefly examine Hegel's comments in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, specifically the sections dealing with dialectic and Plato in Volume 2.

Hegel states there what he calls the 'Notion of true dialectic' as showing forth 'the necessary movement of pure Notions, without thereby resolving these into nothing; for the result, simply expressed, is that they are this movement, and the universal is just the unity of these opposite Notions.'⁴⁴ He immediately acknowledges that we will not find within Plato a fully developed consciousness that this is the nature of dialectic, but that we can nevertheless discern the presence of the dialectic itself. Thus, contrary to Forster's account, from the very beginning of his exposition Hegel

⁴¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Ibid*, p.324

⁴² M.N. Forster, *Hegel and Skepticism* (Cambridge, Mass./London: Harvard U.P., 1989) p.173

⁴³ *Ibid*, p.249

⁴⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, translated by E.S. Haldane and F.H. Simson (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) Vol. 2, p.49

acknowledges that it is going to be a matter of discerning elements of the genuine notion of dialectic from Plato rather than merely reading Plato as transparently expressing that genuine dialectic. He acknowledges that there are very real difficulties in discerning the genuine notion of true dialectic in Plato simply because the manifestation of the universal form is developed from ordinary conceptions. Whilst beginning with ordinary conceptions may appear to make knowledge easier, he claims that it really makes it much more complicated:

'It introduces us into a field in which there is quite a different standard from what we have in reason, and makes the field present to us; when, on the contrary, progression and motion take place in pure Notions alone, the other is not remembered at all. But in that very way the Notions attain greater truth... Since both are there brought together, the speculative element begins to appear as it is in truth; that is, as being the only truth, and that indeed through the transformation of sensuous opinion into thought... Contrasted with merely external reality, it is rather the ideal that is the most real, and it is was Plato who perceived that it was the only real, for he characterised the universal or thought as the true, in opposition to what is sensuous.'⁴⁵

He argues that by being directed against the form of the finite, Plato's dialectic has the effect of confounding the particular, by bringing forth the negation implied within it. The particular is proved not to be what it is, and passes into its opposite, into the limitations which are essential to it. A crucial function associated with this aspect of the Platonic dialogue was the bringing of the universal in men to consciousness. However, Hegel claims that in this form the Platonic dialectic is not 'yet dialectic in its true form.'⁴⁶ Precisely because the universal which has emerged from the confusion of the particular, i.e. the true, beautiful and good, was at first undetermined and abstract, it becomes part of Plato's endeavours to determine this universal in itself:

'This determination is the relation which the dialectic movement in thought bears to the universal, for through this movement the Idea comes to these thoughts which contain the opposites of the finite within themselves. For the Idea, as self-determining,

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.50

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.52

is the unity of these differences, and thus the Determinate Idea. The universal is hence determined as that which resolves and has resolved the contradictions in itself, and hence it is the concrete in itself; thus this sublation of contradiction is the affirmative. Dialectic in this higher sense is the really Platonic; as speculative it does not conclude with a negative result, for it demonstrates the union of opposites which have annulled themselves.⁴⁷

For Hegel the 'speculative dialectic' initiated by Plato is the very thing that is most important yet the most difficult and often overlooked aspect of his thought. He argues that it is crucial that we bring serious attention to bear upon the element of Plato's dialectic that deals with the pure thought of reason, from which he distinguishes the understanding. Indeed, for Hegel:

'Plato's true speculative greatness, and that through which he forms an *epochē* in the history of philosophy, and hence in the history of the world, lies in the fuller determination of the Idea.'⁴⁸

By coming to consider this genuine element of dialectic in Plato we 'must keep to the wearisome path, and allow ourselves to be pricked by the thorns and thistles of metaphysics. For behold, we then come to what is best and highest, to investigations respecting the one and many, Being and nothing.'⁴⁹ For Hegel it is the later dialogues, specifically the *Sophist*, *Philebus* and especially the *Parmenides*, that deal with the dialectic in this 'higher signification'. Crucially, he argues that their aim is not merely a negative one, something associated perhaps with the earlier dialogues that seek merely to confound opinion or understanding, or to awaken a sense of the necessity of knowledge. Plato's dialogues cannot be reduced to merely negative skepticism. Rather, Hegel's substantial claim here is that these three dialogues themselves express, albeit in prototype form, the 'abstract Speculative Idea in its Pure Notion.'⁵⁰ They thus demonstrate a much richer and more complex relationship between skepticism and speculative philosophical reason.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.52

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.53

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.55

⁵⁰ Ibid, p.56

In the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel considers again the question of skepticism's relation to speculative philosophy. Here he argues that skepticism qua skepticism operates at the level of the merely one-sided negative insight, 'a dead end which does not lead to a new content beyond itself'. His *Phenomenology* is to proceed differently as a 'self-accomplishing skepticism', where the highest truth of negative skeptical equipollence has been recognised as the determining element of negativity within speculative reason itself. Thus the specific content, in the form of shapes or *Gestalten* of consciousness, is conceived as containing the negative within itself as the very principle functioning to produce its equipollent other. This is what Hegel terms 'determinate negation' as opposed to the mere negation associated with skepticism qua skepticism. Thus determinate negation emerges as what we will term the 'auto-equipollence' of the specific content itself. The notion of a 'self-accomplishing skepticism' is, we will argue, closely aligned with the notion of the autonomy of reason for Hegel. He argues that if philosophical science is ever to become elevated beyond mere received opinion in its attempt to obtain justified knowledge it must legitimate its own terms from within itself immanently and freely. The terms must not be arbitrarily assumed, presupposed or merely inherited from the tradition. For this to occur philosophical science must liberate itself from all notions of a *given* foundation and become radically *self-grounding* instead. It is this radical self-grounding that we will argue is the explicit purpose of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel writes:

'What spirit prepares for itself in it, is the element of [true] knowing. In this element the moments of spirit now spread themselves out in that form of simplicity which knows its object as its own self. They no longer fall apart into the antithesis of being and knowing, but remain in the simple oneness of knowing; they are the True in the form of the True, and their difference is only the difference of content.'⁵¹

Hegel's great insight here lies in his understanding that for philosophy to become elevated to the 'element of true knowing' it must become radically self-grounding and proceed by way of an internal immanent determinate negative dialectic, and not through the exercise of any external reflective application of reason. This is because

⁵¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, #37

such application would always have the status of merely arbitrary presupposition. It must then begin without any mediated determinate content as such, and yet develop a mediated content out of immediacy, indeterminacy, and without any extraneous terms. It must be an immediately self-determined determinacy and mediacy. For Hegel such genuine philosophical science is impossible unless thought is able ultimately to liberate itself from the inherent abstract opposition of consciousness as understanding, i.e. self and other, thought and being, mind and world. Such oppositions have the status of fundamental presuppositions, an assumed ground or foundation for philosophy, which must ultimately be deconstructed. We will argue that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* must be understood as enacting that deconstruction of the presuppositions of consciousness, to the point where there can no longer be any sustainable antithesis proposed between 'being and knowing'.⁵²

'Pure Science presupposes liberation from the opposition of consciousness. It contains thought in so far as this is just as much the object in its own self, or the object in its own self in so far as it is equally pure thought.'⁵³

The notion of determinate negation displayed throughout the *Phenomenology of Spirit*'s deconstruction of the *Gestalten* of consciousness and self-consciousness is Hegel's way of referring to the positive or progressive aspect of the dialectic. It is determinate negation which makes the conceptual movement a constructive one and not a purely corrosive, destructive or negative one. The negative dialectic associated with authentic skepticism (and identified by Hegel in the early skepticism article) is understood here as an external critical tool which reduces all possible theses, arguments, and positions to contradictions through equipollence, without offering any positive doctrine. When reflecting upon the path of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes in the Introduction to the *Science of Logic*:

'Dialectic is commonly regarded as an external, negative activity which does not pertain to the subject matter itself, having its ground in mere conceit as a subjective itch for unsettling and destroying what is fixed and substantial.'⁵⁴

⁵² See W. Maker, *Philosophy Without Foundations: Rethinking Hegel* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994) for an original outline of this viewpoint.

⁵³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p.49

Notwithstanding his suspicions expressed here regarding the inherent conceit of such skepticism, he does grant that this negative aspect constitutes an important part of the speculative dialectic, much as he had in the earlier skepticism article. However, this recognition is by no means the whole story, for here skepticism is to be conceived as 'the negative that fails to see the positive within itself.'⁵⁵ Indeed:

'The exposition of the untrue consciousness in its untruth is not a merely negative procedure.'⁵⁶

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel argues that skepticism fails to recognise that the negative is something inherent within the content at hand itself, preferring through conceit to insist upon being an external negative imposing itself upon the content. We want to argue for a clear continuity between this view of skepticism and the one found in the earlier article. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel reconfigures the entire methodology of equipollence associated with genuine negative skepticism as the negative operative within any given content (*Gestalt* of consciousness or self-consciousness). Skeptical equipollence itself becomes transfigured and identified as the very nature of the immanent production of the equipollent other from out of the content itself. However, it is understood here as wholly internal rather than the imposition of the equipollent other via an external force, i.e. as in authentic skepticism. Skepticism is reconfigured as a 'self-accomplishing skepticism' characteristic of the internality of the content itself. In order to understand this reconfiguration we must consider how Hegel contrasts it with the external form of skepticism. He undertakes this contrast by considering the form of external skeptical consciousness itself as a distinct form (*Gestalt*) of consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

When considering the external form of skepticism in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel concentrates upon what he had earlier identified in the early skepticism article

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.55-6

⁵⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, #79, p.51

⁵⁶ Ibid

as the degenerate form of subjective skepticism.⁵⁷ But now rather than bringing it into conjunction with authentic skepticism as he had done in early paper (which remains from the perspective of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*'s aims merely an exercise of an external force upon it) he must be understood now as subjecting it purely to the rigours of its own inherent negation, a negation that has a determinate positive result. By articulating a wholly internal critique of degenerate subjective skepticism he is able to demonstrate a move beyond the merely dogmatic alternation associated with this form of skepticism. He achieves this by developing a sophisticated understanding of the immanent determinate negation, *akin* to genuine skepticism, contained within the form of subjective skepticism itself. The continuity here with the earlier article on skepticism consists in the demonstration of the unsustainability of the subjective form of skepticism and the critical force of a purer and more radical form of internal skepticism. There is, however, a crucial difference in that for Hegel now the more radical form of internal skepticism is not to be understood as merely a superior 'form' when contrasted with subjective skepticism. Rather it must be understood as the negative *immanent to* subjective skepticism itself. Hence it is *this* immanent negative which is to be understood as the radically critical force involved in its own overcoming or deconstruction. It is, therefore, a self-overcoming or self-deconstruction i.e. a wholly immanent critique. In fact we would argue that such a view is perfectly consonant with Hegel's arguments in the early skepticism paper. Indeed, precisely because of the contrast between authentic and degenerate subjective skepticism and the consonance between the former and genuine speculative philosophy that Hegel argues for in the early paper, we might argue that this paper be understood as the very genesis of Hegel's notion of self-accomplishing skepticism or immanent critique in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

With regard to his reconfiguration of what we will call universal skepticism (as opposed to what Hegel himself will term subjective skepticism), [Hegel's immanent speculative dialectic is that dialectic which is not merely negative, but which understands negativity as inherent within positive content, and is able to discern and preserve something positive in the demonstration of the content's falsity.] Something is then preserved in the negation with which we are able to continue. So rather than

⁵⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, BKH, see p.338.

the movement of alternation associated with external equipollent skepticism, Hegel conceives internal critique as a determinate path of immanent dialectical progression. There is thus a cumulative effect throughout a series of wholly immanent contradictory positions of consciousness and self-consciousness right up to the point of Absolute knowing:

'In speculative thinking...the negative belongs to the content itself, and is the positive, both as the immanent movement and determination of the content, and as the whole of this process. Looked at as a result, what emerges from this process is the determinate negative which is consequently a positive content as well.'⁵⁸

For Hegel immanent speculative thought is able to show how given abstracted *Gestalten* of consciousness and self-consciousness transform themselves into their contradictions, i.e. how they negate themselves. It is then able to think both elements of the dichotomy together and discern the true nature of the unity of the contradiction, something which skepticism qua external skepticism could never do:

'The speculative or positively rational apprehends the unity of the determinateness in their opposition, the affirmative that is contained in their dissolution and in their transition.'⁵⁹

The immanent speculative philosopher does not rest with the 'truth' of contradiction qua equipollent skepticism, and so does not rest with the merely alternating fate of repetitive contradiction. Rather, immanent speculative philosophy observes the very movement of contradictory positions, namely the immanent movement from one content or position into its other, and is able to discern a higher truth than that obtained by skepticism. The *negative* is thereby understood to have *positive* implications. It is in the introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that Hegel contrasts the notion of determinate negation with the very negation most associated with skepticism:

⁵⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, #59, p.36

⁵⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic*, #82

'The skepticism that ends up with the bare abstraction of nothingness or emptiness cannot get any further from there, but must wait to see whether something new comes along and what it is, in order to throw it too into the same abyss. But when, on the other hand, the result is conceived as it is in truth, namely as a determinate negation, a new form has thereby immediately arisen, and in the negation the transition is made through which the progress through the complete series of forms comes about of itself.'⁶⁰

⁶⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, #79, p.51

III – The Self-Accomplishing Skepticism of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

Having outlined Hegel's response to skepticism's inability to recognise not only the negativity inherent within the content itself but also the positive implications of such an understanding, we must now examine Hegel's exposition of the instantiation, development and self-overcoming of skepticism in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The fundamental movement is concerned with the failure of skepticism to recognise its own determinate negation when it becomes a self-referential skepticism, i.e. when it becomes its own negation. In this way it fails, he argues, to recognise the *positive* at the heart of its own absolutely negative, skeptical, equipollent position; attempting instead to maintain itself dogmatically as a persistent external negative, corrosive and destructive force. Thus skepticism itself, when considered as a *Gestalt* of consciousness or as subjective skepticism, becomes the focus of Hegel's phenomenological deconstruction at a certain moment in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

His discussion of subjective skepticism occurs within the context of his account of the development of the freedom of self-consciousness, and in particular its relation to Stoicism. For Hegel the stoical notion of consciousness necessarily leads to the skeptical one; or as he puts it, the 'truth' of stoicism *is* skepticism; 'skepticism is the realisation of that which stoicism was only the Notion'.⁶¹ The skeptic's consciousness of the nullity of every determinate principle is at the same time an implicit consciousness of his own subjectivity in the form of the capacity to critically assess all principles and is the principle against which all determinate principles are to be asserted. On Hegel's view the skeptic's subjective retreat is a retreat into an inner form of freedom and independence. The skeptical subject's freedom resides in its lack of determination by any criterion or principle that is 'other' than itself, that is, external or alien to itself. It is, on the contrary, self-determining and in-itself:

'Skepticism... is the actual experience of what freedom of thought is. This is *in-itself* the negative and must exhibit itself as such.'⁶²

⁶¹ Ibid, #202, p. 123

⁶² Ibid

Anything that looks abstract, fixed and true can be shown, the skeptic argues, to be only relative to a particular subjective point of view, including even that subjective point of view's view of itself. The skeptic thus applies the kind of reflections that for the stoic constituted independence of thought to thought itself, thereby demonstrating that what was taken as fixed and known by the stoics was in fact relative and open to question. The skeptic's point is that when the impersonal point of view assumed by the stoic is applied to itself it turns out to be self-undermining. Thus, the stoic's attempt to achieve an impersonal point of view leads to the insight that there really is no such impersonal point of view and the conclusion that there can only be subjective and relative points of view. True independence of thought thus requires one to be a skeptic:

'Through this self-conscious negation it procures for its own self the certainty of its freedom, generates the experience of that freedom, and thereby raises it to truth. What vanishes is the determinate element, or the moment of difference, which, whatever its mode of being and whatever its source, sets itself up as something fixed and immutable.'⁶³

The skeptic seemingly achieves a true freedom of self-consciousness, i.e. nothing can count for him unless he takes it as counting, and the skeptic understands that nothing can count as knowledge for him. He thus focuses on his own activity of 'taking things to be such and such'. Skepticism is, as Hegel characterises it, the 'negative', a subjective point of view taking itself and itself alone to be that which sets the standards for what is to count as a claim to knowledge, taking itself to have shown that all the putatively universal points of view are really only subjective. It then argues that no subjective point of view can succeed on its own terms. Nothing can therefore count as stable and independent for this type of skeptic except the skeptic's own consciousness of the relativity of everything else.

Let us briefly consider and contrast Hegel's account of skepticism here in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* together with the earlier skepticism article. In the early article he writes:

⁶³ Ibid, #204, p. 124

'This purely negative attitude that wants to remain mere subjectivity and seeming, ceases ipso facto, to be something for knowledge. He who stays holding fast to the vanity of the fact that "it seems so to him", "that he is of the opinion that..."', he who wants his utterances never to be taken as objective assertions of thought and judgement at all, must be left where he stands. His subjectivity concerns no one else, still less does it concern philosophy, nor is philosophy concerned in it.'⁶⁴

Here the 'purely negative attitude that wants to remain mere subjectivity' ceases, he claims, to be of concern to philosophy. However, in the *Phenomenology* such subjective negation becomes a crucial feature in the development towards the understanding of the freedom of self-consciousness. What he earlier identified as the negative associated with genuine skepticism becomes the very principle of self-critical immanent determinate negation operative throughout the entire *Phenomenology*. The maintenance of a determinately subjective skeptical viewpoint becomes understood here as:

'Wholly contingent, single, and separate ... a consciousness which is empirical, which takes its guidance from what has no reality for it, which obeys what is for it not an essential being, which does those things and brings to realisation what it knows has no truth for it.'⁶⁵

He continues here with the understanding of degenerate skepticism that he had outlined in his earlier skepticism article; i.e. the view that subjective skepticism is explicitly governed by an uncritical relation with empirical notions. He also maintains, as he had earlier, that subjective skepticism determines itself to be an external force of negation. For Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* such a self-understanding forms a distinct shape of consciousness and begins the very process of realising the implicit absolute freedom of the self-conscious subject. However, he argues that as such it inherently converts itself into 'a consciousness that is universal and self-identical; for it is the negativity of all singularity and all difference'.⁶⁶ In this

⁶⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, BKH, p.338

⁶⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, #205, p.125

⁶⁶ Ibid

sense its contingent singular subjective skepticism is implicitly negated, not through the activity of an application of an external negation such as the principle of equipollence associated with Ancient skepticism, but rather through an internal immanent negation of the matter itself. It is, one might say, *self-negation*. This immanent self-negation of subjective skepticism must seemingly assume the detached *universal* point of view to see that all claims to knowledge are themselves relative to a subjective point of view. The subjective skeptic thus finds himself in what seems to be an elementary contradiction from which he cannot extricate himself:

'This consciousness is therefore the unconscious, thoughtless rambling which passes back and forth from the one extreme of self-identical self-consciousness to the other extreme of the contingent consciousness that is both bewildered and bewildering. It does not itself bring these two thoughts of itself together.'⁶⁷

Hegel argues that skepticism announces an *absolute* vanishing of essential being in doubt, but that the very pronouncement of such doubt *is*, and that this form of consciousness, as skeptical doubting, '*is the vanishing that is pronounced*'.⁶⁸ It attempts to affirm the 'nullity of seeing, hearing etc.', yet 'it is itself seeing hearing, etc.'.⁶⁹ Thus, he claims, its 'deeds and its words always belie one another':

'But it keeps the poles of this its self-contradiction apart, and adopts the same attitude to it as it does in its purely negative activity in general.'⁷⁰

Skeptical consciousness discovers that it can preserve its independence not by affirming any particular claim to knowledge but only by affirming its own reflective activity itself. The skeptic, by keeping the poles of its self-contradiction apart through a form of dogmatic refusal, *refuses* speculative philosophy. As such the subjective skeptic remains a divided form of consciousness, caught between the two points of view he finds within himself, namely the contingent, purely personal point of view, and the detached, impersonal point of view. Hegel likens the refusal of speculative philosophy represented by the persistence of skepticism to the situation of 'squabbling

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Ibid

self-willed children', each just stating the opposite of the other for the sake of 'the pleasure of continually contradicting one another.'⁷¹ However, speculative thought is able to discern a positive resolution away from the persistence of the repetition of merely alternating contradiction associated with subjective skepticism. Such a resolution emerges from bringing the contradictory elements within subjective skeptical consciousness together, rather than refusing the conjunction in the manner of subjective skepticism, and represents the determinate negation of subjective skepticism.

Hegel argues that when the skeptic concedes the division within himself, rather than refusing it, he ceases to be a skeptic. His subjective skeptical consciousness is negated through the concession; the skeptic now recognises and accepts the centrality of certain views for himself, and admits that he has no way of justifying those beliefs outside of his own contingently held point of view. Hegel calls this the 'Unhappy Consciousness':

'In skepticism, consciousness truly experiences itself as internally contradictory. From this experience emerges a new form of consciousness that brings together the two thoughts which skepticism holds apart. Skepticism's lack of thought about itself must vanish, because it is in fact one consciousness that contains within itself these two modes. This new form is, therefore, one which knows that it is the dual consciousness of itself, as self-liberating, unchangeable, and self-identical, and as self-bewildering and self-perverting, and it is the awareness of this self-contradictory nature of itself...the *Unhappy Consciousness* is the consciousness of self as a dual-natured, merely contradictory being.'⁷²

The 'Unhappy Consciousness' is to be distinguished from skepticism. The skeptic wishes to assert the supreme validity of no point of view and thus finds itself wavering between both the subjective and the objective points of view, whereas the 'unhappy consciousness' takes the wavering to be an essential feature of itself and the world. It is the self-conception of self-consciousness that discovers that it must hold both sides of the contradiction, that there is no way out of the contradiction, and that it

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Ibid, #206, p. 126

must live *with* it rather than refuse it in its philosophical understanding. The 'unhappy consciousness' must take the two contradictory perspectives as fully opposing points of view; what is justified from one point of view is unjustified from the other. Thus the 'unhappy consciousness' takes the impersonal view to represent the unchangeable essential view and its own subjective point of view to be utterly contingent, changeable and unessential. It is 'unhappy' because it cannot take these two points of view to be indifferent to one another; each is essential and each contradicts the other. The movement of the 'unhappy consciousness' which Hegel then describes involves a return to the original guiding principle of subjective skepticism, namely that it is its own thinking activity that allows things to count for it. Thus the 'unhappy consciousness' eschews the notion of itself as merely passive and receptive to the 'truth', in favour of a preparatory activity whereby it is ready to 'receive the truth'.

We have attempted to demonstrate throughout this discussion of the nature of Hegel's thought and its relationship to skepticism. We have argued that he recovers and develops the truth of authentic skepticism as a crucial element within his own philosophical work. This authentic skepticism is reconfigured by Hegel in his mature work as the negative principle or aspect of the immanent speculative dialectic, and becomes the notion of negation as determinate self-negation, a negation that generates positive results immanently. We have also attempted to demonstrate the degree to which Hegel brings the truth of determinate negation (itself emergent from the consideration of authentic universal skepticism) to bear upon subjective skepticism. As we have outlined, the problems with subjective skepticism concern the degree to which it is governed by an uncritical relation with empirical notions and conceives itself as an external and independent force of negation. Hegel in the *Phenomenology* demonstrates how this subjective form of skepticism is, ultimately, philosophically unsustainable and is necessarily negated. However, Hegel also demonstrates how such skepticism contains a positive truth in the form of the critical negativity that emerges from its movement. The critical negativity, associated with the movement or dialectic of subjective skepticism, must be preserved as a crucial moment in the historical evolution of philosophical consciousness. In the next part of this thesis we will outline and examine three 19th century post-Hegelian attempts to persist with a type of skepticism 'beyond' Hegel. We will bring their respective skeptical positions back into proximity with a Hegelian response, beginning with Schelling's skeptical

characterisation of Hegel's speculative idealism as merely negative philosophy, and his own claims for the elaboration of a Positive philosophy.

PART TWO – THE 19TH CENTURY POST-HEGELIAN SKEPTICS

1 - Schelling's Skeptical Criticism of Hegel

(i) – *Positive Philosophy and Skepticism*

Schelling's reading and subsequent critique of Hegel, his *Deutungsperspektive*,¹ attempts to introduce a novel modality of skepticism into the Western philosophical tradition. We will try to show how this modality emerges from the distinction made by Schelling between Negative and Positive philosophy. He characterises the fundamental flaw in Hegel's speculative idealism as its attempt to embrace a realm that he believes must be delimited and articulated by a Positive rather than a Negative philosophy.² Indeed Schelling demonstrates the failure of Hegel's philosophy by showing it to be a 'Negative' philosophy that insists on being able to explicate a 'Positive' notion of real being. He argues that by learning from Hegel's singular failure subsequent philosophers are able to recognise the way that all types of 'Negative' philosophies refute themselves by attempting to articulate a 'Positive' notion of real being from out of themselves. Thus skepticism persists (in the form of the presence of positive and actual real being incommensurable to reason) and the post-Hegelian philosopher is able to sustain a legitimate opposition to speculative reason's attempt to overcome the difference between thought and actuality. For Schelling this necessary skeptical opposition emerges from within speculative philosophy itself and provides the necessary means for the transition to a 'Positive' philosophy.

Schelling's later philosophy bears a marked skepticism of Hegel's view that a philosophical 'reason' can be constructed that is able to adequately account for there

¹ This is the German term which B. Burkhardt introduces to describe Schelling's critical interpretation of Hegel in his book *Hegel's Wissenschaft der Logik im Spannungsfeld der Kritik* (Zurich: George Olms Verlag Hildesheim, 1993), p. 17

² My own understanding and account of Schelling's notion of Negative and Positive philosophy is largely based upon F.W.J. Schelling's lectures entitled *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, translation, introduction and notes by A. Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and the accounts given in A. Bowie's *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy – An Introduction*, A. White's *Absolute Knowledge: Hegel and the Problem of Metaphysics* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1983) and *Schelling: An Introduction to the System of Freedom* (Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1983), E.A. Beach's *The Potencies of God(s)* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1994) and S. Houlgate's 'Schelling's Critique of Hegel's Science of Logic' in *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 53 No. 1, 1999

being a manifest actual world. It is also marked by a move toward understanding a redefined notion of 'freedom' as a critical force existing outside of, and prior to, any such construct of reason. He argues that such a notion of 'freedom' must be recognised as the explanation for there being a primary disclosure of actuality *beyond* reason. To understand 'what' (*Was*) something 'is' through a rational construct is never to know 'that' (*Daß*) it exists, 'that' it is. For Schelling our knowledge of actuality is always prior to any rational construct; rather, knowledge of actuality emerges from what he terms *Vorstellung*. Given this move (which Schelling argues is the move toward the realm of 'Positive Philosophy') he clearly perceives Hegel's philosophy to be the paradigmatic expression of systematic reflexive reason, i.e. a system of reason whereby thought 'relates' itself to pure essences (or the pure in-itself) through its own activity. He claims that Hegel merely perpetuates a philosophical tradition of thinking the 'what' (*Was*) of things. However, he argues that within Hegel's philosophy an *irreducible* distinction or diremption between actuality and reason is manifested. In other words, a type of internally generated skepticism persists. Indeed, Schelling credits Hegel with having unwittingly brought about the closure of a certain form of negative metaphysics by articulating a necessary distinction between pure reason and actuality. He claims Hegel demonstrates that, despite its best efforts, reason is only ever capable of articulating an evolving determination of 'what' (*Was*) it is to be a certain kind of thing. In this sense he argues that 'negative philosophy is entirely *a priori* in its procedures and conclusions'.³

Negative philosophy is restricted to merely being able to determine what is conceivable within thought or reason alone, and thereby what is *possible*. It can never, Schelling claims, establish 'that' (*Daß*) real being actually exists. In other words, rationality is restricted to representing either the possible *a priori* structures of real being or proposing an *a posteriori* analysis of real being but never the actual existence of being. The culmination of Negative philosophy in Hegel produces a skeptical insight regarding reason and provides an opportunity for beginning a Positive philosophy. This Positive philosophy must begin with an absolute positivity regarding actuality, a positivity that cannot be entirely generated by thought or reason. Beach

³ E.A. Beach, *The Potencies of God(s)* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1994), p. 147

writes that 'Schelling characterises pure thought as pointing beyond itself toward a supplementary source of knowledge'.⁴ The implication of this is that such a beginning must precede philosophical *reflection* and *reason* and that its source is utterly heterogeneous. One problem that has to be addressed by Schelling is how one is to gain access to such a beginning when we appear to have moved 'beyond the strictures of rationalistic philosophies'.⁵ The traditional route marked out by the history of Negative philosophy only ever assumes that a certain kind of being (i.e. the being of an *a priori* concept within reason itself) will serve as an adequate notion of absolute being. However, such necessary absolute being must have always already 'been there' before it is possible to generate an understanding of it as a possible necessity, i.e. 'that' (*Daß*) being *is* precedes 'what' (*Was*) being *is*. Such necessary actuality can never be articulated within pure reason in any other way than negatively, i.e. the necessity that real being cannot *not* be. Negative philosophy thus fails to disclose the absolute plenitude of existence or the fact 'that' (*Daß*) being *is*. In order to establish the nature of actuality we must fall back on something 'other' than 'mere' reason. This something 'other' is what Schelling terms 'sensuous' and 'pure' *Vorstellung* or 'metaphysical empiricism', and through this notion he is able to suggest the existence of a means for a direct consciousness or intuition of things in contrast to pure thought or reason. This notion of metaphysical empiricism remains distinct from pure thought or reason and is characterised by Schelling as an *immediate revelation* rather than an *a priori* possibility or a *posteriori* description. As Beach writes of the notion in his study, it is 'an immediate empathetic encounter with the spirit of another being' or 'a direct experiential access to the supersensible realities'.⁶

Crucial to understanding the way Positive philosophy is configured as a skeptical and disruptive force opposed to pure reason is Schelling's claim that pure reason is *always already* conditioned by a relation to actuality and existence. For Schelling absolutely necessary actuality is that which just necessarily exists since. As Houlgate writes:

'It excludes its own mere possibility by preceding all possibility. This means that the necessity of being itself is not one that is grounded in possibility, but one that is

⁴ E.A. Beach, *Ibid.*, p. 147

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 148

without any prior ground. It is the groundless necessity of being's simply being and having no other option apart from being.'⁷

The claim is that reason itself is irreducibly related to the freedom, independence and anteriority of that which Hegel had so systematically sought to encompass within reason. It is this claim for the irreducible conditionality of reason that provides the necessary impetus for the critical transfiguration of Negative philosophy into a Positive one. Actuality is claimed as a conditioning ground of reason itself, and therefore an exteriority prior to the activity of reason. Such a ground, Schelling argues, can never be completely sublated into that which it has conditioned. Thus Schelling's Positive philosophy emphasises the brute materiality of being as irreducibly anterior to all conceptual speculation; as Beach writes, Schelling's overriding concern for a Positive philosophy is with the 'possibility of supersensible experience and the primacy of the suprarational'.⁸

It is actuality absolutely outside reason that provides the very grounds for the post-Hegelian type of skepticism. Schelling acknowledges that reason itself is able to reach a thought of the necessary actuality of being, but only negatively, i.e. at the level of conception and a possibility; it is unable to bring to mind the positivity and anteriority of actuality. He argues that Hegel's entire philosophy, despite being motivated by a desire to determine actuality or real being, can only ever conceive real being negatively, i.e. as being what cannot not be, simply because it withdraws in to the realm of pure thought:

'Hegel established precisely as the first demand on philosophy that it should withdraw into pure thinking, and that it should have as sole immediate object the pure concept. Hegel cannot be denied the credit for having seen the merely logical nature of the philosophy which he intended to work on and promised to bring to its complete form.'⁹

⁷ S. Houlgate, *Ibid.*, p.9

⁸ E.A. Beach, *Ibid.*, p.172-3

⁹ F.W.J. Schelling, *Ibid.*, p.134

By withdrawing into pure thought Hegel is only ever able to think what is *thinkable* rather than what is *actual*, and Schelling attempts to prove that Hegel is ultimately constrained by the modesty implicit to reason. Despite its immodest pretensions to have discovered actual/real being in thought, Hegel's philosophy remains confined within mere self-identity never really encountering the genuine *otherness* of being. Schelling argues that the consequence of Hegel's immodesty (whereby real being is posited and identified with the structure of the merely conceivable) is that real being existing prior to and beyond reason becomes effaced. The merely conceivable becomes posited as the ultimate structure of the Absolute Idea or Concept, and as the structure of the very possibility of real being, i.e. if there is to be real being it must be rationally constructed. However, despite its efforts to articulate real being in this way Hegel's philosophy remains a paradigmatic expression of Negative philosophy and cannot but fail in its attempt to provide a systematic rational understanding of real being. For Schelling the irreducible truth of real being is that it remains the exterior ground of reason itself rather than something discovered and articulated by reason within a delimited realm of pure thought.

This characterisation of Hegel's philosophy as merely 'Negative' allows Schelling to initiate a sustained skeptical opposition to the *Science of Logic* and Hegel's efforts there to transcend the traditional limitations of reason within the implicit confines of Negative philosophy. He argues that Hegel's *Science of Logic* erroneously attempts to derive an entirely rationally generated knowledge of actuality; a fact revealed by the fact that Hegel's withdrawal into pure thought was 'as one can find stated on the very first pages of Hegel's *Logic*, linked to the claim that the concept was *everything* and left nothing outside itself.'¹⁰ He understands Hegel to be arguing that there is *nothing* apart from reason in actuality itself precisely because the rationally conceivable is essentially all that there is. Herein lies the 'deep flaw', from Schelling's perspective, with Hegel's philosophy, and this 'flaw' grounds all of his subsequent criticisms of Hegel's system:

'Hegel is so little inclined to recognise his philosophy as the merely negative philosophy that he asserts instead that it is the philosophy which leaves absolutely nothing outside itself; his philosophy attributes to itself the most objective meaning

¹⁰ Ibid

and, in particular, a wholly complete knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) of God and of divine things – the knowledge which Kant denied to philosophy is supposedly achieved by his philosophy.¹¹

He objects to Hegel's view 'that everything only exists via what is logical'¹², and argues that Hegel's philosophy ignores or fails to recognise the 'fact' that real being occurs groundlessly 'of itself' beyond reason. As Houlgate writes, Hegel is for Schelling 'an irredeemably panlogistic – or indeed, logocentric – philosopher, who conflates experience with what is simply conceivable'.¹³ Indeed this characterisation of Hegel together with Schelling's conviction that 'there is obviously something more than mere reason in the world, indeed there is something which strives beyond these barriers'¹⁴ provides the skeptical basis for Schelling's specific criticisms of the *Science of Logic*. It is to these specific criticisms that we must now turn our attention in order that we may further consider Schelling's skeptical strategy with regard to Hegel.

Fundamental to Schelling's entire critique is an understanding that the *Science of Logic* attempts to construct a completely presuppositionless and systematically rational account of actuality or a rational science of real being. Hegel can never begin explicitly with the Absolute Idea of rational being, given that such a notion is precisely that which is to be systematically constructed by the project itself. He argues that 'Hegel must go back with the concept to some beginning or other, where he is at the greatest distance from that which is only to come into being via the movement.'¹⁵ In other words, Hegel must begin with the very least, i.e. the most minimal thought of Being, and progress to the very most, i.e. the Absolute Idea of rational real Being. By claiming to begin presuppositionlessly he means to begin the *Science of Logic* in a thoroughly unconditioned way, i.e. without any assumptions concerning method, content or developmental path. He argues that beginning in this indeterminate way ensures that one begins with that with which thought *must* necessarily begin (i.e. with what it must immanently begin). Thus what *must* come first for thought (in the

¹¹ Ibid, p.135

¹² Ibid, p.147

¹³ S. Houlgate, Ibid, p.19

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ F.W.J. Schelling, Ibid, p.136

absence of determinations) is also what is itself *first* for thought, i.e. mere being. For Hegel the notion of mere 'Being' best characterises the very thought of the utter indeterminacy with which thought has to begin. He writes:

'It lies in the nature of a beginning that it must be being and nothing else. To enter into philosophy, therefore, calls for no other preparations, no further reflections or points of connection.'¹⁶

Schelling argues that despite Hegel's claim for a presuppositionless beginning the *Science of Logic* remains fatally and inevitably conditioned by a number of unacknowledged and perhaps unconscious presuppositions that serve to deconstruct it. For instance, he claims that it is conditioned by the unwarranted presupposition that knowledge of Absolute Being is to be garnered by a science of 'essences'. Thus he claims Hegel presupposes that an absolute knowledge of actuality or real being is itself generated by a withdrawal into purely rational thought. From Schelling's perspective the extent to which Hegel's position represents an unwarranted and unjustified presupposition is demonstrated by the degree to which it can be shown to be utterly and irreducibly dependent upon actuality. Therefore, Schelling insists upon the irreducibly dependent and conditioned status of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, and claims that the necessary dependence upon actuality introduces an inevitable and implicit teleology into its discourse. He argues that 'what always tacitly leads this progression is always the *terminus ad quem*, the real world, at which science finally is to arrive.'¹⁷

Indeed for Schelling the *Science of Logic*'s conditionality is the one thing that allows it to fulfil its own promise of *movement in thought*. He denies Hegel's claim that such movement is purely immanently self-determining by claiming that it is the unacknowledged presence of a thinking subject whose thought remains irreducibly conditioned by prior actuality that generates the necessary movement. The subject can never generate a legitimate understanding of positive actuality by artificially abstracting itself from it and withdrawing into the realm of 'pure thought'. The very attempt, Schelling claims, represents the impossibly absurd spectacle of the

¹⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p.72

¹⁷ F.W.J. Schelling, *Ibid*, p.138

conditioned trying to efface its very conditions. Hegel's efforts to obtain an absolutely objective and presuppositionless beginning drive him to attempt to suppress subjectivity itself, to negate 'everything subjective, as pure being...[is]...being in which there is nothing subjective'.¹⁸ Such suppression contributes to what Schelling terms a misleading and 'monstrous' semblance of immanent necessity within the realm of 'pure' thought. Hegel's beginning can only ever be reached through the conscious abstraction of the subject, but in such a way that the subject not only continues to constitute the nature of the result of the abstraction, but also continues to condition the way that this abstraction is to be thought. What is dangerous and 'monstrous' for Schelling is that this fact becomes effaced and unacknowledged in Hegel's account whilst its unconscious presence and influence remains. Since this unconscious presence and influence remains repressed and unacknowledged in Hegel's philosophy Schelling thinks that it is likely to exert an arbitrary effect to a much greater extent than if it were at least recognised and acknowledged. The irony for Schelling lies in the fact that it is precisely this arbitrary effect of the unacknowledged subject that generates the semblance of an immanent developmental trajectory in the *Science of Logic*. Thus the *Science of Logic* remains predetermined by that which is the *most* arbitrary; i.e. the subject's unconscious drives and its non-rationally derived situatedness within actuality. Schelling writes:

'The fact that he nevertheless attributes an immanent movement to pure being means no more, then, than that the thought which begins with pure being feels it is impossible for it to stop at this most abstract and most empty thing of all, which Hegel himself declares is pure being. The compulsion to move on from this has its basis only in the fact that thought is already used to a more concrete being, a being more full of content, and thus cannot be satisfied with that meagre diet of pure being in which only content in the abstract but no determinate content is thought; in the last analysis, then, what does not allow him to remain with that empty abstraction is only the fact that there really is a more rich being which is more full of content, and the fact that the thinking spirit itself is already such a being, thus the fact that it is not a necessity

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 136

which lies in the concept itself, but rather a necessity which lies in the philosopher and which is imposed upon him by his memory.¹⁹

Hegel's claim to have effaced contingent subjectivity from the *Science of Logic* and his demonstration of a supposedly immanent and self-determined movement in pure thought is nothing more for Schelling than an elaborate illusion. He argues that a genuinely successful repression of the subject in thought would in fact result in the disappearance of all thought. He proceeds to consider a number of further necessarily contingent elements constitutive of the *Science of Logic*, and argues that each is bound up with 'traces' of contingent subjectivity that Hegel presupposes and fails to acknowledge properly as necessary for the very activity of the *Science of Logic*. Thus, for Schelling, language itself (together with the principles of logical thought) is undeniably at play at the very point of Hegel's supposed immanent presuppositionless beginning. He argues that if we were to take Hegel's claim for a presuppositionless beginning seriously it would logically exclude the possibility of language itself since the very nature of language is to perpetually invoke presupposed meanings that could only be genuinely effaced through a total effacement of language itself. This argument is analogous to the earlier claim regarding the impossibility of simultaneously effacing genuine subjectivity in thought and retaining thought. Where he had argued that the effacement of the subject would necessarily lead to the disappearance of all thought, he now argues that the disappearance of presuppositions implies the absolute disappearance of all language. Thus, insofar as irreducible subjectivity and thought are inextricably bound up with each other, he argues that language and presuppositions are likewise bound up with each other. For Schelling the presupposed meanings implicit within any language can never be effaced through an act of abstraction itself articulated by language. He claims that even positing an absolutely presuppositionless beginning 'presupposes the concept of presupposition, and as soon as [philosophy] says anything else, it utilises language, which it therefore also presupposes. If it wanted to presuppose nothing, it would have to deduce language itself. For a philosophy presupposing simply nothing, nothing would be left save to

¹⁹ Ibid, p.138

confront all speech with silence. The most complete philosophy would be the most silent.²⁰

For Schelling Hegel's maintenance of language represents *the* paradigmatic 'trace' of the irreducible (yet unacknowledged) subjectivity within Hegel's *Science of Logic*. By maintaining language one has *always already* presupposed everything, and to claim otherwise (as Hegel appears to do) is to fundamentally misunderstand the nature of language. Schelling argues that it is only through the presence of a situated subject that such acts of abstraction are able to be effected within language, and that the unacknowledged presupposition of language represents ultimately the maintenance of the subject in an utterly arbitrary and contingent way.

He also maintains that contained within such an unacknowledged presence of subjectivity are all of the concepts which are to be systematically integrated within the fabric of the *Science of Logic*, e.g. the principles of relation and the function of the copula itself through which the different concepts or categories are to be related. By examining the opening triad of concepts (Being, Nothing and Becoming) in the *Science of Logic* Schelling attempts to demonstrate the presence of contingent elements of subjectivity through identifying specific traces of assumed and unacknowledged categories, principles of logical relation and the copula involved in establishing logical identity. He argues that the notion of Being can only serve as the beginning of a systematic development of the categories of real being if it is *not* pure and *not* indeterminate. Being must, he claims, always already be somehow determinate.

'It is an impossibility to think being in general, because there is no being in general, there is no being without a subject, being is rather necessarily and at all times something determinate...the being of the absolutely first thought could only be non-objective, merely essential, purely primary (*urständlich*) being, with which nothing is

²⁰ F.W.J. Schelling, *Grundlegung der Positiven Philosophie*, ed. H. Fuhrmans (Torino: Bottega d'Erasmio, 1972), p.223, translated and cited by A. White in *Absolute Knowledge: Hegel and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p.18

posited except just the subject. Therefore the being of the first thought is not a being in general but already a determinate being.²¹

It follows that when Hegel purports to demonstrate the immanent self-movement of the category of pure indeterminate Being into that of Nothing all he really exhibits is the inevitable unconscious *contamination* by subjective arbitrariness and the unintelligibility of the first concept. Thus Schelling claims that Hegel's thought appears to be 'driven forward only by a necessity which lies in itself, although it obviously has a goal it is striving towards, and this goal, however much the person philosophising seeks to hide consciousness thereof from himself, for this reason unconsciously affects the course of philosophising all the more decisively.'²² The very movement from Being to Nothing is itself generated by the unintelligibility of the thought of pure indeterminate being abstracted by the subject. The subject responds to such abstraction with the proposition 'Being is Nothing': 'it is not at all being itself that finds itself, but rather I find it as nothing, and say this in the proposition'.²³ Furthermore, there are only two ways Being and Nothing can be related in such a proposition; either as an empty static tautology, or as a genuine predicative statement. Since pure indeterminate being cannot posit *itself* as nothing, or as *anything*, and since a predicative judgment implicitly demands that it is posited by a *real subject*, Schelling concludes that the impersonal proposition 'Being is Nothing' is merely an empty static tautology. It is, therefore, the thinking subject who discovers through the very attempt to think pure abstract indeterminate being that it *is nothing* (i.e. *is not anything*) and subsequently claims the merely empty static tautology 'Being is Nothing'.

For Schelling, since it is the *subject* who asserts such a proposition there really is no immanently self-determining development from pure indeterminacy. The posited move from Being to Nothing is merely an arbitrary contribution or imposition by the thinking subject of the copula, the *is*. By characterising the movement in this way he is able to argue that the meaning of the identifying copula in the proposition 'Being is Nothing' cannot be explained as immanently emerging from within the indeterminacy

²¹ F.W.J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, p.139

²² *Ibid.*, pp.138-9

²³ *Ibid.*, p.140

of pure being itself. Rather, the identifying copula is itself introduced by the situated thinking subject through its experience of the attempt to think pure indeterminate being abstractly. The identifying copula thus operates as a necessary unacknowledged presupposition in Hegel's beginning, i.e. one that its own developmental movement cannot do without. The concept of *Nothing* is introduced by the subject precisely to *determine* its experience of the effort to think absolute pure indeterminacy. It is, therefore, the subject who introduces and applies the identifying copula in an effort to impose a logical correspondence between Being and Nothing. Being *is* Nothing for the subject precisely because *that is* its experience of the attempt to think the pure indeterminacy of Being.

There is no real necessity to be discerned here beyond this arbitrary and entirely subjective judgement. Schelling argues that all of Hegel's concepts or categories remain fundamentally presupposed because they are all embedded in language, and that the notion of their self-generated immanent development occurs only through the conscious attempt at effacing the necessity of the presupposition. Immanence thus remains an elaborate illusion:

'Hegel uses without thinking the form of the proposition, the copula, the is, before he has explained anything at all about the meaning of this is. In the same way Hegel uses the concept nothing as one that needs no explanation, which is completely self-evident.'²⁴

Hence Schelling has no fundamental argument against the idea that pure indeterminate Being is experienced in some immediate fashion as Nothing. He is merely skeptical of the immanent status granted to this idea by Hegel. For Schelling it remains merely the arbitrary or contingent articulation of a thinking subject responsible for an act of abstraction to a notion of pure indeterminacy. Since the subject is always already primordially related to actuality, it has always already predetermined the very end of such a process of thought as a systematically rational reconstruction of that actuality. Thus, he claims, the subject is always situated within

²⁴ Ibid

and conditioned by real being, prior to undertaking an abstractive logical account of Being.

The final aspect of Schelling's attack on Hegel's logical beginning concerns the claims for the immanence of the development of the notion of Becoming from Being and Nothing:

'One should not be surprised by...[the]...proposition...[i.e. Being is Nothing]...but rather by that to which it is supposed to serve as a means or a transition. From this connection of being and nothing, becoming is supposed to follow.'²⁵

In the *Science of Logic* Hegel demonstrates how the category of Becoming emerges from an immanent movement whereby Pure Being distinguishes itself from Pure Nothing, yet at the same time remains 'unseparated and inseparable'. Each category vanishes into its opposite, and this immanent movement of vanishing now emerges as their truth. As Hegel argues, this immanent movement produces the category of Becoming:

'Their truth is, therefore, this movement of the immediate vanishing of the one in the other: *becoming*, a movement in which both are distinguished, but by a difference which has equally immediately resolved itself.'²⁶

Schelling argues that the category of Becoming does not emerge in this purely immanent fashion but through being unjustifiably introduced as a qualification to the original identification of Pure Being and Pure Nothing. He claims that Hegel reveals such a qualification when he describes the emergence of this Beginning in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*. There he remarks that in the beginning the notion of Pure Being is not 'yet' real Being; 'the beginning, the matter [itself] is not yet in its beginning'. 'The little word *yet* is interpolated here', Schelling argues, providing the statement of identity between Pure Being and Pure Nothing with a supplementary meaning. This supplementary meaning, he claims, is not an immanently self-determining one but an illicit teleological principle, externally imposed by Hegel, whereby Pure Being is

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p.83

somehow to be viewed as *Still Nothing* or not yet actuality. Thus 'it would become itself determinate and no longer being in general, but rather determinate being, namely being *in potentia*.'²⁷ 'Pure Nothing' is to be understood in the specific and therefore determinate sense of Nothing *yet* actual or real, and it is only through this notion of a promised though not yet real Being that Hegel is able to introduce the notion of Becoming at all. However, he conceals the indebtedness of this notion of Becoming to the notion of the 'not yet real Being' behind the claim for immanent self-determining movement. Schelling argues that it is precisely the teleological notion of the 'not yet real Being' that reveals the true developmental force of the *Science of Logic*. The 'not yet real Being' remains throughout the very ground of the act of abstraction by a thinking subject and as such makes possible and conditions the logically reconstructed path back to real Being. 'Becoming' cannot represent the immanent development out of the 'unity' of Being and Nothing; but is rather the abandonment by the thinking subject of abstract indeterminacy, of Pure Being/Nothing, in favour of a path towards a reconstructive rational movement, or *recollection*, of concrete actuality within reason. The subject, by being irreducibly situated within concrete actuality, not only determines the abandonment of Pure Being/Nothing to ensure a reconstructive path back to actuality, it also determines the very nature of that path back, thereby rendering that path arbitrarily subjective. Indeed, Schelling views Hegel's introduction of Becoming by the thinking subject in the *Science of Logic* as nothing more than a development of or a radical restatement or recollection of the Kantian categories:

'This becoming immediately divides itself up for him into moments, so that he moves over in this way to the category of quantity, and thus in general to the Kantian table of categories.'²⁸

Thus for Schelling the notion of Becoming is introduced by a subject forced by abstraction to temporally dwell within an abstracted realm of Pure Being/Nothing, the subject recognises this and uses its 'memory' of concrete situatedness within actuality (i.e. within real Being) to 'reason' that Pure Being is merely abstract, indeterminate and Pure Nothing, and as such cannot be real Being 'yet'. The thought that Pure Being

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

is not yet real Being, that it is still Nothing, enables the thinking subject to introduce a notion of Becoming since it conceives Pure Being as 'on the way to' real Being. In this way the thinking subject projects itself upon a predetermined trajectory towards real Being, rather like Baron Munchhausen pulling himself out of the swamp by his own hair. For Schelling the developmental move within the opening triad of the *Science of Logic* is thus not immanent and cannot be, as Hegel had claimed, absolutely objective, pure and universal. Hegel surreptitiously introduces unacknowledged subjective teleological principles into his 'purely' immanent account of the derivation of the logical categories of Being, and as such renders that account *contaminated* by arbitrariness and contingency.

Schelling's efforts here are directed towards exposing the way in which Hegel's system necessarily deconstructs itself; in other words, how he violates his own principle of immanence and autonomy. Schelling's polemic can be concisely articulated by the proposition that *the true Beginning is not at all at the Beginning*, that there is always that which already precedes and remains *prior, exterior to, and in excess of* such a beginning. He attempts to expose how even in Hegel's supposedly careful 'presuppositionless' beginning there remain traces of this excess, this exteriority, which not only merely remain in excess of or exterior to the *Science of Logic* but in fact necessarily condition it and provide the entire momentum for its development of categories. His criticisms all concern the location of these fault lines in Hegel's supposedly autonomous or immanent account, such as the fissures within his purely logical beginning where an inevitable eternal exterior discloses its true constitutive power, a constitutive power utterly irreducible and indivisible.

(ii) – *The Hegelian Response to Schelling*

An adequate response to Schelling's critique (his *Hegel-Kritik*) must consist in a re-reading of what Hegel understands presuppositionlessness itself to mean and how exactly it relates to philosophical science. Such a re-reading will attempt to demonstrate that the principle of presuppositionless beginning is not at all a demand for a regression to a primitive form of consciousness where there could be no other immanent possibility apart from silence. Indeed, if one concentrates solely upon the text of the *Science of Logic* (specifically its prefaces and introductions) a more

complex notion of presuppositionlessness emerges. Despite being absolutely justified extralogically by Hegel, the principle of a presuppositionless beginning pertains 'purely' to the methodological principle of the *Science of Logic* itself. Thus, given that Hegel conceives the *Science of Logic* as having no operative external methodological principle, its development must be radically autonomous and immanently self-determining. For Hegel pure logic must have no determinative principles outside of itself, it must be the pure articulation of thought *thinking itself*.

'What we are dealing with in logic is not a thinking *about* something which exists independently as a base for our thinking and apart from it, nor forms which are supposed to provide mere signs or distinguishing marks of truth; on the contrary, the necessary forms and self-determinations of thought are the content and the ultimate truth itself.'²⁹

It is important to understand how Hegel justifies this presuppositionless *Science of Logic* extralogically and prior to the initiation of purely immanent thought. Hegel's extralogical justifications are psychological, phenomenological, cultural, political and most importantly historical. The extent to which this principle of presuppositionless beginning is to be recognised as an extralogically mediated principle is demonstrated by Hegel's introductory remarks concerning the *Science of Logic*:

'The need to occupy oneself with pure thought presupposes that the human spirit must already have travelled a long road; it is, one may say, the need of the already satisfied need for the necessities to which it must have attained, the need of a condition free of needs, of abstraction from the material of intuition, imagination and so on, of the concrete interests of desire, instinct, will, in which material the determinations of thought are veiled and hidden. In the silent regions of thought which has come to itself and communes only with itself, the interests which move the lives of races and individuals are hushed.'³⁰

From this and other similar statements it is clear that for Hegel the *Science of Logic* is necessarily initiated from an 'elevated' standpoint brought about through the progress

²⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p.50

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.34

of philosophy or reason throughout history. For Hegel Logic consists in 'holding off the contingency of ordinary thinking and the arbitrary selection of particular grounds – or their opposites – as valid.'³¹ His comments appear to deny any possibility for regression to a prior standpoint of consciousness (albeit a basic primitive one) from where one could attempt to initiate a 'pure' and ahistorical logic. Rather, he argues that the 'purity' of logic itself emerges from an evolved and elevated philosophical standpoint. Thus it represents a complete move *away* from the historically discursive perspectives of consciousness and understanding. Therefore it represents a move beyond the realm of the externally bifurcating activity of consciousness (the history of which is outlined in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*) towards a pure internally self-differentiating logic of being. Thus for Hegel 'Spirit, after its labours over two thousand years, must have attained to a higher consciousness about its thinking and about its own pure, essential nature',³²

Presuppositionlessness for Hegel is clearly a principle concerned solely with logic in that it allows for the first time in history the development and articulation of a purely universal logic. However, it clearly remains a principle that has evolved from everything that has gone before, all of which, because of the emergence of such a principle, one is able to remove from having any active methodological influence upon the development of a logic. Once all that went before has been understood and recollected systematically it leads inevitably to an elevated standpoint whereby a presuppositionless beginning can be made. The demand for a presuppositionless beginning does not deny (through a demand for primitive regression) all that has gone before; thus it is not a *forgetting*. It does not represent the negation of the achievements of Spirit, of philosophy or reason, but is the conscious result of the systematic recollection of that progress. For Hegel the elevated standpoint permits the elevation of philosophical language to a point where a presuppositionless science (i.e., one free from determinate exterior methodological principles or the bifurcating activity of consciousness) becomes possible.

What clearly emerges from Hegel's introductory remarks concerning presuppositionlessness is a principle that is explicitly mediated by history, culture and

³¹ Ibid. pp. 58-9

³² Ibid. p. 49

philosophy, where the active mediating principle is the elevated language that develops within them. Hegel's notion of presuppositionlessness wears, as it were, its own presuppositions upon its sleeve; it is a principle explicitly aware of its mediated status as being absolutely crucial for its pure methodological application. In this sense, Schelling's claim to have exposed the hidden presuppositions of the active principle of presuppositionlessness itself is really quite beside the point. It thus remains to be shown that such explicit presuppositions crucial to the status of presuppositionlessness as an active principle are in fact imported as contaminating determinative factors into the *Science of Logic* itself. If such presuppositions can be shown as being imported into the *Science of Logic* and as operating there in a totally unjustified and arbitrary fashion, Hegel's claims for the immanence of the development of the logical categories themselves would indeed be violated. Having brought such presuppositions as language, intention, and the subject to the fore, Schelling claims to show the contamination of immanence in the most unconscious fashion. However a question remains as to whether Schelling is able to recognise the difference between those presuppositions that Hegel claims are in fact *necessary* to *mediate* the very emergence of presuppositionlessness, and their unconscious application and effect in the *Science of Logic*. Hegel claims to be able to separate such presuppositions from the very activity of presuppositionless thought by granting them, in his introductory remarks in the *Science of Logic*, a very precise status. They are, he claims, *self-sublating*:

'Pure knowing... has sublated all reference to an other and to mediation; it is without any distinction and as thus distinctionless, ceases itself to be knowledge; what is present is only simple immediacy... Here the beginning is made with being which is represented as having come to be through mediation, a mediation which is also a sublating of itself; and there is presupposed pure knowing as the outcome of finite knowing, of consciousness.'³³

To understand this point it will be necessary to consider the precise nature of the self-sublating mediated emergence of presuppositionlessness. This will entail an examination of the precise nature of the transition from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

³³ Ibid, pp.69-70

to the *Science of Logic* since, as Hegel writes: 'The Notion of pure science and its deduction is therefore presupposed in the present work in so far as the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is nothing other than the deduction of it.'³⁴

From Hegel's introductory remarks to the *Science of Logic* it is clear that he has no problem whatsoever in acknowledging the fact that the standpoint from which it is to begin is itself a 'result'. As such the 'beginning' presupposes a level of philosophical sophistication that has been brought about or mediated through history. These necessary mediations or presuppositions are characterised by Hegel as radically negative in character and are, he argues, self-sublating. By self-sublation Hegel simply means that the result that emerges reacts upon the presuppositions to negate or absorb them. Clearly the beginning of the *Science of Logic* must be itself presuppositionless, i.e. it must be indeterminate and must not presuppose any external methodological principles for its developmental progress. However, it clearly does not have to be (and indeed cannot be) devoid of any presuppositions whatsoever – it merely has to be free of those presuppositions that are epistemologically relevant to the logical realm, i.e. it has to be free of logical presuppositions. In order to understand how this distinction operates at the beginning of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, and how it is able ultimately to deflect some of Schelling's criticisms, it is necessary to consider the 'result' of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the immanent transition to the *Science of Logic*.

As we outlined in the first part of this thesis, phenomenology is distinct from philosophy in that it does not claim to be able to discover the truth of being purely from within itself. Rather, it considers what various forms of consciousness ordinarily take themselves and their objects to be, and thinks through the inconsistencies and contradictions inherent within the manifold ways consciousness and its objects appear to them. Thus phenomenology compares *beliefs* about the content and object of various forms of consciousness with the actuality of that content or object. Also it is not a 'method' as such, but rather a 'description' of the immanently self-determining dialectical process whereby various concrete forms of consciousness attempt to implement themselves and through experience discover themselves to be deficient,

³⁴ Ibid, p.49

and so transform themselves into another form of consciousness. This process is repeated with the essential truths of each stage being *preserved* in the transformation to the next stage of consciousness. This process is both determinate and progressive. We, the phenomenological observers, are merely there to 'look on', describe, and crucially, become aware of the immanently self-determining developmental continuity which is generated by the deconstruction of each concrete form of consciousness and its 'objects':

'In fact, in the alteration of the knowledge, the object itself alters for it too, for the knowledge that was present was essentially a knowledge of the object: as the knowledge changes, so too does the object, for it essentially belonged to this knowledge.'³⁵

The role of the phenomenologist is to discern the single 'golden' thread that unravels through the deconstruction of each form of concrete consciousness. The phenomenologist is neither to 'spin' the thread nor participate in its unravelling, but merely to discover and follow its own unravelling. At the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* the final concrete form of consciousness achieved, termed 'Absolute Knowledge' by Hegel (but which is also characterised by him as true philosophical consciousness itself), is to be recognised by the phenomenologist as the absolute culmination of the inherently intertwined continuity of all previous forms of consciousness. Absolute Knowledge must be understood if the meaning of the immanent transition to the *Science of Logic* is to be understood as the positing of an absolutely necessary presuppositionless beginning to the science of thought. Absolute knowledge transforms the *Phenomenology of Spirit* into a thesis or a propaedeutic concerning the precise nature of the relationship between Hegel's *Phenomenology* and *Science of Logic*. As W. Maker argues:

'We can understand the *Phenomenology* as a self-sublating mediation if it can be seen as beginning with a determinate thesis and culminating in its self-elimination...the topic of the *Phenomenology* is a thesis – a presupposition – about how to begin philosophical science. For, if the subject matter of the *Phenomenology* is a thesis

³⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, #85, p.54

about how to begin science, and if its outcome is a self-constituted rejection of this way of beginning, then...through this negative procedure of elimination the correct way of beginning science will have been made possible without being predetermined.³⁶

Hegel demonstrates the result of thinking that genuine philosophical science itself must be grounded in the certainty of a concrete form of consciousness. This demonstration emerges from the progressive recognition of a certain developmental continuity to the systematic deconstruction of each concrete form of consciousness' attempts to ground itself in self-certainty. Each form is demonstrated to be inherently self-refuting, and it is the demonstration of each of these forms' self-refutation that is the *Phenomenology of Spirit's* result. Hence a principle close to the heart of Western philosophy (namely the attempt by philosophical science to establish itself through a necessary determinate form of consciousness) is itself deconstructed. Determinate forms of consciousness are unable to achieve an ultimate location for grounding the structure of their own forms without simultaneously deconstructing it. This activity represents the very essence of the form of consciousness Hegel terms 'Absolute Knowledge' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This form of consciousness ultimately represents an absolute deconstruction of all *determinate* forms of consciousness in relation to philosophical science, and as such is the deconstruction of all forms of predetermination or presupposition regarding thought. This process of deconstruction (brought about solely by philosophical consciousness) is, as we outlined earlier, what Hegel terms 'self-accomplishing skepticism'. It is neither the result of an imposition nor an argument posited by the phenomenologist; rather it is merely the observation of the result of the development of each determinate form of consciousness. Hegel claims at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*:

'In this knowing, then, Spirit has concluded the movement in which it has shaped itself, in so far as this shaping was burdened with the difference of consciousness [i.e., of the latter from its object], a difference now overcome. Spirit has won the pure element of its existence, the Notion...Spirit, therefore, having won the Notion, displays its existence and movement in the ether of its life and is 'Science'. In this, the

³⁶ W. Maker, *Philosophy Without Foundations: Rethinking Hegel* (Albany: SUNY, 1994), pp.86-7

moments of its movement no longer exhibit themselves as specific shapes of consciousness, but – since consciousness's difference has returned into the Self – as 'Specific Notions' and as their organic self-grounded movement. Whereas in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* each moment is the difference of Knowledge and Truth, and is the movement in which that difference is cancelled, Science on the other hand does not contain this difference and the cancelling of it.³⁷

In Absolute Knowledge consciousness occupies its genuine element in that it is now capable of becoming pure self-relation. Consciousness/other distinctions that had plagued consciousness have been overcome at this point. Hegel is able to systematically demonstrate how each form of consciousness that instantiated any form of consciousness/other distinction immanently refutes itself and necessarily transforms itself into a different kind of consciousness. Consciousness at the point of Absolute Knowledge realises that thought's only genuine imperative is to *think itself in absolute purity*. Its first 'thought' must then be no more determinate than the mere thought of its own being, which is an absolutely indeterminate being, being in absolute immediacy. Hence the beginning delimited by the *Phenomenology of Spirit* for philosophical science is absolute pure indeterminacy, nothing more, nothing less. Maker writes:

'The *Logic* has a presupposition in the sense that the *Phenomenology* comes before and does something that, historically, needs to be done: it eliminates from scientific purview the notion of cognition according to which cognising must involve presupposing. The *Logic* does not have a presupposition in the sense Hegel claims it does not: its method, content, and scientific character are not predetermined just because what has come before (the *Logic*'s presupposition) has made possible a consideration free of such predeterminacy by articulating the self-elimination of the structure of predetermining.'³⁸

By understanding the complex series of mediations that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* presents together with their culmination and sublation in 'Absolute Knowledge' we are able to understand why it must be viewed as the *necessary presupposition* to

³⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Ibid.*, #805, pp.490-1

³⁸ W. Maker, *Ibid.*, p.93

beginning philosophical science *presuppositionlessly*. It also allows us to recognise the difficulties involved for Hegel's critics and how important it is for them to be able to demonstrate that residual elements to thought remain and operate as surreptitious methodological principles or hidden presuppositions in the *Science of Logic*. As we have already seen Schelling claims that contingently subjective elements such as language and logical relations operate surreptitiously within the *Science of Logic*.

A significant element of Schelling's criticisms of Hegel's presuppositionless logic is this claim that the very use of language to articulate it represents an unwarranted presupposition and has serious negative consequences for the notion of immanence. Schelling claims that language necessarily operates 'nostalgically' and imports 'memories' of its ordinary 'use' into everyday concrete reality. Given that everyday concrete realities are merely arbitrary constructions consisting of numerous illegitimate and unjustified metaphysical assumptions, Hegel's naive use of language inevitably imports traces of such arbitrariness into the *Science of Logic*, serving to contaminate its supposedly immanent development by introducing implicit traces of teleology. However, we will argue that such a claim fails to engage sufficiently with Hegel's own subtle and sophisticated claims regarding the essence of language as an adequate means developed for articulating genuinely presuppositionless science. Hegel writes in the preface to the *Science of Logic* that language is man's 'own peculiar nature'³⁹, and that the familiar forms of thought, 'displayed and stored in human language'⁴⁰, are themselves a necessary precondition or presupposition to genuine philosophical science 'gratefully acknowledged'. However, they are a necessary precondition or presupposition to philosophical science in precisely the same way that the history of the ordinary phenomenal forms of consciousness was, i.e. as *self-sublating* and essentially *non-determinative* for philosophical science.

Hegel acknowledges that everyday language is dominated by the grammar, arbitrary conventions and most importantly the metaphysical presuppositions of ordinary consciousness. However, in order to direct thought to pure categories of being language itself must be shown as a medium that in no way intrinsically determines what is expressed by its means. Whilst everyday language may be governed by

³⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p.31

⁴⁰ Ibid

grammar, arbitrary convention and contingent metaphysical presuppositions, consciousness is able to relinquish and set them aside thereby permitting a genuinely autonomous and immanent articulation of the logical categories of being. Thus, for Hegel, the implications and conventions of everyday language have to be 'discarded at its [philosophy's] portals':⁴¹

'This business consists in holding off the contingency of ordinary thinking and the arbitrary selection of particular grounds – or their opposites – as valid. But above all, thought acquires thereby self-reliance and independence. It becomes at home in abstractions and in progressing by means of Notions free from sensuous substrata, develops an unsuspected power of assimilating in rational form all the various knowledges and sciences in their complex variety, of grasping and retaining them in their essential character, stripping them of their external features and in this way extracting from them the logical element – or what is the same thing, filling the abstract basis of Logic acquired by study with the substantial content of absolute truth and giving it the value of a universal which no longer stands as a particular alongside other particulars but includes them all within its grasp and is their essence, the absolutely True.'⁴²

Given, as we have already shown, that the very *beginning* of the *Science of Logic* is an essentially mediated *result* (i.e. an elevated standpoint, the result of the self-sublation of oppositions in phenomenal consciousness) it is important to understand what the likely implications with regards to language are. Representative consciousness or thought (as demonstrated throughout the *Phenomenology of Spirit*) is affected by contingency and unjustified arbitrary presuppositions. By immanently overcoming representative consciousness or thought in 'Absolute Knowledge', consciousness relinquishes these ideas and perspectives to the point where it allows itself to become a thinking determined by nothing apart from truth. When this occurs, truth or being cease to be something 'other' than thinking consciousness itself since it no longer holds on to its own thoughts over against what truth or being requires it to think. Rather, it is now constituted as a thinking consciousness by the very truth or being that it *has* to think. Absolute Knowledge thus does not entail or require a

⁴¹ Ibid, p.45

⁴² Ibid, p.59

privileged access to being or truth, but the letting of the truth or the nature of being develop or unfold itself in thought alone. Thus, in Absolute Knowledge consciousness is able to articulate the realm of truly speculative philosophy, or pure science, as pure thought *thinking itself*.

It is important to realise that speculative language involves the relinquishing of associations, implications and conventions associated with everyday language. Hegel's speculative language does not merely operate at the level of a naïve and unacknowledged presupposition (as Schelling argues) but involves a developed ability to relinquish all the traditional associations, implications and conventions of everyday language from the very beginning of the *Science of Logic*. This developed ability to relinquish the contaminating features of everyday language is itself the result of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*'s articulation of the notion of Absolute Knowledge, whereby the oppositions of ordinary phenomenal consciousness and its prejudices are overcome. Thus:

'Pure science presupposes liberation from the opposition of consciousness. It contains thought in so far as this is just as much the object in its own self, or, the object in its own self in so far as it is equally pure thought.'⁴³

It is important to consider how Hegel claims speculative language itself operates when 'Spirit has won the pure element of its existence'⁴⁴; for him it is able to relinquish and set aside the presuppositions of conventional representational language. He claims that the *Science of Logic* is the articulation of pure intellectual self-relation, i.e. pure thought thinking itself, where all references to exteriority are dissolved, relinquished or 'sublated' in the self-overcoming process of all consciousness/other structures in Absolute Knowledge. Thus language itself (purged of all representational presuppositions) comes to articulate what the categories of pure thought *are* without any reference to an 'other'. It has thus become *speculative, non-representational* and *non-metaphysical*. Speculative language is a language capable of articulating a science of thought that is utterly presuppositionless and in no way reliant upon 'memories' of the contingent associations, conventions and presuppositions present

⁴³ Ibid. p.49

⁴⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, #805, p.491

within everyday language. Speculative thought (because of its evolved status) is simply able to relinquish all contaminating traces from its discourse and merely attend to and articulate the truth of pure thought itself.

'All that is needed to ensure that the beginning remains immanent in its scientific development is to consider, or rather, ridding oneself of all other reflections and opinions whatever, simply to take up, *what is there before us*. Pure knowing as concentrated into this unity has sublated all reference to an other and to mediation.'⁴⁵

Having shown how Hegel argues that the beginning of philosophical science presupposes a sufficiently developed language for adequately expressing what he terms 'speculative propositions' we will proceed by briefly examining how it functions in Hegel's *Science of Logic*, specifically how it succeeds from the very beginning in articulating the immanently self-determining emergence of the categories Being, Nothing and Becoming *without* necessarily involving the operation of contingent subjectivity as Schelling claims.

Within the speculative language developed within the *Science of Logic*, the subject and predicate terms, e.g. (A) and (B), are distinguished from the terms of a proposition with sensuous content. In 'ordinary' propositions the subject term (A) refers to a given Subject and the Predicate (B) characterises that Subject term (A) in a particular way. However, in speculative language the two terms, (A) and (B), become moments of an identity statement. Such a statement does not claim to state or establish that (B) is a quality or aspect of a given Subject (A); rather it claims that one category (A) is to be recognised as *identical* to (B). Such an identity is 'speculative' in the sense that it incorporates a necessary moment of 'difference' within this identity. Thus, although (A) and (B) are to be recognised as identical they are also to be simultaneously recognised to be different. In the speculative proposition the distance between (A) and (B) that exists in an ordinary proposition is therefore dissolved. Both terms are considered identical because the Predicate term (B) establishes what the essence of the Subject term (A) is. Difference emerges by one universal term, the Predicate term (B), establishing what the intrinsic essence of the other term, the

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.69

Subject term (A), is. It establishes that which the mere Subject term (A) cannot express, and which remains unexpressed until the Predicate term (B) is established. The Predicate term (B) is then itself a Subject in that it expresses the very essence of the original Subject term (A). (B) thus expresses what (A) essentially is. In speculative language the concreteness of the Subject term dissolves into being itself expressed by a Predicate term. The Predicate term does not function as in ordinary language, i.e. to supplement our knowledge of the Subject term by acting as an external addition; rather, it acts to subtract from the Subject term, i.e. it removes the original concreteness of the Subject term. However, it is a subtraction from the Subject term that can be negated by examination of what the Predicate term actually expresses or establishes. Speculative language transports thought, via the Predicative term (B), to reconsider the intrinsic complexity of the original Subject term (A) itself. Thought loses its initial abstract certainty in the concrete Subject term and, for Hegel, only an immanent articulation of the nature of thought in speculative language is able to recover the sense of certainty lost in the first speculative transition.

From the perspective of Negative philosophy, Schelling argues, thought's fundamental role is merely to determine 'what' something is through the use of predicates. Thus to determine something in thought is merely to attribute a predicate term to it, thereby establishing further what (A) is, i.e. being that cannot *not* be. Thought alone, Schelling claims, cannot bring before itself the very 'thatness' of (A). His move into Positive philosophy entails a suspension of thought's activity as *determining* and *attributing propositions* to being, and *simply positing necessary* existence as exterior to it. However, Hegel's development of a speculative language clearly does not demonstrate this characterisation of thought. For Hegel pure thought is not restricted to merely establishing abstract propositions or negative determinations of being; rather, thought *is* being itself, articulated through pure logical speculative reason. Thus, at the beginning of the *Science of Logic*, thought *is* being as pure indeterminate being:

'Being, pure being, without any further determination. In its indeterminate immediacy it is equal only to itself.'⁴⁶

⁴⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p.82

And:

'Pure being makes the beginning, because it is pure thought as well as the undetermined, simple immediate, [and because] the first beginning cannot be anything mediated and further determined.'⁴⁷

Schelling argues that this thought of pure being is merely the most minimal concept reason can attempt to think. However, as a merely empty concept it is recognised as the thought of nothing. It is a static tautology for Schelling precisely because he judges the statement 'Being is Nothing' to have the structure of a mere predicate statement and therefore to essentially *state* nothing. Pure being is equivalent to pure nothing from which nothing could immanently emerge; utter stasis is the only result from such a beginning. At this point Schelling invokes the structural necessity of hidden and contingent subjectivity as the force propelling *Science of Logic* forward. However, for Hegel the beginning of the *Science of Logic* with pure being is not first the thought of nothing but in fact the thought of *pure being*, the thought of what is 'without any further determination'. For Hegel this *pure being*, being without determination, is experienced by thought first as *nothing* then *becoming*. Schelling argues that the thought of being as becoming emerges precisely because the utter stasis of the thought of pure being as nothing necessitates the arbitrary introduction, by a thinking subject's 'nostalgia' of its memory of concrete situatedness, a situation from which it has abstracted. For Hegel, however, the thought of pure being develops *immanently* into the thought of becoming precisely and *only* because the thought of pure being immediately vanishes into the thought of nothing:

'There is nothing to be intuited in it...Being, the indeterminate immediate, is in fact nothing, and neither more nor less than nothing.'⁴⁸

And:

⁴⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic*, #86, p.136

⁴⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p.82

'This pure being is the pure abstraction, and hence it is the absolutely negative, which when taken immediately, is equally nothing.'⁴⁹

It is purely an immanent movement in thought and as such in no way relies upon the surreptitious imposition of teleology through 'memory' in the way Schelling claims. By attempting to merely think pure *being* thought vanishes into the thought of pure nothing. Thus by thinking pure being one immediately thinks pure nothing, and this represents an immanent transition to a *different* notion than pure being, which pure being vanishes into. Clearly this transition articulates the efforts of pure thought and represents a genuinely immanent movement in thought. Teleology, for Hegel, clearly plays no role in the transition. Thought now attempts to think the developed notion of pure nothing:

'Nothing, pure nothing: it is simply equality with itself, complete emptiness, absence of all determination and content – undifferentiatedness in itself.'⁵⁰

In attempting to think the notion of pure nothing thought discovers itself thinking the notion of pure being and thus immediately vanishes back into that notion. A distinction does initially emerge between pure being and pure nothing in that 'it counts as a distinction whether something or nothing is intuited or thought'⁵¹, but it is a distinction that immediately vanishes when thought. In the thought of pure nothing 'nothing is (exists) in our intuiting or thinking; or rather it is empty intuition and thought itself, and the same empty intuition or thought as pure being.'⁵² By attempting to think pure nothing thought vanishes immediately into the thought of pure being:

'Nothing is, therefore, the same determination, or rather absence of determination, and thus altogether the same as, pure being.'⁵³

We therefore have a speculative proposition, 'Being is Nothing', in which the two terms, although conceptually differentiated in thought, cannot in fact be held apart by

⁴⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic*, #87, p.139

⁵⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p.82

⁵¹ *Ibid*

⁵² *Ibid*

⁵³ *Ibid*

thought, and therefore form an identity; i.e. that which defines being also therefore appears to define nothing. They are thus conceptually differentiated in that thought necessarily moves from thinking being (what *is*) to thinking nothing (what *is not*) and from nothing to being. This movement, which is an immediate vanishing movement of one into another, indicates that they are conceptually differentiated but that thought cannot keep them apart. Thought must either remain at the level of this eternal vacillation or come to consider the very *movement* itself by which one vanishes immediately into the other and then immediately back into the other. This process of immediate vanishing (this vacillation) is an identity, but certainly not a static one. Therefore it is not as Schelling characterises it, but is a genuinely immanent self-determined movement. It is from this movement in unity that thought is able to discern the emergence of the concept of becoming. Thus:

'Their truth is, therefore, this movement of the immediate vanishing of the one in the other: becoming, a movement in which both are distinguished, but by a difference which has equally immediately resolved itself.'⁵⁴

Thought, by coming to focus upon this *movement*, is able to immanently discern a notion of that which enables the two categories of pure nothing and pure being to be themselves *differentiated* as related *moments* of becoming. The movement described here from *being* to *nothing* to *becoming* is a purely immanent one and clearly does not involve the interpolation of a notion of the 'not yet real being' or 'being to come' by contingent subjectivity. Indeed if one examines properly the very notion of the 'not yet real being' (which Schelling claims is present in Hegel's text and operates surreptitiously in its movement) one discovers that it occurs in Hegel's *Encyclopaedia Logic* rather than the *Science of Logic*. More importantly it does not occur within what counts as the purely immanent articulation of the movement of being. Schelling fails to recognise the presence of two very distinct elements in Hegel's logical texts, and as such he fails to recognise the very character of Hegel's statement concerning the 'not yet real being' in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*. The first element of Hegel's logical texts consist of propositions articulated and developed within a purely speculative language free from the presuppositions associated with ordinary language. Thus it is this

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.83

language that serves to articulate the purely immanent logical movement of thought. As we have shown, Hegel claims that such a language is able to operate presuppositionlessly and develop speculatively. The second element, clearly distinguished by Hegel, serves merely as a type of reflective commentary upon the immanent logical development itself. Here the language he uses is not purely speculative but more ordinary. To a certain extent it is a language engaged and embedded within the philosophical tradition. Thus Hegel constantly compares and contrasts his own logical development with that tradition, and often attempts to clarify the purely speculative logical development by contrasting it with everyday notions. The two types of language are in an entirely *one-way* relation whereby the reflective element clearly relates to the immanent logical articulation as clarification, but the logical articulation itself is entirely independent. Thus, the immanent logic is not influenced, affected, assisted or moved by any aspect of the reflective considerations whatsoever since it has relinquished all such associations. Hegel clearly states in the introductory remarks on the *Science of Logic* that he will constantly make use of 'reasoned and historical explanations and reflections to make accessible to ordinary thinking the point of view from which this science is to be considered'⁵⁵, and acknowledges that:

'Such reflections may facilitate a general view and thereby an understanding of the development, but they also have the disadvantage of appearing as unjustified assertions, grounds and foundations for what is to follow. They should therefore not be taken for more than they are supposed to be and should be distinguished from what is a moment in the development of the subject matter itself.'⁵⁶

Schelling fails to recognise or acknowledge the dual textuality of the *Science of Logic* and is unable to distinguish the speculative language in which the logical development is itself articulated from the ordinary language in which his clarifying remarks are made. Indeed Schelling's identification of a claim made by Hegel with regards to the 'not yet real being' (a claim that Schelling argues reveals an implicit teleology at work within the logical articulation itself) actually occurs within a reflective remark made by Hegel upon the opening triadic movement of being to nothing to becoming.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.43

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.110

His remark is made in comments upon Section 88 of the *Encyclopaedia Logic* regarding the concept of 'beginning':

'The *beginning*, the matter [itself] *is not yet* in its beginning, but the beginning is not merely its *nothing*: on the contrary, its *being* is already there, too. The beginning itself is also becoming, but it expresses already the reference to the further progression.'⁵⁷

These comments concern Hegel's response as to why logic cannot begin purely with the notion of *beginning*. For Hegel the notion of *beginning* implicitly contains a reference to 'further progression', thus the notion of *beginning* implies the non-immanently derived, and therefore presupposed, notion of *becoming*. Clearly the example of *beginning* that Hegel proceeds to give (an example containing the notion of the 'not yet real being') is one chosen from *ordinary* thinking in order to illustrate the involvement of the notions of being, nothing and becoming in it. It is a notion of *beginning* from ordinary thinking cited to assist in the comprehension of the *pure speculative* thought of being, nothing and becoming, and to show why Hegel does not begin with the idea of 'beginning' but with 'pure being'. Hegel claims that such notions can be recognised within an ordinary (i.e. non-speculative) notion of *beginning*, a notion containing presuppositions. In such a notion the 'matter [itself] *is not yet* in its beginning'.⁵⁸ Hegel is merely attempting to demonstrate that the pure immanent abstract notions of being, nothing and becoming, and their unity, can be discerned already at the level of ordinary thought, and the purpose of such a demonstration is to assist the reader in the comprehension of the pure speculative *Science of Logic*:

'It is easy to say that we do not comprehend the unity of being and nothing... But what is understood by 'comprehension' is often something more than the concept in the proper sense; what is desired is a more diversified, a richer consciousness, a notion such that this sort of 'concept' can be presented as a concrete case of it, with which thinking in its ordinary practice would be more familiar. Insofar as the inability to comprehend only expresses the fact that one is not used to holding onto abstract thoughts without any sensible admixture or to the grasping of speculative

⁵⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic*, #88, remark 3, p. 143

⁵⁸ *Ibid*

propositions, all we can say is that philosophical knowing is indeed quite diverse in kind from the knowing that we are used to in everyday, just as it is diverse from what prevails in the other sciences too. But if noncomprehension only means that one cannot represent the unity of being and nothing, this is really so far from being the case, that on the contrary everyone has an infinite supply of notions of this unity; saying that one has none can only mean that one does not [re]cognise the present concept in any of those notions, and one does not know them to be examples of it.⁵⁹

An analogous discussion takes place in the introduction to the *Science of Logic* where Hegel considers an alternative demand for a beginning, a beginning *otherwise* than with indeterminate being. Such a demand may take the form, he argues, 'that a pure beginning be made. In that case, we have nothing but the beginning itself, and it remains to be seen what this is...thus we should have nothing at all beyond the general idea of a mere beginning as such. We have therefore only to see what is contained in such an idea'.⁶⁰ In thinking the bare notion of beginning, he argues, one recognises that it contains certain logical implications, and as such is clearly opposed to his notion of a genuinely presuppositionless beginning. The bare notion of beginning implies that there is nothing, but that there is something to come; it is therefore illegitimately teleological. 'The beginning is not pure nothing, but a nothing from which something is to proceed'.⁶¹ For Hegel the attempt or demand to begin with a bare notion of beginning implies an unwarranted 'not yet', 'the beginning points to something else – it is a non-being which carries a reference to being as to an other; that which begins, as yet is not, it is on the way to being'.⁶² It implies or merely refers to this 'not yet' because it already contains an unwarranted moment of mediation, and as such does not display a genuinely immanent internal speculative relation. Such a beginning, by already carrying with it a reference to the 'not yet', contains a relation within itself already; it is clearly an illegitimate relation from the perspective of presuppositionlessness and cannot display the type of genuine immanent and internal self-relatedness that Hegel will attempt to demonstrate within the articulation of an authentic immanent logic. Thus he claims:

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p.73

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Ibid, pp.73-4

'The beginning ought not itself to be already – first and an other; for anything which is in its own self a first and an other implies that an advance has already been made.'⁶³

Thus, it is clear that Schelling's argument that the principle of the 'not yet real being' operates as an implicit arbitrary teleology for the *Science of Logic* is based upon a fundamental misreading of the text. We can also recognise that Schelling's criticisms of Hegel's beginning in the *Science of Logic* are seriously flawed, i.e. he attacks supposedly unacknowledged presuppositions that Hegel already acknowledged; he misunderstands the self-sublating status of such presuppositions; he misunderstands the elevated status of the *Science of Logic's* presuppositionless beginning; he misunderstands the role of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in the development of a pure speculative language, a language elevated from representational language; and he mischaracterizes Hegel's own reflective comments upon the *Science of Logic* and conflates them with the logical articulation itself. All of these flaws together with his flawed characterisation of the *Science of Logic's* opening development suggest that Hegel can, to a considerable extent, be recovered from Schelling's attack. However, we must also recognise that Schelling's critique of Hegel, despite its obvious flaws in the shape of misreadings, misinterpretations and misrepresentations of Hegel, attempts to posit a distinctive skeptical strategy taken up by many other post-Hegelian thinkers. Such a distinctive strategy is identified by an *insistence* upon a pre-originary realm or site that is exterior to and the condition of speculative reason, upon which the challenge can be maintained. This pre-originary site and the subject's irreducible relationship to it - i.e. the subject's concrete situatedness within actuality - provide the touchstones for this critical form of skepticism. It is as if the primordial site of the Real, irreducible to reason, functions as an irreparable tear or derangement in the very fabric of speculative reason. This tear serves the philosopher who insists upon demonstrating how the Real persistently destabilises, disturbs, disrupts and undoes the stable fabric of the speculative totality of reason. The Real, for Schelling, acts like a thorn in the side of speculative reason, a thorn that it cannot ever forget, ignore or remove.

⁶³ Ibid, p.75

From Hegel's perspective Schelling's skepticism of reason remains an uncritical, dogmatic and naïve form of empiricism or materialism unless Schelling is able to demonstrate the presence of irreducible and conditioning traces of the Real within the very specific type of Negative philosophy that Hegel's speculative idealism represents. Schelling acknowledges that Hegel's philosophy pursues an absolute understanding of the Real, i.e. that it is an idealist ontology. However, for Schelling, Hegel's idealist ontology cannot articulate the Real in pure thought other than in negative terms. It is unable to reach the Real. There remains an utterly irreducible ontological difference between ideated being and Real being or actuality. However, the only way Schelling can critically sustain such a difference is through being skeptical of Hegel, i.e. by demonstrating precisely how positive ontology pre-originally conditions Hegel's claims for a purely self-determining and immanent idealist ontology. By doing this Schelling would be able to demonstrate that the irreducibility of the pre-original Real emerges as a necessary excess *within* immanence itself. Such a demonstration would go some way to defending him from claims that his Positive philosophy of the Real relies upon naïve, uncritical and dogmatic presuppositions. As Hegel writes:

'I have been only too often and too vehemently attacked by opponents who were incapable of making the simple reflection that their opinions and objections contain categories which are presuppositions and which themselves need to be criticised first before they are employed...there is something stupid – I can find no other word for it – about this didactic behaviour.'⁶⁴

As we have attempted to show, however, Schelling's efforts to demonstrate the presence of the conditioning excess of the Real in Hegel's *Science of Logic* fail. His actual engagement with Hegel's logic and his efforts to try and sustain the conditioning presence of the Real *within* yet *beyond* speculative logic and reason rely upon a number of misconceptions and misrepresentations of it. Schelling's failure to sufficiently engage critically with Hegel's logic renders his persistent skepticism of speculative idealism and reason somewhat didactic, dogmatic and uncritical. Thus all that appears to ground his own insistence upon the positivity of the Real and an ontological difference between pure thought and Real being is his own didactic

⁶⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p.41

subjectivity. Schelling's skepticism begins to resemble the type of dogmatic, external and subjective skepticism which, as we have seen, Hegel analysed in his work and showed to be philosophically unsustainable. The immediate development of Schelling's insights and his skeptical strategy emerged within the 'Young' or 'Left' Hegelians (most notably Feuerbach) and Kierkegaard's anti-Hegelianism. We will argue that by understanding the development and refinement of these distinct skeptical approaches to Hegel we will be better placed to understand how they continue to inform and be mobilised within Levinas's anti-Hegelianism, the subject of the third part of this thesis. We will begin this effort by proceeding to examine in some detail the development of Feuerbach's skeptical challenge to Hegel's idealism as a radicalised notion of empiricism.

II - Feuerbach and the Persistence of Sensible Singularity

(i) — *Sensible Singularity and Skepticism*

In his study of Hegelianism from 1805-1841, J.E. Toews⁶⁵ notes that during the 1820's one of Hegel's own pupils called Bachmann began to have and express grave doubts towards Hegel's system of idealism as a 'therapeutic reconciliation' of reason and reality. Bachmann's doubts are significant for they initiate from within the very citadel of Hegelian idealism itself a revolt against what Hegel took to be the impetus toward and ultimate need for reconciliation in philosophy and culture. Bachmann denied that the presence of the universal in religious life could ever, or perhaps more significantly, *should* ever be fully appropriated by thought or indeed expressed in philosophical or logical *Begriffe*. Bachmann insisted that there remained an irreducible and persistent irrational element that could never be fully articulated in the self-conscious reality of the state, and crucially, as Toews notes, 'an irreducible "otherness" to the absolute experienced in religious feeling that philosophical concepts could not mediate or comprehend.'⁶⁶ Toews notes that toward the end of the 1820's Bachmann was joined by a group of young philosophers and theologians also skeptical of Hegel's absolute reconciliation achieved through the speculative dialectic of thought and being. They demanded, as Toews notes, 'a progressive development of philosophy "beyond" Hegel's allegedly "abstract system"'.⁶⁷ What occurred within their arguments, discussions and publications between the 1820's and the 1840's, with their attempts to go 'beyond' Hegel, arguably continues to have a very profound and significant (albeit indirect) impact upon the entire anti-Hegelian tradition of late 19th and 20th century philosophy.

For the early Feuerbach the advent of Hegel's philosophy completes the long arduous dialectical journey of Spirit. The task of philosophy now was essentially to rationalise the world according to Hegelian doctrine. In the final transition from theology to Absolute Reason Feuerbach argues (along with other young Hegelians) that the redemption of the world through incarnate reason is finally at hand. The task of

⁶⁵ J.E. Toews, *Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805-1841* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980)

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.79

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.80

philosophy is to implement genuine reconciliation in the manner advocated by Hegel. Indeed, it was precisely this movement from religious *Vorstellungen* to philosophical *Begriffe* that concerned Bachmann, Feuerbach and other Young Hegelians, and they set about what they saw as the necessary task of secularising eschatological Christianity. In order to understand Feuerbach's subsequent skepticism regarding Hegelian speculative idealism, and his evolution of a thoroughly empirical philosophy based on sense perception as the primary source of cognition, it is important to understand the way Feuerbach comes to comprehend and articulate a realm beyond Hegel's speculative idealism. We will see that such a fracture is initially articulated in the understanding of religion developed by Feuerbach, and how it becomes developed in texts directly critical of Hegel. We will begin by considering in detail two of Feuerbach's texts where this skepticism of Hegel becomes most explicit – the 1839 essay 'Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy' and the 1843 book *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*.

By the late 1830's Feuerbach's thought develops to the point where he, like Bachmann, becomes increasingly skeptical concerning the orthodox Hegelian view of religion. He argues for the freedom and independence of philosophy from religion (for him the essence of religion resides outside the sphere of reason) by claiming that the proper sphere of religion is 'feeling'. For Hegel 'feeling' is merely the lowest form and least satisfactory vehicle in which to express the genuine content of religion. By situating the very essence of religion back in the sphere of 'feeling' Feuerbach implicitly challenges Hegel's view, and by delimiting the essence of religion to the realm of 'feeling' he attempts to articulate a skeptical fracture within the systematic totality of reason. This skeptical fracture becomes an all-encompassing abyss as he proceeds to articulate further elements 'beyond' reason. This widening of the abyss rests upon Feuerbach's growing contention that genuine reality lies in the concrete, particular, individual being. It is this conviction that allows Feuerbach to believe he is able to generate a skeptical opposition to the Hegelian perspective that holds the universal to be the sole mark of reality.

Following Strauss's published rejection of the Hegelian notion of Christian incarnation in 1835, Feuerbach too rejects the very possibility of the incarnation of 'infinite' Absolute Reason within any finite historical individual such as Christ. This

rejection together with a reformulated understanding of the essence of Christianity represents a fundamental and significant break with Hegel's speculative ontology and initially provides Feuerbach and the other Left Hegelians with a supposedly legitimate strategy for moving *beyond* Hegel. By both rejecting the Hegelian notion of incarnation and delimiting a realm outside of Hegel's system they are able to articulate a skeptical opposition. The redescription of incarnation by Feuerbach involves reconceiving the life of Christ as a figure disclosive of the essence of reason, not as the immanent self-enclosed movement towards an absolute reconciliation with the divine, but as the immanent telos of a human existence in relation to sensuous reality. For Feuerbach the telos of world history is not to be conceived along the lines of the Hegelian presupposition of idealism and the need for an absolute reconciliation between a transcendent God and man, the infinite and the finite, but as the actualisation and self-comprehension of man's inherent capacities and powers. This is what Feuerbach understands by 'species-being' and man's relation to sensuous reality. For Feuerbach Hegel's philosophy represents merely the ongoing theological tradition of mystifying finite sensuous reality into an element of divinity, (albeit one configured by Hegel as able to be ultimately reconciled with the human through speculative reason). Hegel is understood by Feuerbach to merely perpetuate the tradition of obscuring the genuine element of man's species-being and the true nature of his relation to sensuous reality.

A clear overview of the essence of Feuerbach's mature challenge to Hegelian idealism is provided by two of his texts, first 'Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy', published in 1839 and then *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*⁶⁸, published in 1843. In both texts Feuerbach claims that the universal in Hegel's speculative idealism is only a concept, abstraction, or merely a word, rather than reality itself. He argues that one can never absolutely unite the particular (which belongs to real existence) with the general (which belongs to thought alone); there remains, he claims, 'an immense difference...between the 'this' as an object of abstract thought and the 'this' as an object of reality.'⁶⁹ In both of these texts it is the particularity of concrete being that becomes the criterion for genuine philosophy; genuine philosophy

⁶⁸ L. Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, translated by M. Vogel (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1986)

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, #28, p.43

must strive to preserve, express and represent that particularity. For Feuerbach it is only able to do this if its prime organon of cognition is *sense perception*, since it is only through sense perception that we are able to grasp concrete and true reality (the genuinely *otherwise than* thought). As we earlier outlined, Hegel's idealism is characterised by Feuerbach as *pure* thought which 'overlaps its opposite', 'claims for itself what belongs not to itself but to being'⁷⁰, and by doing so is fundamentally mistaken. That is not to say that Feuerbach's philosophy can be easily dismissed as irrational sensualism or naïve empiricism, since, even for Feuerbach the radical task of philosophy remains one of articulating the judgments regarding concrete and true reality in intellectual terms.⁷¹ Philosophical and theoretical practice can only become *real* and *objective*, Feuerbach claims, if it is fundamentally grounded, determined and rectified by sensuous perception. We will return to this aspect of Feuerbach's work later in this chapter.

In these texts Feuerbach attempts to bring a radically skeptical opposition to bear upon what he sees as the very principle of Hegelian idealism, i.e. the speculative identity of thought and being. For him the reality of being lies in the *concrete* and *particular* object rather than in the pure universal thought that claims to encompass and subsume in itself, and indeed claims to be, the whole of reality. Feuerbach writes:

'A being that is not distinguished from thought and that is only a predicate or a determination of reason is only an ideated and abstracted being; but in truth it is not being.'⁷²

Feuerbach argues that Being must be radically reconfigured as a notion of determinate being independent of, and preceding, the activity of thought. This determinate being is pre-originary and prior to the activity of thought itself, and as such cannot be

⁷⁰ Ibid, #29, p.44

⁷¹ Indeed it is precisely this that remains Feuerbach's fault for Marx. In the 'Theses on Feuerbach' Marx writes, 'The chief defect of all previous materialism (including Feuerbach's) is that the object, reality, what we apprehend through our senses, is understood only in the form of *object* or *contemplation*; but not as *sensuous human activity*, as *practice*; not subjectively... Hence in *The Essence of Christianity*, he sees only the theoretical attitude as the true human attitude, while practice is understood and established only in its dirty Jewish manifestation. He therefore does not comprehend the significance of "revolutionary", of "practical-critical" activity.', *The Portable Karl Marx*, ed. E. Kamenka, (London: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 155

⁷² Ibid, #24, p.38

legitimately reduced, through the activity of thought, to merely 'ideated' abstract being. For Feuerbach such an understanding of real determinate being emerges from within sense perception. Sense perception leads to a fundamentally dualistic worldview in which an irreducible object persistently confronts the subject in a manner otherwise than and irreducible to thought. He argues that no synthesis can legitimately mediate the chasm between the subject and object (whereby an elevated identity of the two might be attained). Rather, Feuerbach argues that it is the very essence of sense perception (when considered properly) to lacerate the self-satisfied identity of thought and being.

The sensible object has its own irreducible and determinate reality which cannot be mediated by thought into a higher or more concretely universal reality. Thus, the sensible particular cannot be *reduced* to having the status of a merely transitory moment in the rational and interior process of speculative thought. Feuerbach argues that the sensible object is *ultimate, independent, exterior*, and *faces* the subject. The subject does not determine the object through thought; rather, the *object* is always *radically self-determining*. Sense perception, Feuerbach argues, fundamentally *honours* and *preserves* the radical independence of the sensible object by conforming to it. For Feuerbach the object becomes reconfigured as the determining factor of the subject, rather than the other way around. Thus, only by passively exposing oneself to the radical independence of the sensible object is one able to receive the 'truth of reality'.

Feuerbach attempts to reconceive the subject on the basis of sense perception, i.e. as a fundamentally *passive* agent largely determined by its natural environment. Man is fundamentally unable to alter the status of the radical exteriority of nature and consequently remains fundamentally and irreducibly determined by it. He argues that man's essential liberation and fulfilment cannot come from any Hegelian idealist reconciliation but must come from an interior reorientation of man's consciousness instead. Thus, man must remove the mystified notion of divinity and the hypostatisation of abstract notions. As such it is, therefore, not man *as he is* and nature *as it is* that requires transformation, only the illusions of traditional ontotheology - illusions perpetuated by Hegelian idealism - that oppress and deform man's species-being and its relation to nature.

Clearly Feuerbach's skeptical opposition to Hegel's idealism builds upon many of the insights originally developed by Schelling. Like Schelling, Feuerbach is concerned with opposing Hegel's supposed identity of being and thought by arguing that it is an unwarranted presupposition that functions to obscure the exteriority of real being by configuring it as merely 'ideated' being and interiorising it within the speculative dialectic. Feuerbach asks wryly whether proceeding by means of such a presupposition Hegel is really able to demonstrate philosophy as the absolute truth 'so that it can no longer be doubted, so that skepticism is reduced once and for all to absurdity?'⁷³ Hegel's reconciliation, he argues, is not a genuine reconciliation that successfully overcomes the *real* differences between two distinct and independent entities. Such reconciliation is merely a presupposition underpinning Hegel's entire philosophy from the very beginning. Thus his reconciliation is only ever possible, Feuerbach argues, because there is never a genuine reconciliation to be made. By beginning and ending with thought Hegel's reconciliation is entirely enacted within the confines of abstract thought, and does not represent a genuine reconciliation between thought *and* real being:

'Hegel started from the assumption of Absolute Identity right from the earliest beginnings of his philosophical activity. The idea of Absolute Identity, or of the Absolute, was simply an objective truth for him. It was not just a truth for him, but absolute truth, the Absolute Idea itself – absolute, that is, beyond all doubt and above all criticism and skepticism.'⁷⁴

Thus, Feuerbach claims, in Hegel the 'otherness' of thought (the sensible object) is *always already* within thought; thinking and its differentiation, the 'otherness' of thought, is thus within thought. Hegel's reconciliation of thought and being merely demonstrates the *self-sufficiency* of thought within a rational system. What Hegel really claims is that thought alone is 'real':

⁷³ L. Feuerbach, 'Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy', translated by Zawar Hanfi in *The Literary Brook: Selected Writings of Ludwig Feuerbach* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972) p. 112

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-9

'Hegel is a realist, but a purely idealistic realist or, rather, an abstract realist; he is a realist in the abstraction from all reality. He negates thought, namely, abstract thought; but the negation is itself within abstract thought so that the negation of abstraction is itself an abstraction...Hegel is a thinker who surpasses himself in thought; he wants to grasp the thing itself, but in the thought of the thing. He wants to be apart from thought, but within thought itself – hence the difficulty in comprehending the 'concrete' notion.'⁷⁵

Feuerbach rejects the legitimacy of 'presupposing' a principle of the identity of thought and being. It is not that Hegel fails to satisfactorily demonstrate such an identity, but rather that the principle itself is utterly untenable. For Feuerbach being and thought are utterly incommensurable, and Hegel's immanent articulation of their identity proves to be the immanent identity of *thought* and *ideated being*, or merely thought's self-identity. Such self-identity is, Feuerbach claims, presupposed by Hegel from the very beginning:

'Hegel in his heart of hearts was convinced of the certainty of the Absolute Idea. In this regard, there was nothing of the critic or the skeptic in him.'⁷⁶

Here an important element of Feuerbach's criticisms of Hegel becomes clear. By demonstrating Hegel's presupposition of the absolute identity between thought and being Feuerbach shows how Hegel *fails* to be genuinely skeptical. By claiming to have discovered this blind spot of Hegelian idealism (i.e. real being), a blind spot that prevents him from being genuinely philosophically critical, Feuerbach is indeed very close and greatly indebted to Schelling. However, it is worthwhile looking in some detail at an essay Feuerbach wrote and published some four years before *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*. This essay, entitled 'Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy', greatly illuminates the way in which he reaches these skeptical conclusions regarding Hegel's idealism in the *Principles*, and demonstrates substantial differences from Schelling in actually reaching them.

⁷⁵ L. Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, #30, pp.48-9

⁷⁶ L. Feuerbach, 'Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy', p.115

The essay itself consists of a number of complex and interrelated issues that we should begin by identifying and separating. There is an initial critique of the Hegelian claim to an Absolute philosophy and the claim that it is absolute because it is presuppositionless. From this initial critique Feuerbach develops an instrumental understanding of philosophical theory. For Feuerbach philosophical ideas are never in themselves the Absolute *end* of philosophy; thus philosophical ideas can never represent the actual structure of reality, but are merely *instruments* of enquiry into reality. Consequently, to identify a particular philosophical theory or system with the Absolute truth of reality (as Hegel's philosophy appears to) represents a fundamental confusion for Feuerbach. Such a philosophy, he claims, merely hypostatizes the *means* as the *object* of philosophy, i.e. *reality*. For Feuerbach Hegel's *Science of Logic* and *Phenomenology of Spirit* perfectly exemplify this confusion, i.e. the *Science of Logic's* claim for an absolute 'beginning' with the thought of Pure Being as 'Being' itself, and the *Phenomenology of Spirit's* substitution of the thought of sense awareness for actual sense awareness. Feuerbach then argues that Hegelianism should be considered the final and most abstract form of an idealist tradition marked by a progressive hypostatisation of self-consciousness. Feuerbach concludes his critique of Hegel with a radical proposal for a new philosophy based on what he terms *human species knowledge*. For Feuerbach human species knowledge is understood as a genuine dialogue of reason with reality that represents a move beyond the idealist tradition. For Feuerbach post-idealist philosophy must recognise that the basis of all human experience is sensuous rather than primarily theoretical. Idealism's efforts to transcend and efface this primary sensuousness resulted in a blind anthropomorphism, i.e. the hypostatisation of human categories as if they were objective or transhuman categories, and must, Feuerbach claims, be rejected.

Feuerbach's initial discussion of Hegel in the paper concentrates upon the *Science of Logic*. By critically examining the *Logic's* claims to be an Absolute philosophy he seeks to delimit its role to that of an *instrument* or a mirror for the recognition of one's own thought activity, i.e. as 'the picture gallery of reason'.⁷⁷ The logical system cannot, he claims, be reason itself but merely its limited outward form. To confuse this formal *representation* with the material fact of reason (i.e. the activity of thought

⁷⁷ Ibid. p.110

itself) is a fundamental error, an error of *hypostatisation*. Hegel must be understood (contrary to his own self-understanding) as not actually incarnating the very essence of Reason, but merely giving a particularly rigorous and systematic model or externalised presentation of the abstract form of reason. It is in this sense that Feuerbach claims Hegel must be recognised as a truly great philosophical *artist*. However, Hegel makes the fundamental mistake of taking the *picture* for the *thing itself*, i.e. mistaking the *form* for the *essence*. He thus mistakes that in which thought itself takes a shape so that it may be articulated to others (through its representations in a system) for the way thought is in itself:

'Hegel is the most accomplished philosophical artist, and his presentations, at least in part, are *unsurpassed models of scientific art sense* and, because of their rigour, *veritable means for the education and discipline of the spirit*. But precisely because of this, Hegel...made form into essence, the being of thought for others into being in itself, the *relative goal* into the *final goal*. Hegel, in his presentation, aimed at anticipating and imprisoning the intellect itself and compressing it into the system. The system was supposed to be, as it were, reason itself; all immediate activity was to dissolve itself completely in mediated activity, and the presentation of philosophy *was not to presuppose anything*, that is, nothing was to be left over in us and nothing within us – a complete emptying of ourselves.'⁷⁸

Feuerbach argues that the 'Being' at the beginning of Hegel's *Science of Logic* is not, and cannot be, 'Being' in itself, but only a formal concept of Being, i.e. Being as it is presented for thought in its recognisable (i.e. linguistic or conceptual) form. Reason as a linguistic or conceptual scheme does not, he claims, have the character of real Being; but is only an outward show or the shared form that provides the stimulus and model for one's own thinking. Consequently the *Science of Logic's* presentation of Being is essentially Being for *an-other*. It is the form under which thought grasps its objects and presents that understanding to another; indeed it is the form under which an intellectual community itself becomes possible. Language, as the material condition of communication, dictates this form; thus, the 'unity of form and content' is the unity of logical form alone (insofar as this is entirely derived from language

⁷⁸ Ibid. p110-11

itself). This unity is entirely a matter of the logical unity of language, as a conceptual scheme, rather than the alleged unity between thought and real being.

This understanding of the function of logic provides the ground for Feuerbach's analyses of Hegel's claims for an absolute or immediate *beginning*. He argues that if we are to begin, as Hegel claims, with 'pure, empty Being', then in fact we begin with nothing at all. (As we saw earlier, Hegel himself asserted the dialectical unity of this kind of Being with Nothing). Feuerbach accuses Hegel of saying nothing at all, and of positing a fraudulent contradiction between the two concepts. Just as he attacks Hegel's notion of Being, he proceeds to attack his notion of Nothing, and claims that it is not a concept at all, but the *absence* of a concept. Nothing, Feuerbach argues, since it lacks any determinations whatsoever, cannot be thought, only Being can be thought. For Feuerbach this fact demonstrates that the very essence of thinking is to think *determinately*. Consequently, Feuerbach argues that thought can never transcend thinking anything but determinate Being, and that the Hegelian thought of Nothing in the *Science of Logic* represents the very abdication of thinking reason:

'If you therefore leave out determinateness from being, you leave being with no being at all. It will not be surprising if you then demonstrate that indeterminate being is nothingness. Under these circumstances this is self-evident.'⁷⁹

The logical contradiction between Being and Nothing asserted by Hegel is therefore an empty and merely formal contradiction. The real contradiction, Feuerbach asserts, to this abstract concept of Being that Hegel posits 'is not Nothing, but sensuous and concrete being. Sensuous being denies logical being; the former contradicts the latter and *vice versa*.'⁸⁰ Feuerbach thus claims to *reinstate* a genuine dialectical opposition, but in non-formal terms:

'Dialectics is not a monologue that speculation carries on with itself, but a dialogue between speculation and empirical reality.'⁸¹

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.113

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

For Feuerbach genuine dialectic requires a 'real' opposition of sensory, empirical consciousness with speculative rationalism. The challenge, as Feuerbach reads it, is to demonstrate a resolution to *this* contradiction, which would, he argues, be the real measure or proof of Hegel's thesis of the 'reality of logical being'.⁸² Hence:

'Logical being is in direct, unmediated and abhorrent contradiction with the being of the intellect's empirical and concrete perception. In addition, logical being is only an indulgence, a condescension on the part of the Idea, and, consequently, already that which it must prove itself to be. This means that I enter the Logic as well as intellectual perception only through a violent act, through a transcendent act, or through an immediate break with real perception.'⁸³

At this point in the essay Feuerbach draws attention to the fact that Hegel considers the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as the necessary propaedeutic to the *Science of Logic*⁸⁴, and as such deals there with the whole issue of empirical understanding and the 'certainty of the senses'. Consequently it is to this work that Feuerbach turns his attention, and asks 'Does Hegel produce the Idea or thought out of the other-being of the Idea or thought?'⁸⁵ Since for Feuerbach the 'only philosophy that proceeds from no presuppositions at all is one...that produces itself out of its antithesis'⁸⁶, it is crucial to examine whether or not Hegel successfully refutes rational empiricism in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ Ibid, p.116

⁸⁴ Thus, in the Introduction to the *Science of Logic* Hegel writes: 'In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* I have exhibited consciousness in its movement onwards from the first immediate opposition of itself and the object to absolute knowing. The path of this movement goes through every form of the *relation of consciousness to the object* and has the Notion of science for its result. This notion therefore (apart from the fact that it emerges within the logic itself) needs no justification here because it has received it in that work; and it cannot be justified in any other way than by this emergence in consciousness, all the forms of which are resolved into this Notion as into their truth... The Notion of pure science and its deduction is therefore presupposed in the present work in so far as the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is nothing other than the deduction of it. Absolute knowing is the truth of every mode of consciousness because, as the course of the *Phenomenology* showed, it is only in absolute knowing that the separation of the object from the *certainty of itself* is completely eliminated: truth is now equated with certainty and this certainty with truth', p.48

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ Ibid, p.114

Feuerbach explains that Hegel begins the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (a chapter entitled 'Sense Certainty: On the 'This' and 'Meaning'⁸⁷) with an immediate form of natural empirical consciousness and attempts to demonstrate the immanent dependence of claims for immediate empirical knowledge of sensible particulars upon the categories of 'This', 'Here' and 'Now', categories which are neither finite nor particular but empty universals. Thus, when sense-certainty claims absolute certainty with regard to, for example, 'this' tree 'here' and 'now', or 'this' house 'here' and 'now', each vanishes as a particular whilst the 'this', 'here' and 'now' remain as universal relations: 'It is in fact the universal that is the true [content] of sense-certainty.'⁸⁸ Despite its inability to signify what sense-certainty really 'means', language, Hegel claims, expresses the real immanent truth of sense-certainty's claims. We are shown to be only able to denote particulars by virtue of the universal terms 'this', 'here' and 'now'. Hegel demonstrates that what may initially be meant or intended by sense-certainty, i.e. the immediate certainty of sensory particulars, cannot be expressed in language:

'It is as a universal too that we utter what the sensuous [content] is. What we say is: 'This', i.e. the universal This; or, 'it is', i.e. Being in general. Of course, we do not envisage the universal This or Being in general, but we *utter* the universal; in other words, we do not strictly say what in this sense-certainty we *mean* to say. But language, as we see, is the more truthful; in it, we ourselves directly refute what we mean to say, and since the universal is the true [content] of sense-certainty and language expresses this true [content] alone, it is just not possible for us ever to say, or express in words, a sensuous being that we mean.'⁸⁹

For Feuerbach Hegel's demonstration of the immanent truth of sense-certainty represents an absurdly reductive reading of the genuine truth of sensory consciousness. He claims it is a reading where 'thought is naturally certain of its victory over its adversity in advance.'⁹⁰ He argues that Hegel's reduction of sensory consciousness to the denotations 'this', 'here' and 'now' represents a reduction to empty universals whose reality is no reality at all and whose truth merely represents

⁸⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, pp.58-66

⁸⁸ Ibid, #96, p.60

⁸⁹ Ibid, #97, p.60

⁹⁰ L. Feuerbach, Ibid, p.118

the truth of *self-sufficient* reason. For Feuerbach such universal relations are wholly derived from the radically particular, finite and temporal instances of 'this', 'here' and 'now', and only such radically particular relations among concrete existences can constitute the 'real' content of universal concepts. Feuerbach claims that insofar as sensuous consciousness is concerned, language is utterly irrelevant to establishing its truth: 'Enough of words: come down to the real things!... To sensuous consciousness it is precisely language that is unreal, nothing.'⁹¹

Feuerbach argues that for sensuous consciousness, when properly considered, all words have the status of proper names or mere 'signs by which it can achieve its aims in the shortest possible way.'⁹² For sensory consciousness, he maintains, language is merely instrumental, and cannot express its essence. Therefore, rather than acknowledge that its claims for absolute certainty of sensuous particulars appear refuted by language, it 'sees precisely in this a refutation of language.'⁹³ For Feuerbach Hegel's demonstration of the 'truth' of sense-certainty in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is nothing more than a 'verbal game in which thought that is already certain of itself as truth plays with natural consciousness.'⁹⁴ All Hegel actually refutes are merely logical claims regarding denotations within language concerning absolute particularity (i.e. 'this', 'here', 'now') rather than the *real* 'this', 'here' and 'now' that form the *real* object of sensuous consciousness. This is because, Feuerbach claims, Hegel is not genuinely immersing himself within, or inhabiting, natural empirical consciousness in the way that he claims to be. Consequently, he treats the object of sensory consciousness only in the sense of an object for self-consciousness or thought, i.e. as an externalisation of thought to be recovered within thought. Hegel begins the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (as Feuerbach claims he had done in the *Science of Logic*) by means of an absolute break from the real object of sense consciousness, and the presupposition of an Absolute Identity between thought and being. He writes that Hegel 'begins... not with the 'other-being' of thought, but with the idea of the 'other-being' of thought.'⁹⁵

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 117

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ Ibid

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 118

Feuerbach concludes that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* when taken as the necessary propaedeutic to the *Science of Logic*, cannot be considered as ever having really been engaged with a genuine dialogue with the absolute alterity of the sensory object. Thus, Hegel can never be justified in considering sense-certainty as genuinely overcome or refuted. The *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Feuerbach argues, is not a genuine phenomenology of consciousness (as sensory consciousness) itself, but merely a phenomenological *logic*. Like the *Science of Logic* it represents nothing more than a dialectical monologue presupposing from its inception an Absolute identity of Being and thought. It is not, Feuerbach claims, a genuine dialectical dialogue between thought and the 'other-being' of thought, i.e. the sensible object. Despite Hegel's claims, this genuine dialectical relation remains as much unthought in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as it had in the *Science of Logic*:

'The same unmediated contradiction, the same conflict that we encounter at the beginning of the *Logic*, now confronts us at the beginning of the *Phenomenology* – the conflict between being as the object of the *Phenomenology* and being as the object of sensuous consciousness.'⁹⁶

For Feuerbach such a philosophy cannot have what he terms a 'genetico-critical sense'; a sense that he claims is crucial to a genuine dialectical evolution of reason. Thus:

'A genetico-critical philosophy is one that does not dogmatically demonstrate or apprehend an object given through perception...but examines its origin; which questions whether an object is a real object, only an idea or just a psychological phenomena; which finally, distinguishes with utmost rigor between what is subjective and what is objective.'⁹⁷

Like Schelling, Feuerbach emphasises the extent to which the empirical world, nature or actuality exceeds the structures of comprehension elaborated within the Hegelian system (a system characterised by Feuerbach as being merely 'formal' rather than substantive). Feuerbach's own subsequent philosophy concentrates upon vindicating

⁹⁶ Ibid

⁹⁷ Ibid, p.123

the independence and 'reality' of the empirical world. For Feuerbach the genuine elevation of human reason is only possible by moving away from the idolatry of Hegel's petrified system and towards engaging in a situated dialectical dialogue with empirical or 'sensuous reality'. In this vein Feuerbach returns to his lifelong concern with secularising Christian eschatology. The ground for his attempt at secularisation is his claim that any adequate examination of the essence of religious consciousness and phenomena should be constructed upon what he terms 'genetico-critical sense', since the liberation from the weight of religious 'illusions' or spectres of the imagination can only come from a thorough understanding of the origins of such illusions. The Hegelian movement from religious *Vorstellung* to philosophical *Begriff* does not liberate man from such spectres but merely petrifies them into a mystical objective state. For Feuerbach Hegel's speculative metaphysics of reconciliation represents the culmination of a historical and theological attempt to salvage a transcendental objectivity. The *Science of Logic* merely expresses in philosophical *Begriffe* what religion (through its *Vorstellungen*) had injected with elements of mystical imagination. A deconstruction of Hegel's speculative reason through the disclosure of the degree to which its metaphysical categories rest upon mere spectres of imagination would culminate, Feuerbach argues, in the liberation from the weight of the ontotheological tradition and man's encumberment by divinity.

(ii) – *The Hegelian Response to Feuerbach*

Hegel's response to Feuerbach's criticisms would almost certainly concern the criticisms of sense-certainty and the way Feuerbach subsequently characterises speculative idealism. Hegel's arguments in 'Sense-Certainty' demonstrate that the object of consciousness is not something whose concrete actuality is available to a pre-conceptual consciousness, passively and intuitively receiving presentations of the object. Indeed, he intends to demonstrate that the object of consciousness is not a simple and immediate sense particular but something much more complex, i.e. something that presents itself as an object whose identity is known through a concept.

Arguably, from the Hegelian perspective, Feuerbach's account fails to recognise the precise nature of the arguments in the dialectic of sense-certainty and the notion of universality developed there. The first of Feuerbach's errors lies in his neglect of the

fact that the beginning of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is determined by a descriptive analysis of the different attitudes successively adopted by consciousness towards its own knowledge, towards the relationship between its object and itself. Thus, Hegel must begin merely with the most primitive form of such an attitude, i.e. 'knowledge of the immediate or of what simply is.'⁹⁸ As 'sense-certainty' the attitude adopted by consciousness towards its object is one of immediacy, a sheer 'givenness' unmediated by anything else. Given this immediacy, the object is taken as being in no way dependent upon consciousness:

'Our approach to the object must...be *immediate* or *receptive*; we must alter nothing in the object as it presents itself. In *apprehending* it, we must refrain from trying to *comprehend* it.'⁹⁹

Thus, in this attitude consciousness takes the object to be an absolute, i.e. that which is ultimately available to it to be known. Moreover, it takes the knowledge so provided to be the 'richest', 'truest' and the most certain form of knowledge. 'Richest' in the sense that the object presents itself to consciousness in its absolute concreteness, and 'truest' because the object is immediately related to consciousness and as such nothing comes between them that could possibly distort consciousness' knowledge. This immediacy is the basis for consciousness' certainty of its knowledge; and insofar as the object is immediate then consciousness' knowledge is 'immediate knowledge', i.e. knowledge is identical with consciousness' immediate access to the object itself. Consequently, knowledge cannot be any more certain than that which is itself identical to consciousness' absolutely direct relation to its object.

Since consciousness takes its object to be utterly immediate, it takes itself to be the condition for such absolute immediacy. Hence, it takes itself to be nothing more than that which it is in relation to, i.e. its object. In such an immediate relation consciousness is nothing more or less than its direct apprehension of the immediate object:

⁹⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, #90, p.58

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* #93, p.59

'The thing *is*, and it *is*, merely because it *is*. It is; this is the essential point for sense-knowledge, and this pure *being*, or this simple immediacy, constitutes its *truth*. Similarly, certainty as a *connection* is an *immediate* pure connection: consciousness is 'I', nothing more, a pure 'This'; the singular consciousness knows a pure 'This', or the single item.'¹⁰⁰

For Hegel the pure being of sense-certainty divides into two 'Thises', one 'This' as I, and the other 'This' as object, and he proceeds to reflect in his analysis upon this difference. What he will conclude is that neither is immediately present in sense-certainty, but 'each is at the same time mediated'. Thus:

'I have this certainty through something else, viz. the thing; and it, similarly, is in sense-certainty through something else, viz. through the 'I'.¹⁰¹

Initially consciousness takes the *object* to be the essential term of the consciousness-object relationship, and *itself* the inessential term. This priority is reversed later in the dialectical development. Hegel simply asks whether such a relationship can be sustained. The immediate 'this' that consciousness takes for its essential object must, as immediate, be temporally and spatially locatable; it is, Hegel argues, the 'Now and the Here'¹⁰². These temporal and spatial specifications are necessary indications of the very immediacy of the particular object; it is the way the thing is something which simply is, something merely present here and now. Hegel asks:

' "What is Now?" let us answer, e.g. "Now is Night". In order to test the truth of this sense-certainty a simple experiment will suffice. We write down this truth; a truth cannot lose anything by being written down, any more than it can lose anything through our preserving it. If *now*, *this noon*, we look again at the written truth we shall have to say that it has become stale.'¹⁰³

Hegel's point here is not the merely banal one that Feuerbach seems to reduce it to, i.e. that 'Now' has different referents. Hegel is actually concerned with the very

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, #91, pp.58-9

¹⁰¹ Ibid, #92, p.59

¹⁰² Ibid, #95, p.60

¹⁰³ Ibid

nature and character *of* the referent as such. Thus, by attempting to relate itself to that which immediately *is*, to that which *is now*, consciousness itself discloses that the 'Now' vanishes, and can only be preserved through an abstract general negation:

'The Now does indeed preserve itself, but as something that is *not* Night; equally, it preserves itself in face of the Day that it now is, as something that also is not Day, in other words, as a negative in general. This self-preserving Now is, therefore, not immediate but mediated; for it is determined as a permanent and self-preserving Now through the fact that something else, viz. Day and Night, is *not*. As so determined, it is still just as simply Now as before, and in this simplicity is indifferent to what happens in it; just as little as Night and Day are its being, just as much as it is Day and Night; it is not in the least affected by this its other being. A simple thing of this kind which is through negation, which is neither This nor That, a *not-This*, and is with equal indifference. Thus as well as That – such a thing we call a *universal*.'¹⁰⁴

Consciousness' most primitive attempt to understand its relationship to an object, by characterising the object as a 'This' which is simply 'Here' and 'Now', actually discloses the object to be an empty universal determined by the most general form of negation. Thus it merely persists through a series of undifferentiated 'Nows'. Hegel proceeds to construct an analogous argument regarding the object characterised as something that is simply 'here'. This object too can only be apprehended by consciousness as the maintenance of the *vanishing* of the 'particular 'here's', and 'again, therefore, the 'This' shows itself to be a *mediated simplicity*, or a universality.'¹⁰⁵ The object of sense-certainty is thus shown to be something for which abstract general negation and mediation are essential. However, all this leaves with regard to sense-certainty's 'object' is what Hegel terms an 'empty or indifferent Now and Here', the 'Here' and 'Now' as the most abstract and empty universal. This reverses the very sense of the object taken to be the crucial element of sense-certainty, and for Hegel the certainty is now to be found in the opposite element:

'The certainty is now to be found in the opposite element, viz. in knowing, which previously was the unessential element. Its truth is in the object as *my* object, or in its

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, #96, p.60

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, #98, p.61

being *mine*; it is, because I know it. Sense-certainty, then, though indeed expelled from the object, is not yet thereby overcome, but only driven back into the 'I'.¹⁰⁶

For sense-certainty, at this point, its truth lies in the very particularity of the 'I', 'in the immediacy of my seeing, hearing and so on.'¹⁰⁷ The *certainty* of the object is entirely maintained by the fact that I grasp on to it. "Now" is day because *I* see it.¹⁰⁸ However, Hegel proceeds to demonstrate that the same dialectic operates here with the *subject* as operated with the 'This', 'Here' and 'Now'. Thus Hegel writes:

'I, *this* 'I', see the tree and assert that 'Here' is a tree; but another 'I' sees the house and maintains that 'Here' is not a tree but a house instead. Both truths have the same authentication, viz. the immediacy of seeing, and the certainty and assurance that both have about their knowing; but the one truth vanishes in the other.'¹⁰⁹

Hegel claims that what is maintained here is merely the 'I' as an abstract and empty universal, an 'I' utterly simple and indifferent to what it sees, an 'I' that is a 'simple seeing' mediated by negation:

'When I say 'I', this singular 'I', I say in general all 'I's'; everyone is what I say, everyone is 'I', this singular 'I'.¹¹⁰

For Hegel this empty universality is characterised by the necessity to refer beyond itself but in an utterly indeterminate way. However, the very nature of the empty and abstract universality associated with the supposedly simple self-identity of the immediate object ('This' as 'Here' and 'Now') and the immediate subject ('I') necessarily refers beyond itself to what it is *not*. Its mediation by negativity is in the most abstract and general sense, i.e. it is *indifferent* to *what* it is *not*, and is merely a general form of negation. Empty and abstract universality thus refers, but in an utterly indifferent way. Consciousness as sense-certainty claims its object and subject to be utterly immediate and particular, but when analysed the particularity of its object and

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, #100, p.61

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, #101, p.61

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Ibid, #102, p.62

subject are disclosed to be mediated by the most general form of negation and to be nothing more than the most abstract and empty universal. Hegel's arguments concerning language relate precisely to this point. Thus, he argues that when sense consciousness attempts to refer to its object or subject in language it necessarily attempts to indicate their particularity and immediacy in the only way it can:

'It is as a universal too that we utter what the sensuous [content] is. What we say is: 'This', i.e. the *universal* This; or, 'it is', i.e. Being in general. Of course, we do not *envisage* the universal This or Being in general, but we *utter* the universal; in other words, we do not strictly say what in this sense-certainty we mean to say. But language, as we see, is the more truthful; in it, we ourselves directly refute what we *mean* to say.'¹¹¹

What we must recognise, contrary to Feuerbach's presentation, is that Hegel's arguments concerning language merely exhibit a philosophical point *already* demonstrated. Thus, when sense-certainty calls its object 'This' it attempts to refer to its object as a particular and purely unmediated thing. However, it fails, and language itself is able to demonstrate the essence of that failure. Referring to a particular in language always involves a necessary form of selectivity. However, the particular object as simply an empty universal involves no inner complexity or mediating features in virtue of which it could distinguish itself as 'this' from this or that other particular object. The object so conceived is not really a genuine particular object, rather it is only an empty 'universal this' or 'being in general'. Hence in this way Hegel argues that 'language...is the more truthful.' However, Hegel's broader philosophical point is that the object itself is the basis or ground for such a necessity. The object as a particular itself demands a more determinate form of mediation, and hence comprehension in terms of its mediation. Language is in this sense *truthful* to the object of sense-certainty; it is able to demonstrate that the bare immediate particular is not a genuine particular but an empty universality.

¹¹¹ Ibid, #97, p.60

Hegel proceeds to develop an analysis of the various strategies by which sense-certainty, if it is not to dissolve itself into mere empty universals, tries to maintain the immediacy of the particular. As Hegel writes:

'We reach a stage where we have to posit the whole of sense-certainty itself as its *essence*, and no longer only one of its moments, as happened in the two cases where first the object confronting the 'I', and then the 'I', were supposed to be its reality. Thus it is only sense-certainty as a *whole* which stands firm within itself as *immediacy* and by so doing excludes from itself all the opposition which has hitherto obtained.'¹¹²

Here the pure immediacy of sense-certainty attempts to preserve itself as a relation that remains *self-identical*. The 'I' as sense-certainty attempts to maintain itself as a pure act of intuiting; 'I' adhere to the pure 'Here' and 'Now' without comparing them to other 'Here' and 'Nows'. Thus 'I' as sense-certainty, confining itself to one 'Now' or one 'Here', need to precisely indicate that point. Hegel proceeds to analyse how that immediate point is itself constituted and indicated by sense-certainty. He writes:

'The Now is pointed to, this Now. 'Now'; it has already ceased to be in the act of pointing to it. The Now that is, is another Now than the one pointed to, and we see that the Now is just this: to be no more just when it is. The Now, as it is pointed out to us, is Now that *has been*, and this is its truth; it has not the truth of *being*. Yet this much is true, that it has been. But what essentially has been is, in fact, not an essence that *is*; *it is not*.'¹¹³

There is here a movement within the essence of sense-certainty as a whole. This movement begins with an indication of a pure 'Now' asserted as the absolute truth. However, by indicating it, sense-certainty actually indicates not what *is* but what *has been*, as something 'superseded'. In doing this sense-certainty actually sets aside its first truth. Sense-certainty then attempts to assert a second truth about the immediate particular, i.e. that what *is* has been, but that what has been *is not*. Thus, sense-

¹¹² Ibid, #103, p.62

¹¹³ Ibid, #106, p.63

certainty sets aside the *having been* of the immediate particular, and negates 'the negation of the 'Now', and thus return to the first assertion, that the 'Now' is.'¹¹⁴

That which *is* 'Now' can only be recognised as such *by* consciousness if it is recognised in more determinate opposition to the objects of past time. Thus, the thing itself, the object, holds within itself the opposition and negation, and as such becomes the very ground of it being apprehended by consciousness at all. The present 'Now' is thus the negation of its other, i.e. the immediate past, its *having been*. It holds within itself this opposition to its other, and indeed only by holding within itself this very opposition to its other can it *be* that which consciousness apprehends as something 'Now' present. What this clearly demonstrates is that the very *object* of sense-certainty, i.e. the sheer *immediate*, is not in fact so. The object or referent is a thoroughly *mediated* object in that it is both itself and opposition to and the negation of its other. It is precisely this point that is fundamentally different from Feuerbach's erroneous presentation. The pure 'Now' and its indication are thus constituted neither as immediate nor simple. In positing a pure 'This' sense-certainty actually simultaneously posits an 'other', i.e. the pure 'This' is superseded by its indication and this in turn becomes superseded in order to return to the first 'This'. However, 'this first, thus reflected into itself, is not exactly the same as it was to begin with, viz. something *immediate*; on the contrary, it is *something that is reflected into itself*, or a simple entity which, in its otherness, remains what it is: a Now which is an absolute plurality of Nows.'¹¹⁵

The indication of the pure 'Now' by sense-certainty as a whole reveals itself as a moment that expresses what that 'Now' is in its truth. It can only be a 'Now' as a mediated *result*, or as a plurality of all the 'Nows' taken together. Thus the indicating of the particular 'Now' is the experience of learning that 'Now' is a mediated particular, a universal. However, now it is a universal mediated by a more determinate form of negation than in the divided formulations of the primary instantiations of sense-certainty. What Hegel demonstrates is that which sense-certainty initially takes to be the 'richest', 'truest' and most concrete kind of knowledge is in fact 'the most

¹¹⁴ Ibid, #107, p.63

¹¹⁵ Ibid, #107, p.64

abstract and poorest truth.¹¹⁶ It is based on a conception of the object that is supposed to be absolutely concrete, but is in fact the most abstract. Sense-certainty then discovers, from within its own experience of its relationship to the object, that its conception of the object lacks any reference to the mediated concreteness that the object *must* possess. Furthermore, Hegel argues that sense-certainty itself demonstrates that the object must be minimally but necessarily taken as implying determinate mediation. Thus, consciousness' object cannot be something immediate and indifferent to mediations since its very particularity vanishes into a merely empty form of universality. Rather it must be something that is self-identical by virtue of the mediations it itself involves – it must be 'mediated immediacy'. 'Immediacy' comes to be figured not merely as simple immediate self-identity, but a self-identity recovered within the object's distinction or mediation. 'Mediacy' now signifies not those features to which the object itself is indifferent, but rather those features through which the object is its self-identity, i.e. its 'immediate' self.

What is absolutely clear is that Hegel does not claim that the particular object of consciousness is wholly logical or merely an instance of a categorical universal. What he really claims is that the truth of consciousness' initial primitive conception of its object as pure immediate particularity in sense-certainty is an abstract and empty universal. This bare form of universality implies an identity involving, yet thoroughly indifferent to, mediations. His point is that sense-certainty is neither an adequate or sustainable attitude to that which is, and is in fact a conception of the particular object too abstract to allow the object to account for knowledge of itself as a particular. Hegel demonstrates within the dialectical movement of sense-certainty that the object of sense-certainty, if it is not to dissolve into empty and abstract universality, must become a concretely determinate universal. With the development of this second, more determinate, form of universality the particular something is, by virtue of its own content, able to distinguish itself from other things. It must be, in itself, *not* its 'other', i.e. not this or that. It must not be a purely immediate something but a concretely mediated immediacy. Hegel's arguments do not at all conclude with the proposition that the particular must be subsumed as merely a logical instance of a categorical universal. What they in fact demonstrate is that the object of sense-

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, #91, p.91

certainty must be concretely mediated in its self-identity if it is to disclose itself as a singular or particular thing at all.

For Hegel the movement of sense-certainty is the experience of learning that its object is a mediated universality, i.e. the self-identity of the immediate particular is itself sustained by being a concretely mediated immediacy. What the object is not is a 'boundary for thought', a source of conceptualisable presentations whose real nature cannot be conceptualised. To deny this in the manner Hegel does is to claim that the very identity of sense-certainty's object, as a source of intelligible presentations, is itself the object of a concept. Hegel does not at all deny the independent and distinct nature of the object; rather, he demonstrates that the very identity of the independent and distinct object is itself an object for consciousness not only through the preconceptual intuitions of sensory consciousness but also through a concept. In this Hegel remains a disciple of Kant. Feuerbach's form of empirical naturalism which holds that consciousness' access to its object, the source of all intelligible presentations, is necessarily preconceptual and intuitive, is merely gratuitous and philosophically unsustainable.

As we have seen, contrary to Feuerbach's claims, Hegel's actual analysis is not about dissipating the particularity of the sensory object. Hegel argues that the concrete singular object is disclosed as internally complex or mediated and is not at all a bare form of immediate particularity. Hegel's analysis of sense-certainty discloses that the object is, at least, a self-identical concrete identity, involving a more determinate form of mediation, and an object whose identity is available to conceptualisation. This is revealed by the analysis undertaken by Hegel in the third stage of sense-certainty. This more concrete and determinate form of universality, a form able to make minimal distinctions, enables consciousness to progressively concretise its relation to its object through a series of progressive revisions of the concepts of the object's identity. Hegel thus denies that the object is an ineffable beyond or an intuitively accessible 'something' which is yet inexplicably the very ground of language or thought. Hegel, contrary to Feuerbach's presentation of his philosophy, in fact develops a conception of the object of consciousness that is more concrete than the one posited by Feuerbach's empirical naturalism.

Feuerbach clearly conceives his radicalised 'genetico-critical' empiricism as a more radical form of skepticism than Hegel's speculative dialectic. His radicalised skepticism clearly operates with Schelling's notions of Real Being, actuality, exteriority and his critique of Hegelian idealism's inability to conceive them. This skepticism relies, as Schelling's had, upon a demonstration of the extent to which Real Being exceeds the structures of speculative rationality elaborated by Hegelian logic to contain it. It also relies upon a demonstration of Hegelian speculative idealism as a strict formalism that can only think the Real in formal abstract terms. Where Feuerbach differs from Schelling is in his reformulation of the reasons for that formalism. For him Hegel's logical formalism emerges from a primary presupposition of the identity between thought and being which informs not only his logic but also his account of natural consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This primary presupposition prevents Hegel, Feuerbach claims, from articulating a genuinely skeptical dialectic between thought and real being, which in turn leads him to radically misconceive the very nature of sense perception and its object. By claiming to abandon this primary presupposition, Feuerbach attempts to reformulate and reconfigure sense perception itself as the means to understand the very nature of the Real. For Feuerbach, once the presupposition of the identity between thought and being is abandoned, sense perception becomes the means whereby the genuine alterity of sensory being is respected. Feuerbach seeks to demonstrate that sense perception, when 'properly' understood, allows a genuine dialectic between thought and Real being to be initiated, a dialectic that acts as a skeptically disruptive force to the self-sufficient and self-satisfied formulations of purely immanent speculative dialectic. Thus sensory being apprehended by sense perception functions to solicit reason itself into a more radical dialectic with externality. However, this dialectic cannot become a speculative totality in the way it does in Hegel's *Logic*. This persistently skeptical force emerges, as it had done for Schelling, in a pre-originary realm of the Real and, when conceived properly in sense perception, functions to fracture Hegel's speculative totality of reason. For Feuerbach the skeptical opposition to speculative reason is solicited by the Real rather than by an act of subjective assertion on his part.

An adequate Hegelian response to Feuerbach's post-Hegelian modality of skepticism must consist (as we have already demonstrated) in the recovery of Hegel's own analysis of sense-certainty or the certainty claimed for empirical consciousness and its

objects. By examining the details of Hegel's own analysis we have been able to clearly see that he does not deny the independence and distinctive nature of the object as concrete particular in the way Feuerbach claims. Rather, what he actually demonstrates is that the object as concrete particular is itself a genuine object for consciousness not merely through sensory intuition but, more determinately, as a concept. Feuerbach's type of sensory empiricism merely represents the barest and emptiest form of awareness of the particular, and its insistence upon its privileged insight into the 'truth' of the particularity of sensory being represents nothing more than a dogmatic pre-conceptual certainty or faith. It attempts to articulate a pre-conceptual certainty in a pure heterological element of being. For Hegel such insistence is gratuitous, philosophically unsustainable and not worthy of being accorded the name 'skepticism'. He clearly demonstrates in the dialectic of sense-certainty that it is determinate forms of universality that allow consciousness to sustain a concrete relation with a sensible and particular object, rather than Feuerbach's type of *mystical* pre-conceptual communion with the Real. For Hegel Feuerbach's type of empirical naturalism always forgets this fact, and attempts to reassert a naïve, dogmatic and uncritical form of sensory immediacy as a critical force to reason:

'It is clear that the dialectic of sense-certainty is nothing else but the simple history of its movement or of its experience, and sense-certainty itself is nothing else but just this history. That is why the natural consciousness, too, is always reaching this result, learning from experience what is true in it, but equally it is always forgetting it and starting the movement all over again. It is therefore astonishing when, in face of this experience, it is asserted as universal experience and put forward, too, as a philosophical proposition, even as the outcome of skepticism, that the reality or being of external things taken as Theses or sense-objects has absolute truth for consciousness. To make such an assertion is not to know what one is saying, to be unaware that one is saying the opposite of what one wants to say.'¹¹⁷

Clearly within the critiques of Hegel offered by both Schelling and Feuerbach, Hegel's philosophy becomes increasingly identified as the completion and fulfilment

¹¹⁷ Ibid, #109, p.65

of an ontotheological tradition, namely the western tradition of unity, reconciliation, sameness, and identity. For them Hegel's dialectical *Aufhebung*, despite yielding a degree of diversity within such unity, or difference within such identity, ultimately acts to domesticate a notion of the alterity of real being within a merely formal and systematic dialectical 'monologue'. In this sense, despite serious failings, it is Schelling and Feuerbach who must be recognised as initiating the gestures associated with the 'post-modern' search for an alternative to the philosophical tradition, an alternative that is *beyond*, as Derrida has put it, 'Hegel again, always'.¹¹⁸ Indeed, their skeptical strategies continue to inform and condition many readings of Hegel and the critical strategies of thinkers as diverse as Heidegger, Deleuze¹¹⁹, Derrida and Levinas¹²⁰.

Despite the fact that their positions can be shown to occupy a naïve, dogmatic and uncritical pre-Hegelian realm, what remains distinctive is how they attempt to articulate a form of skepticism from what they perceive to be an exterior implicitly disclosed by Hegel's metaphysical closure, a transcendence in immanence (or as we have characterised it, the *persistence of skepticism*). For Schelling this exterior realm is that of 'actuality', which is necessarily disclosed by Hegel's *Science of Logic* as being the realm absolutely anterior to reason itself; and for Feuerbach it is 'sensuous reality' which he claims is always exterior to Hegel's system but at the same time that which renders its very dialectic possible. Sensuous reality is reputedly obscured by Hegel's system, and Feuerbach's attempted recovery of it (by disclosing its implicit presence within Hegelian dialectic) supposedly enables him to articulate a 'genetico-critical' analysis of Hegel and the ontotheological tradition. Despite demonstrating that Hegel's account is crucially different from and superior to Feuerbach's

¹¹⁸ J. Derrida, 'Tympan' in *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. xv

¹¹⁹ Indeed Deleuze, in a footnote to *Difference and Repetition*, writes: 'Feuerbach is among those who have pursued farthest the problem of where to begin. He denounces the implicit presuppositions of philosophy in general, and those of Hegel in particular. He shows that philosophy must not begin with its accord with a pre-philosophical image, but with its 'difference' from non-philosophy. (However, he supposes that this exigency of the true beginning is sufficiently met by beginning with empirical, perceptible and concrete being', p. 319. Like Deleuze, what we will take from Feuerbach ultimately is the exigency to begin from 'difference' rather than the implicit presupposition of identity.

¹²⁰ Levinas writes the following in his lecture course on ontotheology: 'In contemporary thought in Europe, [the] significance of a meaning before knowledge is beginning to be formulated in philosophy. There are no doubt conceptual potentialities to be found in Heidegger. But this possibility began to be articulated before him: since Kierkegaard, since Feuerbach in a certain sense.' (E. Levinas, *Dieu, la mort et le temps* (Paris: Grasset, 1993) in English as *God, Death and Time*, translated by B. Bergo (Stanford: Stanford U.P. 2000), p. 142

presentation of it, and that many of his criticisms are seriously misplaced, it remains important to remain with these themes of 'actuality', 'exteriority', 'excess', 'particularism', 'anti-rationalism', and 'anti-ontotheology', and recognise them as explicitly skeptical or anti-Hegelian. We must now explore how they converge and cross-fertilise within the anti-Hegelian skepticism of Kierkegaard.

We will not argue that there is a straightforward development by Kierkegaard of either of the suggested post-Hegelian philosophical trajectories of Schelling and Feuerbach. Thus there is neither a Positive Philosophy developed as a philosophy of religious myth (as pursued by the later Schelling) or the genetico-critical humanist anthropological development of reason suggested by Feuerbach. However, within Kierkegaard's work one can recognise a certain continuity regarding the interpretation of what might be referred to as Hegel's presupposition concerning the impetus and need for reconciliation, together with the development of a radical skeptical trajectory as means for going 'beyond' Hegel's philosophical system. Feuerbach's defence of the irreducible particularity of being (despite resting upon a seriously misplaced and erroneous critique of Hegel's treatment of sensuous particularity) clearly resounds within Kierkegaard's thought and his own criticisms of Hegelianism. For Feuerbach, as we have seen, the Real is developed in skeptical opposition to Hegel's idealism and is understood as sensory being accessible to *genuine* sense perception. Only in genuine sense perception, he claims, is being given as it really is without distortions or abstraction (as he understands Hegel's speculative idealism to do). For him the mark of genuine being is its irreducible particularity and independent, self-determining, existence. We will see how Kierkegaard also maintains that genuine being is always particular, individual and resistant to the universal. Thus, his central category is that of the 'single one' in which alone truth and reality lies. Kierkegaard's attack on Hegelianism is directed towards its 'world process' in defence of the 'single one' in order to safeguard, like Feuerbach, the reality of the particular and individual being.

For Kierkegaard the criterion of being is limited to the being of the human subject, and his concern is with the criterion for the authentic being that each individual person may realise. Kierkegaard's concern is thus centred on the being of the individual human being and not on the wider ontological question of being in general.

His concern is the 'single one', and in this sense his criterion for true being is internal and subjective. Truth and reality reside in the inner subjectivity and consciousness of the 'single one'. The criterion offered by Kierkegaard is the ethical and religious dimension of our consciousness. It is in the ethical and religious dimension that the 'single one' grasps or, better, realises his authentic and genuine being. In experiencing himself as an ethical and religious person, the 'single one' realises his true being.

Thus, given the importance each gives to preserving the essential particularity of being, there remain important differences between them; the most important difference concerns their respective understanding of the very nature of that particularity. Whereas for Feuerbach the truth and reality of being reside in the object and are fundamentally public and external, for Kierkegaard they are, as we will see, essentially private and internal. We must proceed with an examination of Kierkegaard's distinctively skeptical anti-Hegelianism and his attempt to preserve the element of subjective particularity, and this examination will provide a means for understanding the inception of the ethical significance of the skeptical gestures that inform Levinas's anti-Hegelianism.

III – Kierkegaard and the Paradox of Ethical Singularity

(i) – Kierkegaard's Skeptical Relation to Hegel

This part of our thesis will examine the precise nature of Kierkegaard's notions of *silence*, the *secret* and *non-conceptual excess* that are developed *against* Hegel. However, the approach adopted will begin by articulating the convergences between Hegel and Kierkegaard in order to better understand the subsequent divergences. Niels Thulstrup in his study *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*¹²¹ claims that Hegel and Kierkegaard cannot be brought into dialogue because their positions are so fundamentally incommensurable. He writes:

'If we compare the presuppositions, goals, and methods of Hegel and Kierkegaard... it becomes evident that the two thinkers as thinkers basically have nothing in common.'¹²²

However, it is important to show that Hegel and Kierkegaard do in fact share a fundamental 'presupposition' regarding the 'need' or 'imperative' for philosophy. Both are broadly concerned with addressing problems associated with the attempt to achieve genuine or true subjectivity, or what Mark C. Taylor in his work on Hegel and Kierkegaard has termed 'selfhood'.¹²³ Hegel's absolute idealism responds to the essentially bifurcated conditions of the subject, the 'unhappy consciousness' of the post-enlightenment era. Hegel's speculative dialectic emerges from the orientation of the egocentric bifurcated subject and is developed into the demonstration of the immanent necessity for a transformation of this egology (i.e. abstract self-subsisting subjectivity) into Absolute objective Being and Truth. With this transformation Hegel claims to disclose the truly objective thought that resides within each particular bifurcated subject. At a precise moment within Hegel's immanent dialectical journey to genuine 'selfhood' the subject 'relaxes' its narrow egology and becomes a reflexive

¹²¹ N. Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard's Forhold til Hegel* (Copenhagen: Glydendal, 1967), in English as *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, translated by G.L. Stengren (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980)

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.372

¹²³ M.C. Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard* (Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 1980) Our understanding of the convergences between Hegel and Kierkegaard is derived from the many insights provided by Taylor's work.

consciousness of itself and progresses to grasping itself in an immanently generated objective totality.

Kierkegaard's thought, like Hegel's, also emerges from a meditation upon subjectivity. Crucially it has come to signify an essentially post-Hegelian rehabilitation of 'genuine' subjectivity, or of contemporary individualism, and is characterised as fundamentally opposing the 'immanence' characteristic of Hegel's speculative philosophy. It posits an 'interruption' in the form of an insistence upon an irreducible necessity for external synthesis in philosophical thought. Thus, Kierkegaard shares with Hegel a concern with the bifurcated subject (the 'unhappy consciousness') but diverges from him by articulating an opposing development in thought. His own meditations upon genuine subjectivity or 'selfhood' generate a move away from the perceived 'nondifferentiation' which speculative philosophy posits in its ultimate theory of genuine selfhood. Kierkegaard moves toward an articulation of an absolute irreducible 'differentiation' of the self from the other, which in turn generated the irreducibility of external synthesis in philosophy. Clearly we should recognise that this path of 'differentiation' parallels the path initiated by Feuerbach. However, despite Kierkegaard's divergence from Hegel, he continues to insist upon a specific crucial element in the development of genuine 'selfhood', namely the Christian Incarnation. Hence both thinkers share an insistence upon the crucial 'revelatory' aspect of the Incarnation for the achievement of genuine 'selfhood' but of course diverge in their interpretations of it.

For Hegel 'the identity of the subject and God comes into the world when the fullness of time has arrived: the consciousness of this identity is the recognition of God in his truth'.¹²⁴ For Hegel the 'fullness of time' is regarded as the 'true present' in which time and eternity explicitly meet. The very condition constituting the fullness of time, and hence necessitating the Incarnation, is the emergence of what Hegel regards as the 'unhappy consciousness' within Judaism and Christianity itself. For Hegel the Incarnated Christ must be ultimately recognised as the Mediator in whom the extremes between which the 'unhappy consciousness' is torn are reconciled. Kierkegaard, to a certain degree, pursues Feuerbach's path with a return to a 'flesh

¹²⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, translated by J. Sibree, with an introduction by C.J. Friedrich (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), p.323

and blood' interpretation of the Incarnation. What Hegel regards as the essential reconciliatory power of the Christian Incarnation (the concrete reconciliation between finite subjectivity and infinite divinity) is for him the very element necessary for a transformation to genuine self-realisation, i.e. the elevation to Absolute Knowledge. However, Kierkegaard regards this speculative approach as a *further* self-alienation from genuine selfhood. What Hegel interprets as the *condition* of self-estrangement, reconciled through Christian Incarnation, is, for Kierkegaard, emblematic of genuine self-fulfilment of selfhood. Christian Incarnation does not function for Kierkegaard as a necessary 'station' *on the way* to Absolute reconciliation; rather, it functions to concretise man's *essential* bifurcation, his *difference* and *separation* from the divine or the infinite. This function of concretised bifurcation (which the Incarnation represents for Kierkegaard) establishes the truth of finite subjectivity. Kierkegaard rejects 'Christendom's' historical mediation and Hegel's speculative philosophical conceptual comprehension of the Incarnation. For him the 'fact' of the appearance or incarnation of the transcendent and eternal God in the form of a particular temporal finite individual was utterly contingent and a thoroughly positive revelatory event that can neither be historically nor rationally mediated. In contrast to the Hegelian notion of the 'fullness of time', the Kierkegaardian 'event' does not constitute an integral element of a continuous rational historical process, (i.e. it does not emerge necessarily through the immanent development of 'spirit') and as such represents a breach or interruption of immanence. For Kierkegaard the Christian Incarnation ultimately represents the most radical 'emphasising' of the contingent, particular and non-immanent characteristic of all historical 'becoming'.

To the extent that Hegel is occupied with and provoked by the disintegration or 'spiritlessness' generated by the bifurcated condition of post-enlightenment subjectivity, Kierkegaard is preoccupied with and provoked by the 'existential' consequences that result from any absolute speculative identification of subjectivity and objectivity, with what might be termed the Hegelian 'levelling' or 'rounding off' of the pluralism or freedom of the existential subject. Kierkegaard writes:

'The whole existence of the human race is rounded off completely like a sphere, and the ethical is at once its limit and its content. God becomes an invisible vanishing

point, a powerless thought, His power only being in the ethical which is the content of existence.'¹²⁵

Kierkegaard is recognisably preoccupied with the condition of post-Hegelian subjectivity, a concern that originates within the thought of the so-called Left Hegelians, most notably Feuerbach.¹²⁶ In contrast to Hegel's view of the philosophical imperative that emerges from the condition of torment of the bifurcated 'unhappy consciousness', Kierkegaard argues that it is in fact Hegel's response (which he characterises as the 'levelling' of existential subjectivity and its dispersal into the general or universal) which represents the true threat of 'spiritlessness' and represents therefore a 'genuine' philosophical imperative. Kierkegaard writes:

'The fundamental derangement at the root of modern times which branches out into logic, metaphysics, dogmatics and the whole of modern life, consists in this: that the deep qualitative abyss in the difference between God and man has been obliterated.'¹²⁷

Kierkegaard must be recognised as fundamentally responding to and developing many of the anti-Hegelian/anti-speculative themes originally articulated by Schelling and Feuerbach. Feuerbach claims that Hegelian speculation ossified genuine thought (genuine thought being, for Feuerbach, that which is engaged with a 'flesh and blood' dialectical dialogue with the truth of sensuous reality) rendering it into a system that is akin to transforming it into a stone circle. Hegelian speculative reason is viewed as petrifying all genuine, living, breathing pluralist thought. Kierkegaard recognises and assumes that these implications are the genuine philosophical imperative of his time. Like Feuerbach he also considers that the post-Hegelian orthodoxy of speculative reason implies an essentially negative and spiritless consequence when extended to the situated existential subject. Speculative reason suggests the 'concealment' of a 'qualitative abyss'; it conceals the genuinely torn subject through its detached,

¹²⁵ S. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling: Dialectical Lyric by Johannes de Silentio*, translated by A. Hannay, p.78

¹²⁶ It is worth noting that Kierkegaard himself attended Schelling's 1840-41 lectures. However, as Mark C. Taylor writes, Kierkegaard was deeply disappointed in them. Taylor writes: 'He found little new in them and soon ceased attending them. His acquaintance with Schelling's lectures came through reading notes taken by other students.' Mark C. Taylor, *Ibid.*, p.19

¹²⁷ S. Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, edited and translated by H. & E. Hong, p.6075

disinterested and disengaged consideration of it. Thus all the necessary passion associated with the genuinely torn subject is levelled out by speculative consideration. Speculative philosophy, Kierkegaard claims, gives ontological and epistemological privilege to universality and generality over the notion of isolated particularity. As such genuine truth can only emerge for it when the discrete, isolated particular is absolutely *subsumed* under or *consumed* by the universal or general that Hegel claims is immanent to it. Kierkegaard's entire philosophical orientation emerges as a response to an imperative essentially announced in the aftermath of the dominant orthodoxy of post-Hegelian speculative philosophy.

To understand the way Kierkegaard develops these skeptical and anti-Hegelian themes it will be necessary for us to outline the main theses of two of Kierkegaard's major pseudonymous texts, *Fear and Trembling* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.¹²⁸ This analysis will itself be guided by an important insight provided by Mark C. Taylor's work on Hegel and Kierkegaard. For Taylor Kierkegaard's pseudonymous texts constitute an alternative 'phenomenology of spirit', marking distinct stages upon a trajectory towards genuine 'selfhood'. Taylor writes:

'Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings constitute the cast of characters through which he stages the dramatic struggle for authentic selfhood. Each pseudonym represents a particular shape of consciousness, form of life, or type of selfhood... Taken together, the pseudonyms present a coherent account of what amounts to a phenomenology of spirit analogous, though alternative, to the course plotted by Hegel. The Kierkegaardian forms of life are arranged as dialectical stages in the development of genuine individuality.'¹²⁹

Hegel, Hegelian speculative philosophy and the 'age' that it constitutes is undoubtedly the main target of *Fear and Trembling*. Central to its challenge is an opposition to the Hegelian imperative for absolute and total disclosure of all aspects of the subject's existence to reason. Kierkegaard understands Hegel's general thesis to

¹²⁸ The focus here will be upon Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments Vol. I: Text*, edited and translated by H. & E. Hong

¹²⁹ M.C. Taylor, *Ibid*, p.92

be that every mode of life and thought ultimately reveals itself to necessarily involve mediation:

'The Hegelian philosophy assumes there is no justified concealment, no justified incommensurability. It is therefore consistent in its requirement of disclosure.'¹³⁰

Kierkegaard is concerned with recovering from the Hegelian imperative of full disclosure the element of religious faith which is, for Kierkegaard, essentially non-disclosive, and to bring a halt to the Hegelian imperative or 'urge' to *go further* than faith whereby religious *Vorstellung* is superseded by philosophical *Begriffe*. For Kierkegaard, 'Today nobody will stop with faith; they all go further'.¹³¹ Kierkegaard's skeptical anti-Hegelian endeavours in *Fear and Trembling* are clearly articulated in the preface:

'Even if one were able to render the whole of the content of faith into conceptual form, it would not follow that one had grasped faith, grasped how one came to it, or how it came to one.'¹³²

By invoking the Old Testament figure of Abraham, Kierkegaard, or rather his pseudonym in *Fear and Trembling*, Johannes de Silentio¹³³, brings Hegel and Abraham into proximity with the aim of making Hegel *tremble*. As part of this endeavour he formulates three questions. Can there be a 'teleological suspension of the ethical'? Can there be an 'absolute' duty toward God? Can Abraham's silence be ethically defensible? By bringing Abraham into proximity with Hegel, Johannes de Silentio aims to disclose the fundamental incompatibility of Hegelian speculative philosophy and genuine religious faith and responsibility. For Johannes de Silentio the Hegelian system (as a system of total disclosure) cannot contain the truth of religious faith, for the truth of that faith is concealed. For Kierkegaard the element of non-disclosure is crucial to the very structure of religious faith itself. The element of non-

¹³⁰ S. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, p.109

¹³¹ Ibid, p.42

¹³² Ibid, p.43

¹³³ A. Hannay notes in his introduction to his translation of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* that the pseudonym 'Johannes de Silentio' is 'allegedly borrowed from one of the Grimms' fairy tales, "The Faithful Servant" (p.10). It is worth noting that in this story faithful John is petrified, literally turned to stone, for attempting to put into words, by way of an explanation, his faithful actions to his master.

disclosure, the secret that *is* faith, exceeds Hegel's speculative system with its explicit programme of absolute immanent disclosure. The Hegelian system, rather than perfecting Christian faith, disperses its essential 'subjective truth' into what Johannes de Silentio terms the 'ethical'. Johannes de Silentio's notion of the 'ethical' in *Fear and Trembling* is derived from a distinction between *Moralität* (morality) and *Sittlichkeit* (ethics, ethical life) found in Hegel's philosophy.¹³⁴ Hegel argues that *Moralität* is a historically unmediated 'ethics' of pure reason. Such an 'ethics' abstracts from 'moral experience' to such a degree that it cannot be truly adequate to it. For Hegel, Moral philosophy must reorientate itself towards what he terms *Sittlichkeit*, that is, the established laws and customs, institutions and practices, of the culture to which the philosopher belongs. This conception of the 'ethical' as *Sittlichkeit* includes the religious as 'elevated' within it, and it was this principle of 'ethics' that Johannes de Silentio challenges with the religious faith of Abraham.

According to Genesis 22.1 Abraham is called upon by God to sacrifice his only beloved son Isaac. Abraham does not question God and obeys him despite God giving him no reason or explanation for his demand. Abraham says nothing of what he must do to his wife Sarah or Isaac, and, the next morning he leaves for the mountains of Moriah with Isaac. When Isaac asks him of the whereabouts of the lamb they are to slaughter and burn, Abraham replies that 'God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering'. At the moment Abraham takes his knife to kill his son, however, God orders him not to, having seen that Abraham was prepared to obey him and make this sacrifice. A ram is found and sacrificed in Isaac's place. For Johannes de Silentio, precisely because he doesn't 'speak' and gives no explanation or rationale for his actions, Abraham transgresses the 'ethical' order. The highest expression of this 'ethical' order is what binds us to each other, but Abraham does not speak, he keeps a secret. Jacques Derrida in his work on Kierkegaard and *Fear and Trembling* observes:

'To the extent that, in not saying the essential thing, namely, the secret between God and him, Abraham doesn't speak, he assumes the responsibility that consists in always being alone, entrenched in one's own singularity at the moment of decision... But as soon as one speaks, as soon as one enters the medium of language, one loses that very

¹³⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, translated by H.B. Nisbet, edited by A.W. Wood

singularity. One therefore loses the possibility of deciding or the right to decide. Thus every decision would fundamentally, remain at the same time solitary, secret and silent. Speaking relieves us, Kierkegaard notes, for it 'translates' into the general.¹³⁵

Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* cannot 'contain' this silent truth of Abraham's faith. Nothing within the Hegelian notion of *Sittlichkeit* can 'motivate' or 'justify' Abraham's actions, his ethical society can only demand that he must love and protect his son Isaac. Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* would then disperse the element of true faith here and Abraham would be considered as transgressing his ethical obligations towards his son, and be condemned as a murderer. Johannes de Silentio insists that Abraham can only be considered as a murderer, rather than the 'father of faith', from the perspective of *Sittlichkeit*, and will remain condemned unless those laws, customs, and institutions associated with *Sittlichkeit* are ultimately considered to be merely penultimate norms that are subordinate to a higher law. This is what Johannes de Silentio refers to as the 'teleological suspension of the ethical'. Thus in order to recognise the essence of Abraham's faith and be able to recover him from the necessary condemnation of *Sittlichkeit* it is necessary to recognise the truth of a higher allegiance than *Sittlichkeit*.

What is at stake here for Johannes de Silentio is the question of the ultimate source of the moral law and my relationship to it, i.e. my ultimate duties and responsibilities. Johannes de Silentio questions whether such a source can be immanent within *Sittlichkeit*, as Hegel argues, or whether it is always transcendent, an origin concealed from the reach of Hegel's immanence, an origin that exceeds it through its non-disclosure. Johannes de Silentio writes :

'Faith is just this paradox, that the single individual as the particular is higher than the universal, is justified before the latter, not as subordinate but superior, though in such a way, be it noted, that it is the single individual who, having been subordinate to the universal as the particular, now by means of the universal becomes that individual who, as the particular, stands in an absolute relation to the absolute. This position cannot be mediated, for all mediation occurs precisely by virtue of the universal; it is and remains in all eternity a paradox, inaccessible to thought. And yet faith is this

¹³⁵ J. Derrida, 'Whom to Give to (knowing Not to Know)' in *The Gift of Death*, p.59

paradox...or else faith has never existed just because it has always existed. And Abraham is done for.¹³⁶

From the perspective represented by Abraham genuine selfhood is realised within the torn singularity of the subject's decision, in utter isolation from others, and in opposition to *Sittlichkeit*. It is realised by the total devotion to an absolutely transcendent God over against whom the individual always stands. The Abrahamic God is the transcendent Master who demands absolute obedience. However, God's absolute transcendence allows for the possibility of a conflict between one's religious commitment or responsibility and one's personal desire and concrete ethical responsibilities. Given that such a conflict will inevitably emerge the faithful subject must follow Abraham's example in foregoing all personal desire and suspending all ethical responsibility, even if this might mean going so far as to sacrifice one's own beloved child. From the perspective of *Sittlichkeit* such action is incomprehensible, insane, wilful, or even evil. Since the command of the absolutely transcendent (i.e. the call to religious responsibility) is itself contrary to human reason (since it exceeds human reason and any 'concept' of responsibility) the religious subject has no ethical assurances that the judgement of *Sittlichkeit* regarding its actions is incorrect. Such ineradicable uncertainty generates an unavoidable and extraordinary level of insecurity, which in turn generates the inescapable 'fear and trembling' of religious faith.

Moves to evade the 'fear and trembling' of true religious faith and responsibility represents, Johannes de Silentio claims, the 'temptation' of the ethical. The 'temptation' of the irresponsible *Sittlichkeit* impels Abraham to speak, to give an account of his actions. It impels him to dissolve the singularity of his religious responsibility into the realm of the general or ethical. Derrida again captures this aspect of the paradoxical movement of 'irresponsibilisation' (which is the result of the 'temptation' of the ethical) in the following lines from his study of *Fear and Trembling*:

¹³⁶ S. Kierkegaard, *Ibid.*, pp. 84-5

'For Abraham, Kierkegaard declares, the ethical is a temptation. He must therefore resist it. He keeps quiet in order to avoid the moral temptation which, under the pretext of calling him to responsibility, to self-justification, would make him lose his ultimate responsibility along with his singularity, make him lose his unjustifiable, secret, and absolute responsibility before God. This is ethics as 'irresponsibilisation', as an insoluble and paradoxical contradiction between responsibility in general and absolute responsibility. Absolute responsibility is not a responsibility, at least it is not general responsibility or responsibility in general. It needs to be exceptional or extraordinary, and it needs to be that absolutely and par excellence: it is as if absolute responsibility could not be derived from a concept of responsibility and therefore, in order for it to be what it must be it must remain inconceivable, indeed unthinkable: it must therefore be irresponsible in order to be absolutely responsible.'¹³⁷

Johannes de Silentio concludes that the truth of religious faith that emerges from the story of Abraham is not and cannot be the Hegelian self-consciousness of the ethical order; rather, it is the subject's irreducibly *personal relation* to God, an absolute relation that ultimately relativises all cultural relation and subsequent responsibilities. For Johannes de Silentio Abraham demonstrates that it is 'beyond' or 'outside' the ethical spirit that the truth of the structure of responsibility are to be found, in a covenant of silence and secrecy between the subject and the Absolutely transcendent. Ultimately this covenant of silence and secrecy, this *paradox of responsibility and irresponsibility*, this absolute non-disclosure that is religious faith, exceeds Hegelian speculative dialectics and philosophy in general. Derrida argues that what emerges with this paradox of responsibility/irresponsibility is the revelation of 'conceptual thinking at the limit'¹³⁸, it is the paradox which marks the breach of the Hegelian system and the space for the movement *beyond* Hegel. Derrida forcefully argues, as Johannes de Silentio has already done, for the interruption of Hegelian philosophy, for a breach of the system, which is at the heart of the discourse of *Fear and Trembling*.

'The paradox cannot be grasped in time and through mediation, that is to say in language and through reason...it remains irreducible to presence or to presentation, it demands a temporality of the instant without ever constituting a present. If it can be

¹³⁷ J. Derrida, *Ibid.*, p.61

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.68

said, it belongs to an atemporal temporality, to a duration that cannot be grasped: something one can neither stabilise, establish, grasp, apprehend, nor comprehend. Understanding, common sense, and reason cannot seize, conceive, understand, or mediate it.¹³⁹

Within *Fear and Trembling* there is a clearly announced assault upon Hegel's presupposition of the need for reconciliation. Kierkegaard argues against such a 'need', task or imperative arising from what Hegel terms the 'unhappy consciousness', the need for or task of 'reconciliation' of the bifurcated subject within the concrete universal. For Johannes de Silentio the subject's task is not to go 'beyond' faith to a speculative concept, but to go 'beyond' the speculative concept in 'going back' to the truth of religious faith. Johannes de Silentio insists upon the necessity of maintaining from the beginning the absolute separation of the subject and of recovering the subject from the 'reconciling' forces of Hegelian speculative philosophy. Kierkegaard's assault upon what is understood to be the second element of Hegel's presupposition, namely the presupposed nature of the 'task' of reconciliation, i.e. Hegel's absolute or total speculative philosophical system, is in part outlined in the second pseudonymous work that we will consider here, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.

In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Kierkegaard, through his pseudonym Johannes Climacus, posits one major question - 'how must the subject be constituted so that there remains a problem of how the subject is to enter into the correct relation to Christianity?' Johannes Climacus begins by presenting himself as a type of Kantian thinker for whom the genuine Kantian dialectic prevails over the Hegelian immanent speculative dialectic, and challenges the Hegelian speculative project of resolving dissonance into harmony, difference into identity. For Johannes Climacus the function of the Christian Incarnation must be rethought in order to reassert the proper function of philosophy and to reassert the priority of traditional Aristotelian logic. For Climacus traditional logic is the formal principle that must be recovered in opposition to Hegel's speculative immanent logic, and Climacus's concrete principle is Christianity understood as the 'absolute' communication of the nature of subjective

¹³⁹ Ibid, p.65

existence as opposed to Hegel's understanding of Christianity as an imperfect version of the Truth that receives its 'perfect' expression within his speculative philosophical system. For Climacus the subject, the 'unhappy consciousness' is a *destroyed* synthesis, which as existing, contrary to what Hegel argues, does not possess the absolute capacity for reconciliation, or the capacity for recreating the 'destroyed' synthesis. By referring to the resistance 'achieved' by Johannes de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling*, Climacus argues that religious faith is the paradigm of such resistance, a resistance that discloses the truth of what he terms *external* synthesis in thought.

Climacus opens *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* with a discussion of the so-called 'objective' problem of the truth of Christianity and concludes that upon the path of objectivity the subjective problems of the relation to Christianity are dispersed. From the objective perspective there is the problem of the objective truth of Christianity itself, rather than its truth for the existing subject. The objective account of Christianity has two distinct strands, according to Climacus. It can either be historical, so that one attempts to pursue an entirely authentic account of Christian doctrine, or it can be speculative, where the attempt is made, through pure thought, to conceptualise and thereby philosophically validate the truth of Christianity. However, for Climacus, the problem of the existing subject's relation to Christianity cannot itself emerge for either of these strands of the objective account. On the path of the historical there can be no ultimate transition beyond mere probability to absolute objective certainty, and upon the speculative course there is a fundamental misunderstanding of both what Christianity is and what it is to be an existing subject in relation to it. For Climacus it is not reason as such that is essentially opposed to religious faith but 'modes' of reason that have forgotten or conceal their intrinsic limits as human, and consequently fall into self-deification. The modes of reason associated with Hegelian speculative thought have absolutised the ethical to such an extent that the subject's absolute relation to God has all but disappeared. Religious faith has become indistinguishable from 'socialisation', and for Climacus Hegelian speculation renders religious faith into a merely abstract essence whose concrete essence is transformed into the 'state'.

In addressing what is then the central concern of the work Climacus focuses upon the 'subjective problem' itself. He invokes the figure of Lessing as the type of figure who

isolates himself and does not articulate a historical or speculative objective system, but who is, rather, a 'subjective' thinker. This subjective thinker is interested in the question of his own uncompleted existence, which is still in the process of becoming, together with the question of thought itself. The subjective thinker realises that the two cannot be 'separated' through a reconciliatory conjoining of the two and emphasises the role of 'decision'. The subjective thinker realises the very anxiety of Pascal, who is 'incapable of seeing the nothing from which he emerges and the infinity in which he is engulfed'.¹⁴⁰ Climacus thus builds upon the understanding developed within *Fear and Trembling* that Hegel's move 'beyond' faith is mistaken. For Climacus the Hegelian system promises to replace the objective *uncertainty* of Christianity with absolute *certainty*, and Climacus claims that it cannot legitimately achieve this since the system itself remains an interpretation, merely a perspective. Its presuppositionless status emerges from an act of decision upon what Climacus argues would remain only a perpetual act of reflection; 'reflection can be halted only by a leap'.¹⁴¹ Further, the Hegelian system 'levels' or 'rounds off' the moment of passionate inward appropriation of religious faith by 'reducing' the subject to a merely impersonal observer devoid of existential identity. It effaces the moment of subjective decision. Climacus though, in addressing the 'subjective problem' struggles to maintain the very freedom or 'space' within which genuine subjective decision and genuine responsibility emerge.

Climacus characterises the Hegelian philosopher, in struggling to obtain Absolute Knowledge, as having to possess the absolute totality of the divine ideas and thus stand at the very completion of the historical process so as to encompass the totality of the unfolding of the Idea. The Hegelian philosopher is characterised by his efforts to 'reflect' himself *out of* existence and *into* eternity. The subjective thinker (Lessing for Climacus) recognises that to view the world *sub specie aeterni* is to see the world as God sees it. However, if existence as subjectivity is conceived as an uncompleted existence (subjectivity is a process of achievement within time) and if logic is essentially atemporal, as Climacus insists, then a *logical, philosophical* system can be formulated, but not a system of *being* or *existence*. The subject's existence is necessarily and perpetually *dynamic* whereas logic is *static*. Hence Hegel's attempt to

¹⁴⁰ Pascal, *Pensees*, translated with an introduction by A.J. Krailsheimer

¹⁴¹ S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p.116

bring movement into logic, so as to be able to work out an immanent logical system of being, is an impossible endeavour for Climacus:

'Reality itself is a system for God; but it cannot be a system for any existing spirit for any existing spirit. System and finality correspond to one another, but existence is precisely the opposite of finality. It may be seen, from a purely abstract point of view, that system and existence are incapable of being thought together; because in order to think existence at all, systematic thought must think it as abrogated, and hence as not existing. Existence separates, and holds the various moments of existence discretely apart; the systematic thought consists of the finality which bring them together.'¹⁴²

If subjective existence is an unfinished endeavour, a perpetual becoming, then the effort must, Climacus argues, be in all circumstances an effort toward a 'specific' goal; ethics as a consequence becomes crucial. The existing subject's endeavour is simply an expression of his ethical attitude provided by whatever 'specific' goal he strives for in time. The subjective thinker, Climacus argues, must view the entire speculative endeavour as a comical attempt to do what is impossible for an existing subject, the abrogation of the subject's very existence, its striving, decision and responsibility. Climacus maintains that abstract thinking is undertaken under the orientation of eternity, and as such averts its gaze from the process of subjective existence, which cannot reside within the repose of eternity but must always be in a process of 'becoming'. For Climacus subjective thought is far from being easier than abstract speculative thought, indeed it is the more difficult since its *task* is to attempt to think the 'particular' rather than the universal. Hegelian speculative thought ultimately claims to overcome the principle of contradiction inherent within 'unhappy consciousness', to have 'reconciled' it to the universal, and as such thinks that it can be 'correct' in its progress within the 'ether' of Absolute Knowledge, the realm of the identity between thought and being. For Climacus no existing subject can ever find itself in this ether, in this pure sphere, thus Hegel's claim to have overcome or reconciled contradiction is really of no interest:

¹⁴² Ibid. p. 118

'The difficulty that inheres in existence, with which the existing individual is confronted, is one that never really comes to expression in the language of abstract thought, much less receive an explanation. Because abstract thought is *sub specie aeterni* it ignores the concrete and the temporal, the existential process, the predicament of the existing individual arising from his being a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal situated in existence.'¹⁴³

However, Climacus does not merely mock Hegel's claims or dismiss them; he continues by arguing that if Hegel insists that the reconciling of contradiction is valid for the sphere of subjective existence, then such an assertion is dangerous for it abolishes the 'difference' between good and evil and thus all ethics. For Climacus the ethical is the only truly important reality, a reality ultimately delineated by the subject's relation to Christianity, and subsequent religious responsibilities. This relation is a relation of non-disclosure.

Fear and Trembling expresses the Absolute Paradox of religious faith as non-rational, as fundamentally self-contradictory and irreducibly 'absurd'. Rather than revealing the omnipotence of reason and the rationality of actuality, the paradox of religious faith confronts Hegelian speculative philosophy and philosophy in general with the limitations and boundaries and irrevocably separates the rational and the actual. Thus faith and reason, religious belief and philosophical knowledge, are *not* implicitly *one*, an ontotheology, but are fundamentally antithetical. Climacus, in true Kantian spirit, insists that reason must make it clear that the Absolute Paradox cannot be understood and must disclose to the subjective thinker that the paradox *really is* a paradox. Against Hegel's claim that the Incarnation discloses the absolute immanence of God in Being and thus the 'homogeneity' of the divine and the existing subject, Kierkegaard argues for an Absolute Paradox of the incarnated God-Man (Christ). The function of the Incarnation is to disclose the absolute radical transcendence of God and the 'heterogeneity' of the divine and the existing subject.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* p.301

Against Hegel's speculative revision of the principles of identity, difference and contradiction, Kierkegaard reaffirms traditional Aristotelian logic.¹⁴⁴ He argues that Hegel's effort to mediate opposites merely collapses distinctions essential to concrete subjective existence. He attempts to use the radical insight into the nature of Incarnation to articulate a breach in Hegel's absolute immanent movement within his *Logic*, and to reassert the truth of a logic of the external synthesis of discrete metaphysical particularities. Whilst acknowledging that viewed *sub specie aeterni* there can be no contradiction, Kierkegaard argues that only God can be a true Hegelian. Hegel's system emerges from a concrete existence but is a system that cannot articulate real existence as immanence. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* what makes the notion of immanent mediation attractive and the term synthesis problematic for Hegel, makes the concept of synthesis attractive and the category of immanent mediation problematic for Kierkegaard's existing subject. Kierkegaard ultimately seeks to abolish Hegelian immanent mediation and reinstate external synthesis, a positive third term that creates the synthetic coincidence of opposites. Metaphysical oppositions are synthesised through the existing subject's free self-conscious activity, a synthesis of reality and ideality. From Kierkegaard's perspective the polarities of finitude and infinitude represented by reality and ideality are ultimately opposites for the existing subject that can only be bridged through an *act* of synthesis, through the struggles of the system.

It can be seen that Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* represent a fundamental assault upon Hegel's primary presupposition of the need for reconciliation. They represent a challenge to the entire impetus of Hegelian philosophy. Such a skeptical challenge to Hegel's immanent speculative closure of metaphysics, a challenge that aims to effect an interruption, arguably continues to delineate much of the territory of subsequent post/anti-Hegelian philosophy.

¹⁴⁴ Trendelenburg's critique of Hegel's *Science of Logic* was particularly influential on Kierkegaard's thinking here. See F.A. Trendelenburg, 'Extract from *The Logical Question in Hegel's System*' in R. Stern ed., *GWF Hegel: Critical Assessments, 4 Vols* and for an account of Kierkegaard's relation to Trendelenburg's thought see J. Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1967).

(ii) *The Hegelian Response to Kierkegaard*

Hegel would clearly reject many of Kierkegaard's criticisms, judging them fundamentally misguided. For Hegel Kierkegaard's contention that speculative dialectical reconciliation dissolves difference in identity represents a serious failure to comprehend the genuine nature of the speculative identity within difference where oppositions become co-implicated and demonstrated to be essentially mutually constitutive. Kierkegaard interprets Hegelian speculative idealism as an identity philosophy in which difference, multiplicity, and plurality are merely apparent, ideated and finally unreal. However, even Hegel rejects this conception of abstract non-differentiation; the type of early Schellingean idealism he rejects represents such an identity philosophy. With a type of speculative idealism distinguished from the Schellingean identity variant, Hegel demonstrates that the relation of identity and difference does not result in the *absorption* of difference in identity or the *dissolution* of identity in difference. Hegel would reject the Kierkegaardian characterisation of Speculative idealism as resulting in a 'levelling' of the contradictions of actual existence and the tensions of finite individuality. For Hegel it is only through speculative idealism that one is able to fully penetrate the very nature of actuality and to comprehend it. The speculative dialectic whereby particularity and universality are progressively reconciled does not dissipate genuine individuality; but demonstrates that it can only arise within an internally differentiated totality through an immanent internal relation. Thus Hegel would be able to proffer a wholly immanent critique of the type of external skeptical position that Kierkegaard adopts.

From Hegel's perspective the opposition definitive of Kierkegaard's understanding of genuine individuality would leave that individual unsustainably fragmented. Such fragmentation is, for Hegel, the very characteristic most associated with spiritlessness. Like the Unhappy consciousness Kierkegaardian individuality is dogmatically mired in abstraction and the differentiations he insists upon cannot be rationally sustained. The Kierkegaardian self is set against the other, the subject against the object, finitude against infinitude, reality against ideality, actuality against possibility, freedom against necessity, individuality against universality, self against society, time against eternity, and man against God. The result of insisting upon such persistent opposition is the negation of the essential qualities of genuine concrete individuality:

'Consciousness of life, of its existence and activity, is only an agonizing over this existence and activity, for therein it is conscious only of its own nothingness.'¹⁴⁵

Awareness of one's inessentiality leads to a desperate self-negation through which the temporal finite subject seeks to regain its essentiality through reconciliation with divinity. Such faith, however, is doomed to failure. The types of reified oppositions that underlie and presuppose it make reconciliation impossible and self-alienation inevitable. Subject and object, self and other, existence and essence, man and God, remain estranged:

'There is on the one hand, a going out from my finitude to a Higher; on the other hand, I am determined as the negative of this Higher. The latter remains an Other, which cannot be determined by me, insofar as determination is to have an objective meaning. What is present is only this going out on my part, this aiming to teach what is remote; I remain on this side, and have a yearning after a beyond.'¹⁴⁶

This desperate and restless yearning leads to the individual's attempt to establish an absolute relation with an alien God, further and further beyond the human community, until the self is utterly isolated, alienated and estranged. For Hegel such self-maintenance of individuality in strict opposition to otherness does not realise genuine individuality in the way a thinker like Kierkegaard insists it does. For Hegel, given that Spirit is essentially intersubjective, the refusal of sociality is essentially the very negation of concrete individuality. Kierkegaardian type faith, for Hegel, represents nothing more than a revival of Jewish positivity in which a servile subject is completely obedient to an omnipotent Lord and Master. Hegel had, in his *Early Theological Writings*, explored this aspect of Judaism, and had characterised it there as 'the spirit of self-maintenance in strict opposition to everything – the product of his thought raised to the unity dominant over nature which he regarded as infinite and hostile.'¹⁴⁷ Such an insistence upon the absolute qualitative difference between the divine and the human misconstrues both the nature of the infinite and eternal God and

¹⁴⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, #209, p.127

¹⁴⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 1, p.177

¹⁴⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, p.186

the finite temporal individual. Hegel would argue that Kierkegaard's 'Knight of Faith' is essentially estranged, 'a stranger on earth, a stranger to the soil and to men alike'¹⁴⁸. With Abraham, the 'Knight of Faith' is condemned to suffer the homesickness born of perpetual exile and desperate yearning for the beyond.

Kierkegaard would clearly respond by arguing that Hegel's insistence upon the coincidence of opposites would leave them perpetually fragmented, and that it ultimately represents a failure to truly grasp the dialectical paradox created and sustained by the synthetic activity of Spirit. Since Hegel's reconciliatory vision remains blind to genuine paradox, he mistakenly identifies what Kierkegaard argues is the concretely realised individual with the Unhappy consciousness, i.e. merely a penultimate stage towards realised spirit. Kierkegaard's 'Knight of Faith' is not estranged from real existence but reborn to finite experience, 'faith begins precisely where thinking leaves off'.¹⁴⁹ Faith is an absurdly paradoxical act of the individual, simultaneously resigning and reappropriating, negating and affirming the created order:

'A paradoxical and humble courage is required to grasp the whole of the temporal by virtue of the absurd, and this is the courage of faith.'¹⁵⁰

Hegel, however, would maintain that his conception of concrete individuality is actually *implicit* within and *immanent* to this opposition, i.e. Kierkegaardian individuality. Thus, Hegel would insist upon the fact that this notion of individuality necessarily and immanently negates itself in its very attempt to instantiate itself; it thus passes over into its opposite, i.e. Hegelian concrete Spirit. For Kierkegaard the individual's identity is established through a self-relation independent of relation to alterity. Relations among individuals are conceived as being external to antecedent constituted identity and as such remain accidental to determinate being. Thus Kierkegaard regards identity and difference as logically indifferent and denies that the individual's identity arises through internal logical relation to alterity; rather individuality is a function of its opposition to alterity. Hegel, however, is able to

¹⁴⁸ Ibid

¹⁴⁹ S. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, p.82

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p.59

demonstrate that the effort of the Kierkegaardian individual to establish its self-identity through a radical self-affirmation of its freedom and self-subsistence will ultimately immanently negate itself. In this immanent negation the irreducible structures of the internal relation between self and other become disclosed as being the very ground for Kierkegaard's radical self-affirmation. Thus:

'Self-subsistence pushed to the point of the one as a being-for-self is abstract, formal, and destroys itself. It is the supreme, most stubborn error, which takes itself for the highest truth, manifesting in more concrete forms as abstract freedom, pure ego and, further, as Evil. It is that freedom which so misapprehends itself as to place its essence in this abstraction, and flatters itself that in thus being with itself it possesses itself in its purity. More specifically this self-subsistence is the error of regarding as negative that which is its own essence, and of adopting a negative attitude towards it. Thus it is the negative attitude towards itself which in seeking to possess its own being destroys it, and this its act is only the manifestation of the futility of this act.'¹⁵¹

Hegel, in the *Science of Logic*, repeatedly demonstrates the essential and necessary co-implication of categorical opposites. For Hegel the truth of the individual can never be as a *merely* hypostatised, reified and abstract individual in the way Kierkegaard maintains. As we have seen, Kierkegaard attempts to articulate an absolute irreducible 'differentiation' of the self from the other, which in turn generates the irreducibility of *external* synthesis in philosophy. However, as we will see, Hegel shows how concrete individuality can *only* emerge, and be sustained, by virtue of the *internal* logical relation between self and other. We will thus proceed by examining Hegel's account of this necessary internal relatedness between 'something' and 'other' in the *Science of Logic*. We will argue that his account persuasively demonstrates Kierkegaard's failure to engage with the whole matter of *internal* relation, together with his failure to understand that the notion of an irreducible 'differentiation' of the self from the other was already recognised and treated by Hegel within the *Science of Logic's* treatment of 'something' and 'other'. Indeed, Hegel's immanent account of these categories will conclusively demonstrate that such an 'absolute' external differentiation logically implies an internal relation. By

¹⁵¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 172

concentrating upon the details of Hegel's account of the categories of 'something' and 'other' in the *Science of Logic* we will be able to show precisely how Hegel discloses the essentially other-related structure of being and thus highlight implicit weaknesses within Kierkegaard's abstraction of the individual from immanent and internal relation.

It is important to emphasise, before we begin our analysis of Hegel, the immanently self-determining nature of the *Science of Logic* whereby *new* categories develop strictly immanently from prior developed categories; as such the content of new categories is *entirely* determined by an understanding of how prior categories alone operate within the transformation and transition of concepts. Thus when abstracting singular categories for analysis from such an immanently self-determining developmental process, there are a number of risks involved that we will attempt to avoid by recognising the necessity of providing details regarding their immanent development.

Hegel's initial description of the categories 'something' and 'other' occurs within his account of 'Determinate Being'¹⁵². Here the category of 'determinate being', or 'there-being or being which is there' (*Dasein*), is present to thought as a simple immediate unity of 'being' and 'nothingness'. 'Determinate being' is not the same as pure 'being', i.e. the category by which the *Science of Logic* begins its immanent development¹⁵³. 'Being' had transformed itself, through the moments of 'Nothing' and 'Becoming', into this bare form of determinacy. Here in Determinate Being, despite the determinateness remaining indefinite and therefore vague in its reference, 'there-being' (*Dasein*) is more specific than 'being' and represents a real development. Hegel argues that the 'emphasis' of dialectical questioning or thinking must now fall upon clarifying the precise nature of how being comes to determine itself in more concrete terms.

Initially Hegel claims that this bare form of determinateness has the form of immediacy: 'the simple oneness of being and nothing'¹⁵⁴. Crucially he states that in

¹⁵² G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, pp. 109-156

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-108

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 109

immediacy determinateness is only for our reflection, and is 'not yet posited as such in its own self'¹⁵⁵. In order that this occur 'a number of determinations, distinct relations of its moments, make their appearance in it'¹⁵⁶. Dialectical questioning must endeavour to uncover and clarify the way in which the determinateness of being is posited immanently within being, or how 'being' determines itself as 'a being' itself.

In the transition to immediate determinate being the relation to 'being' is one of an immediate unity of 'being' and 'nothing' where 'no differentiation of this unity is posited'¹⁵⁷. Such a simple immediate form of determinateness is categorised by Hegel as 'quality'. However, 'quality' here has the characteristic of the one-sided application of determinateness to 'being', but determinateness can equally be posited in the determination of 'nothing', which is equally a moment in the immediate unity of determinate being. When this happens determinateness is posited as 'differentiated, *reflected* determinateness, no longer as immediate or in the form of being'¹⁵⁸. Thus, 'nothing' as a determinate element of determinateness is equally something *reflected*, (i.e. '*for us in our reflection*'¹⁵⁹, as Hegel writes) as in 'quality', but now as 'negation'. 'Quality' when it is taken in the distinct one-sided element of 'being' is 'reality'; but it is burdened with a negative aspect, which becomes negation in general, which is likewise a 'quality'. Hegel's point here is to demonstrate that when determinate being has the 'quality' of 'reality', thereby having as its sole emphasis the positive aspect of 'being', the true nature of its determinateness, i.e. involving an element of 'negation' is effaced.

In 'quality' as determination there is, and inescapably so, a distinction between reality and negation. However, Hegel demonstrates that such a distinction having arisen is subsequently self-sublating, so 'reality' itself comes to necessarily *contain* negation as a moment. The necessity that 'reality' must contain negation as a moment emerges from the recognition that 'reality' *is* a determinate being and *not* an indeterminate 'being'. Similarly, negation is determinate being in that it *is* 'affirmatively present,

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p.110

¹⁵⁶ Ibid

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. p.111

¹⁵⁸ Ibid

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p.110

belonging to the sphere of determinate being'¹⁶⁰. For Hegel the sublation of these distinct aspects represents more than a mere repetition of the stages so far traversed in the thinking of the immanent development of determinate being. The distinction is not a wavering movement to be traversed *ad infinitum*, but 'is'; that is, the distinction emerges as the *very way* being now determines *itself*.

'What is, therefore, in fact present is determinate being in general, distinction in it, and sublation of this distinction; determined being, not as devoid of distinction as at first, but as again equal to itself through sublation of the distinction, the simple oneness of determinate being resulting from this sublation'¹⁶¹.

Hegel characterises this movement of sublation of the distinction between 'reality' and 'negation' as 'being's own determinateness' rather than a determination through external reflection.¹⁶² Through this initial form of *self-determination* being is a determinate being, or, as Hegel categorises it, it *is* 'something'. Hegel describes this 'something' as the *first* negation of negation, as the first wholly *internal* relation immanent to 'being'. Through this first negation of negation, the first internal form of relatedness, being determines itself immanently to become a determinate being, a 'something'. However, as the *first* internal relation it remains, Hegel maintains, 'a very superficial determination', and 'only the beginning of the subject [*Subjekt*] - being-within-self'¹⁶³. From this still as yet indeterminate notion of self-determination 'being' goes on to develop 'first, as a being-for-self' and so on until 'in the Notion it first attains the concrete intensity of the subject'¹⁶⁴. For Hegel what lies at the basis of such development in the self-determination of being is 'the negative unity with itself'¹⁶⁵ which emerges here in protean form, and now becomes the object for thought.

Thus through 'being's' own self-mediation of the moments of 'reality' and 'negation' a negative unity emerges as being's own self-determinateness *becomes* increasingly concrete. Such a negative unity *is* present as self-mediated in the first protean form of

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 115

¹⁶¹ Ibid. p. 115

¹⁶² Ibid

¹⁶³ Ibid

¹⁶⁴ Ibid

¹⁶⁵ Ibid

self-determination, ie. 'being' as 'something'. However, it is determined as a *simple* unity, a simple form of self-mediation. Hegel shows that 'being' as 'something' is determined initially as a 'simple' unity, and collapses into becoming the 'simple' oneness that is 'being'. He characterises the process of thinking this movement of becoming the 'simple oneness' of 'being' as being fundamentally *different* from the initial immediate determinateness of determinate being since it no longer has merely the thought of mere 'being' and 'nothing' as its constituent moments. In this new thought 'being' is a *determinate* being, and its second moment, negation, is equally a determinate being but one determined as a negative of the 'something' rather than just the negative of 'reality'; it is, Hegel argues, an 'other'¹⁶⁶. The 'becoming' of the determinate being here is seen to be a matter of transition between moments which are themselves 'somethings' but initially determined as 'something' and 'other' within a process of 'alteration'. This process of alteration is not posited at first as a process of self-mediation between the two constituent moments of 'alteration'; rather each 'something' is sustained through maintaining the self-relation of the 'something' and its negative moment in 'alteration' (which is simply posited as equally qualitative but negatively so). Thus the negative moment is simply characterised initially as an 'other' in general.

Thus in this initial emergence of the categories of 'something' and 'other' both are equally determinations of 'something'. Each therefore, Hegel argues, is equally 'other':

'If of two things we call one *A*, and the other *B*, then in the first instance *B* is determined as the other. But *A* is just as much the other of *B*. Both are, in the same way, others.'¹⁶⁷

Here the 'other' initially functions symmetrically or reciprocally as a matter of reflection, or external determination. Hegel, as he had argued in the dialectic of 'Sense Certainty' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, argues that it is the designation 'this' which operates externally to distinguish 'something' from 'other'. So it becomes a matter of 'this' and not 'that'. But this means of distinction is merely a

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. p.116

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. p.117

'subjective designating' whereby the determinateness 'falls into this external pointing out'¹⁶⁸. The distinction is not yet determined by 'being' itself, from out of itself immanently. Through the designation 'this' 'we mean to express something completely determined', but, as he had already argued in 'Sense Certainty', 'speech, as a work of the understanding, gives expression only to universals'¹⁶⁹. Curiously Hegel argues that the only exception to this is the proper 'name' of the singular particular thing, but argues that since the proper 'name' is absolutely singular it is 'meaningless', or 'merely posited and arbitrary'¹⁷⁰. It is interesting to note that as we have already outlined, both Feuerbach and Kierkegaard attempt to sustain the 'Other' as absolutely singular and unique and to effectively have, what Hegel claims here, the status of a proper name. For Kierkegaard such an 'Other' actually signifies but without rational content or meaning, and he would deny that there is anything 'merely posited or arbitrary' regarding such an understanding of the absolutely singular 'Other'.

In this process of determination through subjective external designation of the 'other' by 'something', 'otherness' 'appears' as a determination wholly alien to the determinate 'something', or as 'outside the one determinate being'¹⁷¹. The 'other' is thus 'determined' as the 'wholly other'. However, as Hegel has already shown, every determinate being determines itself inescapably as 'other' whereby 'there is no determinate being which is determined only as such, which is not outside a determinate being and therefore...not itself an other'¹⁷². The something/other distinction is unsustainable since 'there is so far no distinction between them'¹⁷³. However, he now argues that such a collapse of distinctions is itself (like the distinction through subjective designation before it) a matter of external reflection. The self-sameness of 'something' and 'other' initially emerges from the 'comparing of them'¹⁷⁴. What such a reflective collapse of the distinction ignores is the extent to which an 'other' retains a seemingly ineluctable element of 'otherness' 'apart from

¹⁶⁸ Ibid

¹⁶⁹ Ibid

¹⁷⁰ Ibid

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p 118

¹⁷² Ibid

¹⁷³ Ibid

¹⁷⁴ Ibid

the something'¹⁷⁵. This element of 'otherness' is not eliminated through an initial reflective comparative collapse of the distinction. What thought must do is examine this ineluctable element of otherness and clarify what it thus means to be 'other' by taking it 'as isolated, as in relation to itself, abstractly as the other'¹⁷⁶. Thought must ascribe to the 'other' a *nature* of its own.

Hegel, in considering 'otherness' in its own self, does not begin by considering its relatedness to 'something'. Rather, the 'other' in itself is characterised as the Other of itself or 'that which is external to itself'¹⁷⁷. He characterises this 'other', determined by itself as 'other', as 'physical nature...the other of Spirit'¹⁷⁸. This 'other' *is* the 'other of itself and as such the 'other' of the 'other'. He argues, 'It is, therefore, that which is absolutely dissimilar within itself, that which negates itself, alters itself.'¹⁷⁹

However, in this process of negating itself (of 'altering' itself) the 'other' remains identical with itself. What it alters *into* within this process *is* the 'other' in that this is *its* sole self-determination. Hegel argues that by 'altering' 'it only unites with its own self'¹⁸⁰. In this process of alteration determinate being is *reflected into itself* through the sublation of the 'otherness', and determinate being *is*, in this process, a self-identical 'something'. However it is a self-identical 'something' from which 'otherness', which is at once necessarily and irreducibly a moment *of* it, is distinct from it:

'It [the 'other'] is thus posited as reflected into itself with sublation of the otherness, as a self-identical something from which, consequently, the otherness, which is at the same time a moment of it, is distinct from it.'¹⁸¹

As Hegel writes succinctly in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, thought has established that 'otherness is quality's own determination, though at first distinct from it'¹⁸². Pure

¹⁷⁵ Ibid

¹⁷⁶ Ibid

¹⁷⁷ Ibid

¹⁷⁸ Ibid

¹⁷⁹ Ibid

¹⁸⁰ Ibid

¹⁸¹ Ibid

¹⁸² G. W. F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic*, #91, p. 147

thought is able to establish that 'something' is itself necessarily 'preserved' in the 'negative of its determinate being'¹⁸³, the 'other' or 'outside', and that it is 'essentially one with it and essentially *not one* with it'¹⁸⁴. Pure thought has established the necessity of 'something's' internal relatedness to 'otherness', i.e. that 'something' is intrinsically and constitutionally 'other-related'. Thus pure thought is able to demonstrate the essential futility of the attempt to dogmatically maintain a hypostatised, abstracted and alien quality of otherness. This 'other-relatedness' of something, Hegel argues, 'is at once contained in it and also still separate from it'¹⁸⁵, and is categorised by the notion of 'being-for-other'.

'Something' necessarily preserves itself in this negative of its determinate being and as such is being 'as self-related in opposition to its relation to other, as self-equal in opposition to its inequality. Such a being is being-in-itself.'¹⁸⁶ This 'Being-for-other' and 'Being-for-itself' constitute the two moments of the 'something'. The truth of the two determinations are their *relation*, as 'moments of one and the same something.'¹⁸⁷ Hegel concludes that 'each, therefore, at the same time, also contains within itself its other moment which is distinguished from it.'¹⁸⁸

'Being-for-itself' necessarily entails 'Being-for-other', and since identity is fundamentally relational, otherness ceases to be merely other and difference is no longer *indifferent*. Relation-to-Other is simultaneously mediated self-relation through which concrete individuality is established and maintained. Abstract external difference and exclusive oppositions are abrogated when it is demonstrated that these relations are internally and immanently generated, and are shown to be an essential element of the speculative unity of Being. As Hegel writes in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* the self is fundamentally 'the opposite of itself: it is for itself, insofar as it is for another, and it is for another, insofar as it is for itself.'¹⁸⁹

¹⁸³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p.119

¹⁸⁴ Ibid

¹⁸⁵ Ibid

¹⁸⁶ Ibid

¹⁸⁷ Ibid

¹⁸⁸ Ibid

¹⁸⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, #99, p.76

For Hegel immanent internal relations are ontologically definitive, thus *to be* is to be *related*. Individuality is essentially *social*, and Spirit fundamentally *intersubjective*. Concrete individuality can *only* arise in community with other free subjects. Extracted from such necessary interrelation the individual becomes dogmatically maintained as an abstract, indefinite, alienated unhappy consciousness. Kierkegaard's stubborn skeptical refusal to acknowledge the necessary co-inherence of self and other leads, Hegel would argue, to a failure on his part to recognise the thoroughgoing sociality of selfhood and the intersubjectivity of Spirit. When conceived by Hegel the dialectical mediation of oppositions reconciles (but does not dissolve) those contraries constitutive of concrete finite individuality. Hegel is clearly more sensitive to the dangers of dissipating difference in identity *and* the disintegration of identity in difference than Kierkegaard permits. Hegel ultimately recognises that in order to articulate an adequate understanding of concrete individuality it is necessary to trace (as he clearly does in the *Science of Logic*) a mediated path between the extremes of undifferentiated unity and abstract multiplicity.

The essence of Kierkegaard's failure is in fact analogous to the failure of abstract skeptical equipollence that Hegel demonstrates. With the abstract form of skepticism there is an insistence upon a heterogeneous element incommensurable with reason. However, for Hegel argues this heterogeneous element is ultimately associated with the implicit diversity *of* reason rather than a realm opposed to it. As we saw in our earlier discussion, Hegel argues that diverse equipollent heterogeneous moments of reason are necessarily wholly within reason; that is, they are necessarily related moments of reason. Kierkegaard's insistence upon absolute heterogeneity between self and other is likewise disclosed as being merely one moment of reason abstractly and dogmatically posited in opposition to another. For Hegel such an insistence signifies merely one dogmatically abstracted moment of reason and cannot be *otherwise*. Kierkegaard's insistence upon the 'paradox' of faith and the absolute separation between self and other fails, from a Hegelian perspective, to articulate a sustainable notion of an *otherwise* than reason in *opposition* to reason. For Hegel reason is One, as self-identity and relationality, whereby all the heterogeneous moments associated with the type of skepticism analogous to Kierkegaard's thinking

are ultimately demonstrated to be moments of self-relation. By strongly insisting upon an element of non-relationality between the self and other Kierkegaard seemingly fails to articulate a valid opposition to Hegel's speculative idealism, since for Hegel such absolute separation can be clearly demonstrated (and is in his *Science of Logic*) to necessarily involve relationality.

However, Kierkegaard questions this privileging by Hegel of the principle of a self-reflexive type of skepticism, a type underlying the very structure of the speculative dialectic, and as being at all representative of the genuine spirit of ancient Pyrrhonism. Self-reflexive skepticism, he claims, fails to doubt radically enough since it cannot reject the operative presupposition to doubt *everything*. This absolute doubt becomes itself an *absolute* and leads to the self-reflexivity associated with thoroughgoing skepticism. Clearly for Kierkegaard Hegel's adoption of thoroughgoing skepticism as a principle of immanent speculative dialectic would imply a presupposition of an absolute. For Kierkegaard the true Pyrrhonian doubter must come to reject this absolute that assumes the form of a type of 'method' associated with thoroughgoing self-reflexive skepticism, or what Hegel calls 'self-accomplishing skepticism':

'When thought becomes self-reflexive and seeks to think itself, there arises a familiar type of skepticism. How may this skepticism be overcome, rooted as it is in thought's refusal to pursue its proper task of thinking other things, and its selfish immersion in an attempt to think itself?'¹⁹⁰

For Kierkegaard a genuine persistence of skepticism paradoxically involves a skeptical rejection of thorough, self-reflexive and 'self-accomplishing' skepticism in an effort to discern whether there is a different basis for philosophy than the thoroughgoing determinate negation of Hegelianism. For Kierkegaard the radically 'self-accomplishing' skepticism associated with Hegelian idealism (as Hegel himself clearly recognised) represents a *positive* stance for the *negative*. However, Kierkegaard draws a very different series of implications from this. Unlike Hegel he does not recognise 'self-accomplishing' skepticism as a means for articulating an utterly autonomous and self-determining rationality of the Real, the One, or the All.

¹⁹⁰ S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Scientific Postscript*, p 299

For Kierkegaard Hegel's 'self-accomplishing' skepticism actually represents the nullification of the very spirit of Pyrrhonism and no longer represents a genuinely disruptive force. Speculative dialectic thus operates like a pregnant pause rather than a radical derangement; it functions as a pensive hesitation productive of further determinate content rather than a decisive stance *against* something. As Hegel writes in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*:

'The road can... be regarded as the pathway of *doubt*, or more precisely as the way of despair... it brings about a state of despair about all the so-called natural ideas, thoughts, and opinions... It is only when it is taken as the result of that from which it emerges, that it is, in fact, the true result; in that case it is itself a *determinate* nothingness, one which has a *content*. The skepticism that ends up with the bare abstraction of nothingness or emptiness cannot get any further from there, but must wait to see whether something new comes along and what it is, in order to throw it too into the same empty abyss. But when, on the other hand, the result is conceived as it is in truth, namely, as a *determinate* negation, a new form has thereby arisen, and in the negation the transition is made through which the progress through the complete series of forms comes about of itself.'¹⁹¹

For Kierkegaard this type of self-reflexive and self-accomplishing skepticism in thought is not a genuine 'nothing' but always a 'something', and his thought is marked by the attempt to return to a more paradoxical form of doubt or a more genuine path of despair. For him the only genuine response to the real derangement brought about by skepticism is a subjective act of faith. However, he argues that such a leap of faith only brings about a further sense of doubt:

'Doubt is conquered not by the system but by faith, just as it is faith that has brought doubt into the world.'¹⁹²

Kierkegaard's persistent skepticism represents a paradoxical *repetition* of refutation and return that cannot be overcome. The Kierkegaardian skeptic functions as if

¹⁹¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, #78-9, pp.49-51

¹⁹² S. Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, edited and translated by H. & E. Hong, IV B, p.13

pursuing the paradoxical path of the Möbius strip.¹⁹³ Certainty in the face of doubt can only be discerned by an ungrounded, unjustified and unjustifiable 'leap of faith', which reason can always doubt. This type of certainty for Kierkegaard is entirely subjective rather than objective.

Kierkegaard's opposition to Hegelianism might best be understood as conjoining traditional skeptical themes with a notion of the need for a 'leap of faith' in human existence. Thus for Kierkegaard the subject's contact with the Real is not conceived as an objective or universal certainty, but as an entirely subjective one. Certainty is entirely maintained by an unjustifiable act of subjective faith, or by a *decision* on the part of the subject.¹⁹⁴ This has clear parallels with Pyrrhonism. As Hegel himself had acknowledged, Pyrrhonism accepts the irreducibility of appearances whilst acknowledging their lack of philosophical determinateness.¹⁹⁵ However, the Pyrrhonian skeptic recognises that such appearances function as the ground for subsequent truth claims and the dogmatism associated with natural consciousness that must be skeptically opposed. Radical Pyrrhonian doubt rests upon an understanding of the irreducibility of the merely pragmatic quality of appearance, or what might be termed (in the context of Kierkegaard) a type of unsustainable and unjustifiable faith in appearances. It is the subsequent determinate truth claims of natural consciousness as a type of response to the irreducible quality of appearance that provokes Pyrrhonian skeptical opposition. One might argue that the essence of Pyrrhonian skepticism could be understood as the attempt to protect the indeterminate and unjustifiable 'faith' in appearances by ensuring that they do not become overdetermined by natural consciousness and subsequently reason. Pyrrhonian skepticism evolves and persists as a primal force preventing the realm of appearances becoming overdetermined by natural consciousness, and maintains a pragmatic attitude. Crucially Pyrrhonian skeptical opposition to the tendency to overdetermine appearances takes its bearings from a rationally indeterminate and pragmatic attitude towards the irreducibility of appearance. For the Pyrrhonian Skeptic appearances are rationally unjustifiable and

¹⁹³ A one-sided surface formed by joining the ends of a rectangle after twisting one end through 180 degrees.

¹⁹⁴ Arguably within Kierkegaard's thought Pyrrhonian skepticism becomes transfigured into an early form of Existentialism.

¹⁹⁵ As we saw in the first part of this thesis, Hegel acknowledges the pragmatic acceptance of appearances within genuine Pyrrhonism. For Hegel such pragmatic acceptance has no genuinely philosophical implication. See pp.6-7

remain ungrounded by thought, yet acknowledges that they remain utterly necessary for existence. Kierkegaard might be recognised as arguing in an analogous way when he claims that we must accept the *revelation* of the Other or God as irreducible and rationally unjustifiable. For Kierkegaard the revelation of the Other or God is akin to Pyrrhonists pragmatic understanding of everyday appearance, i.e. both are beyond being justified or grounded by reason *yet* are a necessary structural conviction of human existence. Thus, just as Pyrrhonism might be understood as the persistent attempt to maintain the integrity of a pragmatism with regard to appearances, Kierkegaard might be understood as traversing a parallel path by persistently attempting to protect what he claims to be the irreducible truth of revelation from any reductive claims of reason. In this way Kierkegaard's thought resembles a persistent and radical form of Pyrrhonian skepticism.

For Kierkegaard the paradox of faith and the revelation of God result from their having a two-fold nature: they both represent a heterogeneous element that both *is* and *is not* a moment within reason. The paradoxical heterogeneity of faith can become (when it is articulated within a rational discourse) comprehensible as a differentiated moment of rationality itself in the way Hegel argues. However, Kierkegaard argues that it also expresses a radical heterogeneity exceeding the domesticated form of difference associated with speculative reason. As we outlined earlier within our Hegelian response to Kierkegaard, it is the immanent demonstration of the internal relationality of heterogeneous elements that is ontologically definitive for Hegel. From the Hegelian perspective Kierkegaard's insistence upon this abstracted and radical form of heterogeneity opposed to rationality represents nothing more than a pre-critical form of dogmatism. Furthermore, from Hegel's perspective it merely represents a type of dogmatic abstraction of an element of difference that he is able to demonstrate as merely one element within an ontologically definitive relation and unified totality. However, we must ask whether this type of Hegelian immanent critique merely misses the point of Kierkegaard's thought.

Clearly Kierkegaard recognises the plasticity and force of Hegel's speculative reason, and attempts to identify the type of paradoxical heterogeneity associated with faith and the revelation of God with a type of negativity more radical than that at work within the Hegelian speculative dialectic (i.e. the determinate negation that allows

heterogeneous elements to be immanently assembled into a speculative totality). It is in the light of this effort that Kierkegaard must be understood as attempting to radicalise the notion of skepticism and its relationship to philosophical reason. For Kierkegaard genuine skepticism implies a type of radically indeterminate negativity establishing itself as a self-dissembling truth rather than a determinate one. This radically self-dissembling structure of genuine skepticism suggests for Kierkegaard a process whereby any manifestation and articulation of the negative (as the heterogeneous element opposed yet articulated within reason) never becomes definitive enough to become wholly determined as a moment within the speculative dialectic. Thus, for Kierkegaard genuine skepticism is able to manifest a moment of real heterogeneity in reason (i.e. as a moment in rational discourse) but as if it were not really present there. This type of negativity manifests itself as a moment of mystery and paradox and as something that necessarily and radically undermines its own manifestation and articulation. It is precisely this notion of paradoxical heterogeneous negativity that Kierkegaard's thought attempts to posit as being resistant to Hegel's speculative dialectic. This type of paradoxical heterogeneity cannot, Kierkegaard claims, be adequately contained or understood by seeing it as merely a determinate form of negation. It cannot legitimately be reduced to the domesticated form of negativity that Hegel understood as the principle of diverse and determinate difference within the rational circuit of being. Kierkegaard's radically indeterminate negation relies upon the fact that it is always already absent at the very moment it becomes apparent within reason. Such negativity can, therefore, never be ontologically definitive since it persistently brings with it its own radical skepticism that dissolves any such tendency. It is precisely this quality of Kierkegaard's radicalised notion of negativity that he opposes to speculative idealism.

Despite considerable similarities between this approach and the one developed by Levinas towards Hegelianism¹⁹⁶, Levinas always attempts to distance his thought from Kierkegaard's throughout all of his work. Before proceeding with our analysis of Levinas's anti-Hegelianism it is important to clearly understand not only Levinas's

¹⁹⁶ See M. Westphal, 'The Transparent Shadow: Kierkegaard and Levinas in Dialogue' in M.J. Matustik & M. Westphal ed. *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995) pp.265-281, 'Levinas's Teleological Suspension of the Religious' in *Ethics as First Philosophy*, ed. A. Peperzak, pp.151-160, M. Weston, *Kierkegaard & Modern Continental Philosophy - An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1994) and P. Kemp, 'Another language for the Other: from Kierkegaard to Levinas' in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol.23, No.6, 1997, pp. 5-28

continuity with regard to Kierkegaard but also his profound antipathy. Indeed, we wish to argue that it is only by understanding both the continuities and discontinuities between Kierkegaard and Levinas that one can begin to understand the full force of the latter's anti-Hegelianism. In that endeavour we will proceed with an examination of two short essays¹⁹⁷ where Levinas clarifies these continuities and discontinuities. This brief examination of Levinas's relationship to Kierkegaard will function as a necessary prelude to our more detailed analysis of Levinas's philosophy in the next part of this thesis.

In both of Levinas's essays on Kierkegaard there is a clear acknowledgement that Kierkegaard is responsible for introducing a radical and important new idea to European philosophy by way of a novel modality of skepticism. He explains that this novel modality of skepticism is 'the possibility of attaining truth through the ever-recurrent inner rending of doubt, which is not only an invitation to verify evidence, but part of evidence itself.'¹⁹⁸ For Levinas it is the paradoxical persistence and recurrence of *doubt* as 'part of evidence itself', as an element of belief, that is crucial to the force of Kierkegaard's anti-Hegelianism. He argues that in Kierkegaard's thought there is no longer a straightforward opposition of faith and knowledge where the *uncertainty* of faith is be opposed to the *certainly* of knowledge. Rather, Levinas claims that there is an opposition between two distinct modalities of truth, which he terms 'truth triumphant' and 'truth persecuted'. Here the notion of 'truth triumphant' is explicitly identified with the Hegelian dialectic:

'The dialectic's remarkable effort consisted in showing the necessity of the conversion of that egotism into Being and Truth, and, in so doing, in revealing a thinking that lay dormant in the subjectivity of the subject. At a certain moment the tension upon itself relaxes to become consciousness of self, the I grasps itself in a totality, under a general law, on the basis of a truth that triumphs – that is, that leads to discourse.'¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ E. Levinas, 'Kierkegaard: Existence and Ethics' and 'A Propos of "Kierkegaard vivant"' in *Proper Names*, translated by M.B. Smith (London: The Athlone Press, 1996), pp.66-79

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, p.77

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p.68

To this Hegelian triumphant truth Kierkegaard opposes a belief or faith that is supposedly 'authentic' precisely because of the incomparable singularity of subjectivity. This belief or faith is not merely an imperfect knowledge of the truth that would be, in itself, 'triumphant', or, as Levinas writes, 'imposing its sway from the start upon everyone's thinking.'²⁰⁰ This belief or faith supposedly translates an irreducible existential condition that cannot be contained by any 'outside', and Levinas argues:

'Is at the same time needy and indigent, poor with that radical poverty, that irremediable poverty, that absolute hunger that is, in the final analysis, what sin is. Belief is linked to a truth that suffers.'²⁰¹

Through this modality of a 'truth that suffers' Kierkegaard attempts to describe the very manifestation of the divine or the transcendent. The 'truth that suffers' thus represents a *certainty* irreducibly co-existing with absolute *uncertainty*, a truth that recognises the irreducibility of the *persistent* presence of this skepticism and doubt within itself. It is precisely the persistent presence of skepticism in the 'truth that suffers' that acts incessantly to dissemble any tendency for it to become merely a determinately negative element of rationality. The 'truth' of such negativity is that it is indeterminately negative rather than determinately negative. Levinas writes:

'The contradiction between presence and absence, in which belief maintains itself, remains unreconciled – like an open wound, in a state of endless bleeding. The refusal of the synthesis is not in this case an intellectual weakness. It is precisely in keeping with this new mode of truth...The idea of truth that suffers transforms all seeking after truth – all relation to exteriority – into an inner drama...The truth that suffers does not open man to other men but to God, in solitude.'²⁰²

For Levinas the modality of a truth that suffers 'manifests itself as if it did not dare to say its name, and thus as always about to leave.'²⁰³ This idea of a transcendence of the transcendent residing in such extreme humility, he claims, allows us to glimpse a new

²⁰⁰ Ibid, p.69

²⁰¹ Ibid

²⁰² Ibid, pp.69-70

²⁰³ Ibid, p.77

modality of truth beyond Hegelian notions of truth, since its presentation is *eternally* equivocal; 'it is as if it were not there.'²⁰⁴ 'Persecuted truth' allows a radical notion of transcendence to emerge precisely through the persistence of a type of *doubt*. Such a notion of transcendence, Levinas claims, is *beyond* the realm of Hegel's immanent speculative dialectic:

'The idea of persecuted truth allows us, perhaps, to put an end to the game of disclosure, in which immanence always wins out over transcendence; for, once being has been disclosed, even partially, even in Mystery, it becomes immanent. There is no true exteriority in this disclosure. Now, here with Kierkegaard something is manifested, yet one may wonder whether there was any manifestation... Truth is played out on a double register: at the same time the essential has been said, and, if you like, nothing has been said. This is the new situation – a permanent rending, an ending that is no ending.'²⁰⁵

This notion of a persecuted truth characterised by the permanent rending of doubt is *the* crucial feature of Kierkegaard's thought that, we will argue, Levinas retains within his own mature work. Levinas acknowledges that from the Hegelian perspective the Kierkegaardian notion of persecuted truth is an unwarranted subjective scandal, and 'carries with it an irresponsibility, a ferment of disintegration.'²⁰⁶ Notwithstanding Levinas's overall sympathy with this view of Kierkegaard (which we will examine next) he nonetheless acknowledges that the Hegelian modality of triumphant truth cannot enclose the subversive, recurring, and persistent rending of doubt that Kierkegaard elicits as the very structure of extreme subjective belief or faith. Indeed the persistent Kierkegaardian opposition between the two modes of truth becomes reconfigured by Levinas in his later work as the modalities of the *Said* and the *Saying*.²⁰⁷ What Levinas comes to term pre-original Saying shares with Kierkegaard's persecuted truth an ability to persistently resist and disrupt triumphant truth. For Levinas, pre-original Saying is:

²⁰⁴ Ibid. p.78

²⁰⁵ Ibid

²⁰⁶ Ibid. p.70

²⁰⁷ We will examine these notions in greater detail in the next part of our thesis.

'Antecedent to the verbal signs it conjugates, to the linguistic systems and the semantic glimmerings, a foreword preceding languages, it is the proximity of one to the other, the commitment of an approach, the one for the other, the very signifyingness of signification... The original or pre-original saying, what is put forth in the foreword, weaves an intrigue of responsibility. It sets forth an order more grave than being and antecedent to being.'²⁰⁸

What can be spoken or written about is what can be made *present* to the listener or the reader. It is essential to what can be said to be that it can enter in this way into the Said, and thus truth becomes essentially conceptual and external and thus shares many of the features of what Levinas had associated with the Kierkegaardian notion of triumphant truth. The truth of being in the Said becomes what can be thematised and conceptualised as an object within a rational discourse. However, for Levinas the notion of antecedent pre-original Saying (i.e. the approach of the Other) can only become thematised in the triumphant truth of the Said by a certain *abuse* of language, since Saying indicates the very condition of possibility for such thematisation. In order to mitigate such an abuse (or what Levinas terms the necessary *betrayal* of the pre-original Saying in the Said) it is necessary for Levinas to indicate the way in which Saying involves a perpetual self-reduction or self-rending as it enters into the Said. Here Levinas makes explicit (when describing the radical diachrony of pre-original Saying) the Kierkegaardian necessity of retaining the modality of persistent and recurrent radical skepticism. This necessity of remaining with the permanent rending of doubt is crucial for remaining 'with the extreme situation of a diachronic thought'²⁰⁹; a diachrony beyond what is for Levinas the ontological synchrony of the Said. In order to conceive Saying as beyond the Said of Hegel's speculative dialectic Levinas retains Kierkegaard's sense of the necessity of the permanent rending of doubt (as part of the evidence itself) in order to signify the genuine transcendence of the transcendent:

'To conceive the Otherwise than being requires, perhaps, as much audacity as skepticism shows, when it does not hesitate to affirm the impossibility of statement

²⁰⁸ E. Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1978, 1st edition 1974) in English as *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, translated by A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), pp.5-6

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.7

while venturing to realize this impossibility by the very statement of this impossibility. If, after the "innumerable" refutations which logical thought sets against it, skepticism has the gall to return (and it always returns as philosophy's legitimate child), it is because in the contradiction which logic sees in it the 'at the same time' of the contradictories is missing, because a secret diachrony commands this ambiguous or enigmatic way of speaking, and because in general signification signifies beyond synchrony, beyond essence.²¹⁰

Our more detailed examination of Levinas's philosophy in the next part of this thesis will concentrate upon his development of this 'Kierkegaardian' insight regarding the 'secret diachrony' that commands a perpetual skepticism of reason in his own work. However, having traced the most important element of continuity between the two thinkers we must now trace the most important elements of discontinuity. The question we must ask is why, given the very clear sympathy Levinas has with Kierkegaard's thought, he retains a deep antipathy toward him.

One of the most important reasons for Levinas's antipathy stems from his belief that Kierkegaard is partially responsible for initiating (through rehabilitating an excessive form of subjectivity) an exaggerated and exacerbated subjectivism of existence. Levinas claims:

'In protesting against the absorption of subjectivity by Hegel's universality, he bequeathed to the history of philosophy an exhibitionistic, immodest subjectivity.'²¹¹

Levinas asks whether this return to subjectivity that refuses 'triumphant truth' merely leads to another form of violence, a dangerous violence that emerges precisely at the point where Kierkegaard refuses what he conceives to be 'ethics'. Levinas claims:

'It is Kierkegaard's violence that shocks me. The manner of the strong and the violent, who fear neither scandal nor destruction, has become, since Kierkegaard and before Nietzsche, a manner of philosophy. One philosophises with a hammer. In that

²¹⁰ Ibid, p.9 Note: Lingis erroneously translates Levinas's reference to skepticism here as 'philosophy's illegitimate child'; however, the French reads 'et il revient toujours en enfant *légitime* de la philosophie'. We have amended the translation accordingly.

²¹¹ E. Levinas, *Proper Names*, p.76

permanent scandal, in that opposition to everything, I perceive by anticipation the echoes of certain cases of verbal violence that claimed to be schools of thought, and pure ones at that... That harshness of Kierkegaard emerges at the exact moment when he 'transcends ethics'.²¹²

Indeed Levinas argues that Hegelianism is able to claim a kind of nobility from its reaction against the implicit violence of Kierkegaard's exacerbated subjectivism of existence. For Levinas it is important to go beyond what he calls this 'pathos' of Hegelianism. He asks whether there is a notion of subjectivity that is irreducible to Hegelian objective being, yet understood by a different principle of individuation than the mere excessive egotism of Kierkegaard. The answer to this question emerges when he questions Kierkegaard's understanding of the notion of 'ethics':

'Kierkegaard's entire polemics against speculative philosophy supposes subjectivity tensed on itself, existence as the care that a being takes for its own existence, and a kind of torment over oneself. The ethical means the general, for Kierkegaard. The singularity of the I would be lost, in his view, under a rule valid for all. Generality can neither contain nor express the I's secret.'²¹³

Levinas claims that Kierkegaard has a mistaken understanding of the essence of ethics. The truth of ethics, for Levinas, is the consciousness of one's responsibility towards others that does not function to submerge the I in the general; rather, it functions to utterly singularise the I. Thus, responsibility for the Other situates the I as a unique individual; i.e. ethical obligation radically instantiates the I. By understanding ethics in this way Levinas is able to return to, and reconceive, the story of Abraham and Isaac otherwise than Kierkegaard:

'In his evocation of Abraham, he describes the encounter with God at the point where subjectivity rises to the level of the religious, that is to say, above ethics. But one could think the opposite: Abraham's attentiveness to the voice that led him back to the ethical order, in forbidding him to perform a human sacrifice, is the highest point in

²¹² Ibid

²¹³ Ibid

the drama. That he obeyed the first voice is astonishing: that he had sufficient distance with respect to that obedience to hear the second voice – that is the essential.²¹⁴

By attempting to articulate a principle of subjectivity that resists Hegelianism, i.e. an ethical principle of individuation, Levinas attempts to go beyond *both* 'speculative totalitarianism' and 'Kierkegaardian non-philosophy'. By positing the question whether the ethical relation must involve the entry into and disappearance within generality, Levinas questions Kierkegaard as much as Hegel. Levinas argues:

'If the relation to exteriority cannot form a totality whose parts can be compared and generalised, it is not because the I keeps its secret within the system, but because the exteriority in which human beings show us their faces shatters the totality...An impossibility that does not remain in its negative meaning, but immediately puts the I in question. This putting in question signifies the responsibility of the I for the Other. Subjectivity *is* in that responsibility and only irreducible subjectivity can assume a responsibility. That is what constitutes the ethical.'²¹⁵

For Levinas the subject cannot evade its responsibility for the Other. The *excess* of subjectivity is not achieved through an exaggerated secret realm of subjective belief or faith in the manner Kierkegaard suggests; rather, the existential excess of subjectivity is accomplished 'as a swelling of responsibility'.²¹⁶ This putting in question of the egotistic subject does not destroy the I but represents an essential *election* of irreducible subjectivity. This ethical election of the subject signifies a radical form of singular commitment, and rids the subject of its violent imperialism and egotism, be it the Hegelian or Kierkegaardian subject. Hence:

'Life receives meaning from an infinite responsibility, a fundamental *diacony* that constitutes the subjectivity of the subject –without that responsibility, completely tendered toward the Other, leaving any leisure for a return to self.'²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Ibid. p.77

²¹⁵ Ibid. p.73

²¹⁶ Ibid

²¹⁷ Ibid. p.74 Note: Translators note reads – 'Diacony, or deaconry, is derived from a Greek word meaning servant' p.178

It is important to understand how Levinas differs from Kierkegaard here. He attempts to traverse a very difficult path beyond the totality of Hegel's speculative dialectic and Kierkegaard's excessive and exaggerated subjectivism, i.e. the subjectivity that contains the excessive, paradoxical and non-rational 'leap of faith'. This difficult path is pursued by retaining certain elements of Kierkegaard's philosophy, but also by maintaining that what ultimately individuates the subject is not a voluntaristic 'leap of faith' or an act of subjective resistance to the generalities of the Hegelian system. Levinas argues that the absolute ethical responsibility for the Other disrupts the very grounds for any such voluntaristic subjective resistance, and is a disruption that delivers the subject over to a pre-original structure of ethical individuality, investing the subject *as* responsibility for the Other. As we shall see in our analysis of Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*, it is not the I that resists the Hegelian system but the Other:

'The I is conserved then in goodness, without its resistance to system manifesting itself as the egoist cry of the subjectivity, still concerned for happiness or salvation, as in Kierkegaard. To posit being as Desire is to decline at the same time the ontology of isolated subjectivity and the ontology of impersonal reason realising itself in history.'²¹⁸

We will now proceed with an examination of Levinas's attempt to traverse this difficult path *beyond* Hegel and Kierkegaard.

²¹⁸ E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.305

PART THREE - LEVINAS AND THE PERSISTENCE OF SKEPTICISM

I – Introduction

Emmanuel Levinas's work persistently revolves around two fundamental issues. The first issue concerns the construction of a formal ethics grounded upon a notion of the absolute transcendence of the Other and a subject's immediate responsibility toward that Other.¹ The other issue consists of his extensive written work and activities as a member of the cultural and spiritual life of Judaism.² Despite the fact that both of these issues are often inextricably bound up with each other³, it is clear that for Levinas both elements are utterly 'dominated by the presentiment and the memory of the Nazi horror'⁴. His explicitly philosophical work presents a thorough and ongoing struggle to articulate a non-ontological understanding of the alterity of the Other (*Autrui*)⁵ and a notion of the ethical 'older than' justice. This struggle involves an

¹ For example, *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité* (Livre de Poche; The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971, first edition 1961) in English as *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969) and *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1978, 1st edition 1974) in English as *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, translated by A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998).

² In the text 'Signature' Levinas gives a concentrated overview of his life and works. There he writes: 'Direction of the century-old *École Normale Israélite Orientale*, preparing teachers of French for the schools of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle du Bassin Méditerranéen*. Daily communication with Dr Henri Nerson, frequent visits to M Clouchani, the prestigious – and merciless – teacher of exegesis and of Talmud. Annual conferences, since 1957, on Talmudic texts at Colloquys of the Jewish Intellectuals of France.' ('Signature', translated by M.E. Petrisko, edited by A. Peperzak in *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol.8 (1978) pp.175-189).

Levinas published numerous texts associated with Judaism, including *Difficile liberté: Essais sur le judaïsme* (Editions Albin Michel, S.A. - Paris 1963 & 1976) in English as *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, translated by S. Hand (London: The Athlone Press, 1990), *A L'heure des nations* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1988) in English as *In the Time of Nations*, translated by M.B. Smith (London: The Athlone Press, 1994), *L'au-delà du Verset: lectures et discours talmudiques* (Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1982) in English as *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, translated by G.D. Molc (London: The Athlone Press, 1994) and *Nine Talmudic Readings*, translated by A. Aronowicz (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).

³ Levinas often insisted upon the separation of these two elements of his work, indeed in an interview from 1986 he claimed, possibly not altogether seriously: 'I separate very clearly these two types of work. I even have two publishers; the one publishes my confessional texts, the other my texts which are called purely philosophical. I keep the two orders separate.' ('Interview with François Poirié' in *Is It Righteous To Be? - Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, edited by J. Robbins (Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 2001), p.62) The relationship between the two elements of Levinas's work is complex and would be a subject for an entire thesis in its own right. However, it will not be an issue that we will seriously address within the confines of this thesis.

⁴ E. Levinas, 'Signature', p.177

⁵ See A. Lingis's footnote in *Totality and Infinity*: 'With the author's permission, we are translating "autrui" (the personal Other, the you) by "Other", and "autre" by "other". In doing so, we regrettably sacrifice the possibility of reproducing the author's use of capital or small letters with both these terms in the French text', pp.24-5

We will follow Lingis's translation in our own discussion of Levinas.

ongoing dialogue with the greatest philosophers of the ontological tradition, and the two thinkers that Levinas struggles most consistently with are Hegel and Heidegger. In many ways Levinas's struggle with Hegel and Heidegger represents a fundamental and radical continuity present throughout all of his work, from *De l'Evasion* in 1935⁶ through to *De Dieu Qui Vient À l'Idée* (*Of God Who Comes to Mind*) in 1984⁷. Indeed, one might even go so far as arguing that his entire philosophical work represents a persistent attempt to resist the distinct ontologies articulated by these thinkers.⁸ What is beyond question, however, is that the radically supra-ontological and its ethical significance are constant themes throughout Levinas's philosophical work. Indeed, as Robert Bernasconi has written, the ethical significance of the absolute alterity of the Other has become 'virtually synonymous with the proper name "Levinas"'.⁹

Levinas's approach to the whole question of ethics is fundamentally different from approaches that begin with either the universality of the moral law (i.e. Kant) or the notion of utility (i.e. Bentham or Mill). His approach consists in maintaining that the genuine relation to the Other is initially without reference to either universality or utility. For Levinas such a relation is a condition, but not the foundation, of justice. This 'relation' to the Other is conceived as 'unique' and absolutely other, and for Levinas it is the primary significance of the meaningful. The relation to the Other as incomparable, emptied of all 'social role', naked and destitute, immediately imposes itself upon *my* responsibility. The nudity of the Other is a call to *me*; an appeal as an absolute imperative. This is what Levinas calls the 'face':

⁶ E. Levinas, *De l'Evasion* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1982)

⁷ E. Levinas, *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée* (Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin) in English as *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, translated by B. Bergo (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998)

⁸ Levinas's persistent resistance to Heidegger is immensely complex and beyond the remit of this thesis. Our account of Levinas will privilege the way in which it specifically represents a formidable resistance, or refusal, of Hegelian totality and speculative idealism. Indeed our focus will be upon what we will argue is Levinas's reconfiguration and insistence upon a form of skepticism internal to genuine philosophy but otherwise than Hegel.

⁹ R. Bernasconi, 'The Alterity of the Stranger and the Experience of the Alien' in J. Bloechl (ed.), *The Face of the Other & The Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), p.62

'Infinity presents itself as a face in the ethical resistance that paralyses my powers and from the depths of defenceless eyes rises firm and absolute in its nudity and destitution.'¹⁰

The face-to-face relation is conceived by Levinas as being prior to all structures whatsoever, whether they are understood as the categories of Greek philosophy, Kant, Hegel or Husserl, and is conceived as prior to all structures of the Heideggerian notion of being-with.¹¹ It is a relation prior to all system, symmetry, correlation, will, freedom, and the opposition of activity and passivity; 'the face is present in its refusal to be contained...it cannot be comprehended, that is, encompassed'¹². It is, as John Llewelyn characterises it, 'an un-condition which is pre-original and prior to the *intéressement*'.¹³

This pre-original un-condition of subjective interiority is what Levinas calls the 'separation' of the *psyche*. Within the temporal topology of interior life (the psyche) an extraction from identity with being has *always already* happened. That extraction occurs as a disturbance or interruption of the originary order of presence or consciousness; therefore it represents a loss of the immediate coincidence of oneself with oneself without which, Levinas claims, the transcendence of the meaningful would not be produced. Through this notion of separation Levinas is able to allude to a paradoxical past of subjectivity as a necessary condition or presupposition of its constitutive activity. He argues that the transcendental power of subjective constitution is itself conditioned by a prior presupposition that, itself already constituted, only afterwards turns out to be constituting. Thus the very act of constitution emerges as *always already* conditioned by an originary mediation at the core of subjectivity, of ipseity.

¹⁰ E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp.199-200

¹¹ M. Heidegger, 'Being-in-the-World as Being-With and Being a Self: The "They"' in *Sein und Zeit* (Max Niemeyer Verlag, Tübingen, 1927); published in English as *Being and Time*, translated by J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962) and *Being and Time*, translated by J. Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp.107-122

¹² E. Levinas, *Ibid*, p.194

¹³ J. Llewelyn, *Appositions of Jacques Derrida & Emmanuel Levinas* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), p.1

The paradoxical temporality through which this originary subjectivity bursts open and emerges as already constituted, i.e. in a movement whereby it precedes itself, is the structure and advent of what is for Levinas genuine ethical subjectivity. By affecting the very structure of being the irreducible and irrecuperable temporality of separation has always already overflowed those structures. This is why Levinas defines it as 'an-archic', without beginning, *always already* past, and always refractory to the present of representation. At the very core of oneself there is a primordial exposure to the Other whose time cannot coincide with the present of consciousness. Levinas will, in his later writings, speak of this as a radical diachrony¹⁴, which he contrasts with the notion of negativity at play in dialectics. The notion of diachrony signifies a disturbance or interruption of the logical linearity of ontological sense and evokes the notion of what might be termed hetero-affectivity; i.e. the irrecusable bond between affectivity and transcendence that constitutes the concrete fabric of subjectivity. The paradox of a non-synchronisable diachrony (hetero-affectivity) signifies an irrecusable anteriority of 'obligation' anachronously prior to any voluntary commitments. Levinas's pursuit of this absolute disquiet that disrupts the very certitudes of ontological sense is undertaken within his philosophical work as a specific variation of Phenomenological practice, and it is to this Phenomenological practice which we must now turn before proceeding any further with outlining the detail of Levinas's relationship to Hegelian dialectics and idealism.

¹⁴ E. Levinas: 'Time is essence and monstration of essence... In its temporalization... in the recuperating temporalization, without time lost, without time to lose, and where the being of substance comes to pass - there must be signalled a lapse of time that does not return, a diachrony refractory to all synchronization, a transcending diachrony.' *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence* p.9

II - Levinas & Phenomenology

There is a clear recognition in all of Levinas's philosophical work that Husserlian Phenomenology represents *the* method for doing philosophy. Indeed in an interview from 1984 he claims that Phenomenology 'is a manner of thinking concretely. There is in this manner a rigor, but also an appeal to listen acutely for what is implicit.'¹⁵ This practice of acuity and rigor is developed by Levinas through a sustained critical dialogue with Husserlian Phenomenology¹⁶ together with the recognition that Phenomenology holds the key to articulating an effective and formidable resistance to Philosophical Idealism, particularly the Hegelian variant. Indeed a striking feature throughout all of his writings on Husserl is the degree to which he argues for the genuine radicalism of Phenomenological practice by contrasting it to Idealism. Thus in an essay on Husserl's Phenomenology published in 1960 we find an important statement concerning Hegelian Idealism that provides a profound insight into Levinas's overall anti-idealist orientation:

'A new idealism, born of Hegel, conquered...the thought and even the sensibility of the West. It affirmed the entry of the absolute into the becoming of concrete events. Events would no longer dissimulate but would manifest the Absolute; they would consummate its designs...Ever since then, the intelligibility of the world is read in the imprint left on it by the work of mortals, in the perspectives opened up by cities and empires. We acquired the conviction that we cannot encounter – or think – anything within the real in the wild state. Everything is formed, transformed, or reflected by man – even nature, sky and forest. The elementary forces touch us only through civilization, a language, a literature, an industry, or an art. Thus what is human is not

¹⁵ E. Levinas, 'Interview with Salomon Malka' in *Is It Righteous To Be? – Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, edited by J. Robbins (Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 2001), p.93

¹⁶ In addition to undertaking this critical engagement with Husserlian Phenomenology throughout his major philosophical works such as *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence*, Levinas also wrote an early study of Husserlian Phenomenology entitled *Theorie de l'intuition dans la phenomenologie de Husserl*, in English as *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, translated by A. Orianne (Evanston: Northwestern U.P. 1973) and several papers dedicated to the understanding and development of Husserlian Phenomenology which were collected and published as *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, translated and edited by R.A. Cohen & M.B. Smith (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1998)

only the eye that perceives the image of the world, but also the light that illuminates it.¹⁷

Husserlian Phenomenology is able to offer a potential resistance to Hegelian Idealism by contributing a 'naïveté which attested to a new experience of being',¹⁸ and contains resources that allow a radical ethical signification to be indicated. For Levinas:

'In a phenomenology where the activity of totalising and totalitarian representation is already exceeded in its own intention, where representation already finds itself placed within horizons that it somehow had not willed, but with which it cannot dispense, an ethical *Sinngebung* becomes possible, that is, a *Sinngebung* essentially respectful of the Other.'¹⁹

Husserlian Phenomenology with its methodological cornerstones of intentionality and reduction (*epoché*) claims to disclose a 'givenness' or the 'appearing' of all that 'appears', i.e. beings and objects. It claims that such appearing arises at the initiative of the phenomena, 'through their own clarity'²⁰, without any concern for categories that reason may impose upon them. Phenomena thus disclose themselves *originally*, that is, without presupposition as lived sensation and embedded life experience (*erlebnis*). Phenomenologically understood, phenomena are an appearance which appear *in their own appearing*, as *eidos*, which 'gleams from their eternal essence with more brilliance than can be borrowed from a reference to the past'.²¹ Thus for phenomena to appear the appearance does not need to be traced back to *a priori* conditions, associated with the forms and categories of reason, but to the luminosity of the appearing of that appearance.

Levinas claims that the historical focus of the Phenomenological practice developed by Husserl shifted to the cognitive or intentional object, including the subjective acts that constitute or determine it and its secondary correlation with a thing. In developed

¹⁷ E. Levinas, 'The Permanent and the Human in Husserl' (1960) in *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, translated and edited by R.A. Cohen & M.B. Smith (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1998), p.130

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.133

¹⁹ E. Levinas, 'The Ruin of Representation' in *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, p.121

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

Husserlian Phenomenological practice the world that exists for the subject turns out to be equivalent to the world that gets its being from the subject to such an extent that eventually the correlation of object and I, *noema* and *noesis*, replaces the originary correlation of appearing and appearance. From the perspectives opened up by the Phenomenological reduction (*epoché*) advocated by Husserl, the being of each and every being becomes comprehensible to the philosopher in its appearing as an object of the intentionally constitutive acts of consciousness. The implication of such a move is that consciousness bears the limit of all that appears; hence, what is not discovered in the reduction as an object intended by consciousness has no being, i.e. is less than nothing. Consciousness becomes equated with thinking or assuming that everything 'appears', since everything that befalls it is according to it. Levinas claims that such a phenomenological practice consists 'in perceiving a rigorous correlation between the object's structures and the processes of the thought that intends it or has self-evidence of it'.²² For Levinas such practice grants the notion of intentionality the 'allure of an idealizing identification'.²³ It is clear from all of Levinas's post-war writings on Husserl that the development of Phenomenological practice in this direction is governed by totalising gestures associated with idealism, and indeed he comes to term precisely this type of practice 'Phenomenological Idealism'. He claims that the totalising gestures more associated with idealism can be seen to infect Husserlian Phenomenology, and such contamination stems from the fact that Husserl's conception of intentionality is governed from the outset by the presupposition of intending an ideal object:

'For Husserl, the object, even in the cases where it is sensible and individual, will always be what is identified through a multiplicity of intentions. To say that all consciousness is consciousness of something is to affirm that across these correlative terms of a multiplicity of subjective thoughts, and thus transcending them, an identity is maintained and affirmed. The intentional object has an ideal existence in relation to the temporal event and spatial position of consciousness.'²⁴

²² E. Levinas, 'Intentionality and Sensation' in *Ibid.*, p.135

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 136-7

For Levinas the way Husserlian Phenomenology develops is governed by this understanding of the idealising nature of intentionality whereby the *real* is constituted as an *ideal* identity. Thus, by understanding Husserl's treatment of intentionality he argues that the specific task of Husserlian Phenomenology becomes comprehensible:

'Intentional analysis follows from the original idealism of identifying intentionality. The work of synthesis, only the result of which fascinates naïve and scientific thought, must be retrieved. The identity-result is the abstraction that fixes a petrified thought that has already forgotten its life and the horizons from which it uprooted itself... Phenomenology is then the "reactivation" of all these forgotten horizons and of the horizon of all these horizons.'²⁵

Contrary to this understanding of Husserl's Phenomenology Idealism, Levinas posits a significant reversal of the notion of centrifugal intentionality that moves from the subject or ego to the object. He posits a counter-intentionality that moves back *towards* the ego. Levinas's unique approach to Phenomenology also replaces the existing object with a 'face' as the origin of this counter-intentionality, and which, strictly speaking, does not have to exist: 'We have called face the auto-signifyingness par excellence.'²⁶ Thus, amongst the phenomena on which is exercised the subject's constitutive activity, Levinas distinguishes counter-phenomena – i.e. the 'face'. The 'face' is counter-phenomenal since its very 'appearing' consists less in giving itself to be seen directly than in imposing upon the subject's gaze the weight of an obligation or responsibility irreducible to constitutive intentionality. The 'face' is not, therefore, one particular spectacle among others; rather, it bursts into that field of visibility accessible and originating from the subject's activity with what is utterly inaccessible or invisible as such. The 'face' is a luminous source, blinding and interrupting the subject's constitutive intentional gaze. This reversal of intentionality and phenomenality (passing *from* the object that is visible *to* the face that aims and is thus non-visible) radically alters the entire horizon of phenomenological analysis. Indeed, for Levinas such a movement discloses the potential within Phenomenology for a formidable and effective resistance to philosophical idealism.

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ E. Levinas, 'Language and Proximity' in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, translated by A. Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), p. 120

What Levinas's own Phenomenological approach struggles to show, contrary to Husserl, is that the appearing of being is not the ultimate legitimation of the structures of subjectivity. In other words, the subject is not, finally, reducible to the field or the 'event'²⁷ wherein beings are deployed in their being. Thus, there is more to subjectivity than the role it plays as constitutive consciousness. Levinas's notions of counter-intentionality and the 'face' demonstrate how the subject reaches an ultimate 'beyond' or 'hither' side of the subject's constitutive role as consciousness in the apparition of objective beings. His work attempts to show how the subject of Phenomenology includes *more than* consciousness, and in doing so demonstrate how it would open an order of meaning or intelligibility *beyond* that measured by the structures of consciousness. Consequently, 'phenomena' that did not appear within the intentional constitutive consciousness of Husserlian Phenomenology *would* 'appear' in Levinas's reconfiguration of Phenomenology. This 'something more than' consciousness *in* subjectivity suggests that the ultimate (or *arché*) reached by Husserlian Phenomenology is already a limitation to meaning, a limitation of a broader and vaster order of signification. In this larger order of signification, which is the focus of all Levinas's philosophical work, the field of objectivity, of ontology, and truth, no longer measures all the possibilities of appearing (a field determined by the constituting intentions of consciousness):

'That life that bestows meaning may reveal itself otherwise, and presuppose for its revelation relations between the Same and the Other that are no longer objectification, but society. The condition of truth may be sought in ethics.'²⁸

Despite these reversals of notions so fundamental to Husserlian Phenomenology, Levinas does retain a crucial element of the Phenomenological method advocated and developed by Husserl. Precisely what he retains is made clear in a conversation from 1975:

²⁷ To understand what Levinas means by the 'event' of being one would have to return to Heidegger's notion of *Ereignis* in *Zur Sache des Denkens*, in English as *Time and Being*, translated by J. Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), *Identity and Difference* - a bilingual edition, translated by J. Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) [*Identität und Differenz* (Pfullingen: Gunther Neske, 1957)] and *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, in English as *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, translated by P. Emad and K. Maly (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana U.P. 1999)

²⁸ E. Levinas, 'The Ruin of Representation' in *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, p.120

'What I do is Phenomenology, even if there is no reduction, here, according to the rules required by Husserl; even if all of the Husserlian methodology is not respected...In proceeding back from what is thought toward the fullness of the thought itself, one discovers – without there being any deductive, dialectical, or other implication therein – dimensions of meaning, each time new...In starting from a theme or an idea, I move toward the "ways" by which one accedes to it, then the way by which one accedes to it is essential to the meaning of the theme itself: this way reveals to us a whole landscape of horizons that have been forgotten and together with which, what shows itself no longer has the meaning it had when one considered it from a stance directly turned toward it. Phenomenology is not about elevating phenomena into things in themselves; it is about bringing the *things in themselves* to the horizon of their appearing, that of their phenomenality; phenomenology means to make appear the appearing itself behind the quiddity that appears, even if this appearing does not encrust its modalities in the meaning that it delivers to the gaze...Out of the thematization of the human, new dimensions are opened that are essential to reflected meaning. All those who think in this way and seek these dimensions in order to find this meaning are doing phenomenology.'²⁹

Thus it is by retaining Phenomenology's objective of returning to the 'concrete', 'to the things themselves' on the hither side of the naiveté of objectifying thought, that Levinas is able to pursue what he terms the paradox of 'separation', the temporal 'intrigue' that precedes all reflective reason. In the preface of *Totality and Infinity* Levinas again credits the Phenomenological return to the *concrete* as revealing these 'unsuspected horizons':

'Intentional analysis is the search for the concrete. Notions held under the direct gaze of the thought that defines them are, nevertheless, unbeknown to this naïve thought; these horizons endow them with a meaning – such is the essential teaching of Husserl...What counts is the idea of the overflowing of objectifying thought by a forgotten experience from which it lives.'³⁰

²⁹ E. Levinas, *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée* (Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin) in English as *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, translated by B. Bergo (Stanford, California: Stanford U. Press, 1998), pp. 87-8

³⁰ E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.28

The temporal intrigue that Levinas claims is the necessary presupposition of reflective reason is a presupposition that reflective reason cannot itself constitute. His own Phenomenological analyses ceaselessly elucidate the original meaning of this 'concrete'. From these analyses one does not end up at an absolute *unconditioned* from which meaning emerges, but at a fundamentally impassable *conditioning* which, always presupposed, overdetermines or co-determines *all* meaning. They signify the impossibility of leaving the concrete, of exiting the temporal circle traced out by such dimensions, and the impossibility of providing an account through linear reasoning that would lead to the pure present of an atemporal origin. Levinas writes:

'The conditioning of conscious actuality in potentiality compromises the sovereignty of representation much more radically than does the discovery in the life of feeling of a specific intentionality, irreducible to theoretical intentionality, and more radically than the affirmation of an active engagement in the world prior to contemplation. Husserl puts into question the sovereignty of representation with respect to the structures of pure logic, the pure forms of the 'something in general', in which no feeling plays a role and where nothing presents itself to the will; and yet these structures and forms reveal their truth only when set back into their horizon'³¹

Throughout Levinas's Phenomenological Practice there is an inevitably circular movement to the way in which the concrete is deduced through 'unsuspected horizons' of formal notions and abstract significations that are, at the same time, the conditions by which formal notions have their 'latent birth' and from which they are to detach themselves. Thus there is a passage traced from the concrete to the formal in order to return to the concrete. The deformatization of formal notions and abstract significations precisely implies a return from the reduction of the given objectivity to the horizons of forgotten meaning, by which objectivating thought is nonetheless conditioned. For Levinas:

'We are beyond idealism and realism, since being is neither inside nor outside thought, but thought itself is outside itself. A second act and second thought are

³¹ E. Levinas, 'The Ruin of Representation' in *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, p. 116

necessary in order to consider hidden horizons that are no longer the context of this object, but the transcendental givens of its meaning.³²

This circular movement of the Phenomenological method is retained by Levinas. Indeed, the movement that attempts to discern 'unsuspected horizons' of meaning represents, for Levinas, the 'very task' of philosophy. This task is conceived as exposing, so far as possible, the 'ethical' significance of the pre-original (what Levinas will later term 'Saying'). Levinas writes:

'The signifyingness of an enigma comes from an irreversible, irrecuperable past which it has *perhaps* not left, since it has already been absent from the very terms in which it was signalled ("perhaps" is the modality of an enigma, irreducible to the modalities of being and certainty³³)... The enigma is the way the Ab-solute, foreign to cognition, because it does not lend itself to the contemporaneousness that constitutes the force of time tied in the present, because it imposes a completely different version of time... This extravagant movement of going beyond being or transcendence toward an immemorial antiquity we call the idea of infinity. The infinite is an unassailable alterity, a difference and ab-solute past with respect to everything that is shown, signalled, symbolised, announced, remembered, and thereby 'contemporised' with him who understands.'³⁴

This primary enigma of ethics exposes itself within a philosophical discourse duty bound, for essential reasons, to commence as ontology. The ethical domain of signification articulates itself in the pre-originary realm, a realm prior to the orders of being and the political, of symmetry and reciprocity, of representation and of the

³² Ibid. p.120

³³ Levinas's point here is further clarified by J. Derrida when he discusses Levinas's use of the word 'probably' in his text for Levinas, "En ce moment même dans cet ouvrage me voici" in *Textes pour Emmanuel Levinas* Paris: Editions Jean-Michel Place, 1980) in English as "At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am", translated by R. Berezdivin in R. Bernasconi & S. Critchley (eds), *Re-Reading Levinas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) pp. 11-48:

'I cut across my reading to admire this "probably": it contains nothing empirical or approximate, it removes no rigor from the utterance it determines. As ethical responsibility, the essence of language doesn't belong to discourse about the *Said*, which can only determine certainties... Without that [ethical] responsibility there would be no language, but it is never sure that language surrenders itself to the responsibility that makes it possible: it may always betray it, tending to enclose it within the same. This liberty of betrayal must be allowed in order for language to be rendered back to its essence, which is the ethical. For once, for a unique time, essence is freed for probability, risk, and uncertainty.' p.23

³⁴ E. Levinas, 'Phenomenon and Enigma' in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p.71

logos. We will argue that it is precisely in this sense that ethics as *first* philosophy realises a genuinely critical essence intrinsic to knowledge. Ethics as first philosophy realises a notion of critical 'negativity' radically otherwise than the notion of determinate negation. According to Levinas's ethical transfiguration all philosophy (despite originating *in* being) becomes capable of putting itself profoundly into question, and thereby wondering how being itself is to be justified, by virtue of a pre-originary obligation and responsibility for the Other. We will argue that ethics as first philosophy represents nothing less than the *persistence of skepticism* in philosophy. Such persistence represents a sophisticated challenge to the essence of Hegelianism by enacting a formidable critical interrogation of being and reason themselves. Levinas's work demonstrates how the call of being to its justification is ultimately discovered through a trace of transcendence in immanence. Such a call functions like that disruptive yet legitimate child of the philosophical tradition itself, namely skepticism.

III - Levinas & Hegel

There is clearly an understanding at play in Levinas' philosophical work of a particular trajectory in the history of ontology that culminates in Hegel's speculative idealism.³⁵ As we have attempted to understand it, Hegel's speculative idealism ontology is conceived as a radical form of immanence, i.e. as an autonomously evolving and historically developed and instantiated reason. It is described by Hegel himself as the immanent autonomous movement of self-relating negativity in thought and being. This immanent speculative dialectic results in an understanding of being itself as a totality of reason, as a whole, the One, or the Absolute. Thus, for Hegel 'it is in the grasping of opposites in their unity or of the positive in the negative, that speculative thought consists.'³⁶

Levinas argues that within Hegel's speculative logic and its notion of multiplicity each individual essentially remains what it *is* in the ensemble formed by the multiplicity of terms speculatively identified, i.e. this 'a' is the other of 'b' and 'b' is the other of 'a'. He characterises this ontology of the One (which for Hegel is an immanent speculative identity of multiplicity) as dangerously totalitarian in a philosophical sense rather than a crudely political one:

'Ontology as first philosophy is a philosophy of power. It issues in the State and in the non-violence of the totality, without securing itself against the violence from which this non-violence lives, and which appears in the tyranny of the State.'³⁷

He understands Hegel's speculative idealism to move, through the *simultaneous* production and reduction (through negation) of all aspects of alterity to mere moments of immanent negative self-relation, towards an understanding of 'Absolute Being'. For Levinas such ontology necessarily functions through an act of reduction and effacement of the true significance of the alterity of the Other (or what Levinas will

³⁵ E. Levinas, Indeed, Levinas once characterised Hegel as 'probably the greatest thinker of all time' *Difficile liberté: Essais sur le judaïsme* (Editions Albin Michel, S.A. - Paris 1963 & 1976) in English as *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, translated by S. Hand (London: The Athlone Press, 1990), p.238

³⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik* (*Werke, Theorie Werkausgabe, Bande 5 & 6*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970) in English as *Science of Logic*, translated by A.V. Miller, foreword by J.N. Findlay (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1989), p.56

³⁷ E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.46

term in his early work as the 'infinite' (*l'infini*). All of Levinas's efforts with respect to Hegel's ontology consist of an exhortation to philosophise *non-speculatively* in an effort to articulate the irreducible ethical significance of the subject's relation to the absolutely Other. He asks whether the absolute alterity of the Other (which he argues contains a sense *otherwise* than being) can be properly conceived at all except by positing it as a positive modality of the unique and incomparable. His answer consists of an incessant effort to exclude and preserve the alterity of the Other from the type of speculative identity that constitutes Hegelian immanent ontology, i.e. the identity of identity and difference. He persistently exhorts us to reconsider a modality that is *beyond* and which *resists* the very 'logos' that founds speculative idealism, and to refuse its very terminology.

The Other, he claims, is not simply an alter-ego, i.e. an appresented analogue of myself. He and I are *not* equals and we are *not* relatives; there is an absolute asymmetry between us. There is between us (in the Hegelian phrase that Levinas crucially attempts to critically reconfigure) an *absolute difference*. Ultimately Levinas asks whether it is this absolute difference of the Other (which in its original difference is its being *otherwise* than being) that forbids its inscription within the terms of a speculative identity, but maintains the possibility of what he terms a *non-indifference* (in an ethical sense) with regard to the Other. His philosophical work necessarily proceeds as an exposition of the ethical significance of radical transcendence, as the radically and excessively positive infinity of the Other. When specifically contrasted to Hegel's ontology this positive modality of infinity is, he argues, *prior* to the alterity of self-relating negativity determinately operative within speculative idealism.

In response Hegelians ask whether or not this merely represents a naïve re-statement of pre-Hegelian transcendental or neo-transcendental philosophical positions and as such fails to engage critically with the rigorous demands of an immanent philosophy such as Hegel's. How, they ask, can a transcendental or neo-transcendental philosophy such as Levinas's evade the reach of the Hegelian immanent dialectic apart from maintaining a dogmatic, unjustified, and presupposed principle like the 'Absolute alterity of the Other' and the ethical claims associated with it? For Hegelians Levinas is either maintaining an 'Absolute difference' without relation, or a type of relation to 'Absolute difference' merely dogmatically presupposed and

asserted rather than grounded immanently on rationally speculative terms. Either way, for Hegelians, Levinas's thought is from its very inception terminally condemned as uncritical, dogmatic, abstract, one-sided and naïve.

A further concern for Hegelians, which we will address, is the understanding and characterisation of Hegel's thought operative within Levinas's work, i.e. as philosophically totalitarian in character and representing the formal reduction of the alterity of the Other to the Same, and as a rigid maieutics³⁸. For them such characterisations of Hegel's philosophy are as deeply flawed as his subsequent positioning of his own thought as 'beyond' Hegel. Ultimately his thought, for Hegelians, contains a deeply misconstrued understanding of Hegel and for them there remains something deeply pathological about Levinas's dogmatic obsession with the Other (perhaps too Jewish) and something idiotic about his reading of Hegel (perhaps too Kierkegaardian).

However, we will argue that such questions and concerns are in fact recognised and treated successfully by Levinas in his work. The extent to which he acknowledges these types of Hegelian concerns emerges, for example, when he writes:

'When faced with the Hegelian saying [*le dire*], one cannot easily raise one's voice – not only because thought becomes timid, but because language seems lacking. There is nothing more derisory than 'putting forward an opinion' on Hegel – classing him, either in order to reduce him in stature or to glorify him, as a mystic or romantic or anti-Semite or atheist... we express ourselves in a language that has not established its grounding... We ask ourselves whether language does not hold another secret to the one bought to it by the Greek tradition, and another source of meaning; whether the apparent and so-called 'non-thought' 'representations' of the Bible do not hold more possibilities than the philosophy that 'rationalises' them, but cannot let them go free... whether we should not leave the system, even if we do so by moving backwards, through the very door by which Hegel thinks we enter it.'³⁹

³⁸ Maieutics - a dialogue that endeavours to give birth to knowledge *already* contained in the interlocutors

³⁹ E. Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, p.238

Levinas denies that contesting the primacy of autonomy and reason necessarily implies irrationalism, dogmatism or mysticism, or the abandonment of the ideal of freedom. For him 'one is not against freedom if one seeks for it a justification'.⁴⁰ Rather, he maintains that reason and freedom are themselves radically founded upon prior 'unsuspected' structures 'whose first articulations are delineated by the metaphysical movement, or respect, or justice.'⁴¹ Freedom and reason thus require an *ethical* justification, and that implies a justification coming from *beyond* freedom and reason themselves. For Levinas, the self-legitimizing activity of reason and freedom within Hegelian philosophy is *ethically* utterly untenable, and argues that it is the approach of the Other who puts into question the naïve legitimacy of freedom. For us Levinas's reconfiguration of philosophy towards this 'other' justificatory source of meaning in fact successfully addresses a number of Hegelian questions in the most direct way possible. This is not to deny the considerable challenge of Hegelianism, but to maintain that they can be met by understanding how Levinas, without dogmatism, proceeds with a remarkable reversal of truth that ultimately rests upon freedom outside or beyond the immanent dialectic of determinate negation. Our own account of Levinas's work will focus upon this sense of urgency for reason and freedom to be justified *heterogeneously*. We readily acknowledge that Levinas's insistence upon heterogeneity, transcendence in immanence or metaphysical exteriority will nevertheless always appear somewhat incommensurable to Hegelian idealism. However, such incommensurability is, to a certain extent, the actual point of Levinas's efforts. Thus Levinas inevitably appears somewhat irrational, unfounded and dogmatic from the ultra-autonomous and ultra-rationalist Hegelian perspective. We will suggest that his efforts cannot look, from such a perspective, otherwise and as such demonstrates an intrinsic inability of Hegelianism to catch sight of genuine exteriority. That Hegelianism fails to discern within Levinas's work anything other than a mere pathological form of transcendental dogmatism perhaps reflects more upon the limitations of systematic immanence as a philosophical approach than it does upon Levinas's own work. We will argue that whilst his work is undeniably deeply marked by attempts to articulate the radically otherwise than being, the beyond reason, the pre-original relation to the Other outside of the rationally constitutive powers of the subject (i.e. the always already past of the absolutely Other *in* the

⁴⁰ E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.302

⁴¹ *Ibid*

subject), it also remains the profound attempt to demonstrate that these utterly heterogeneous conditions found and justify reason and freedom themselves. We will argue that Levinas cannot be reduced to being an irrationalist, mystic or dogmatist. The ethical relationship is not a species of consciousness whose ray emanates from the I; it puts the I in question. This putting in question emanates from the Other. This insistence upon ethics as a radical type of critical inspiration and disturbance, as first philosophy, represents neither a naïve pre-Hegelian transcendentalism nor a type of naïve dogmatism associated with empiricism. Rather, we argue, it represents nothing less than the profound attempt to demonstrate that the exteriority of the Other is *the* critical principle that founds and justifies all society, reason and freedom:

'The ethical, beyond vision and certitude, delineates the structure of exteriority as such. Morality [*le morale*] is not a branch of philosophy, but first philosophy.'⁴²

Our arguments will attempt to show the extent to which Levinas succeeds in articulating a 'displacement' of Hegel's speculative idealism, and in articulating a non-dogmatic notion of transcendence *in* immanence, where immanence turns out to have *always already* contained more than *it* can contain. For us his work succeeds in disrupting the steady, autonomous and sober immanent constitution of thought as it emerges within Hegel's 'presuppositionless' beginning with an identity of thought and being in the *Science of Logic*. This disruption has 'always already' happened, and is traced within Levinas's work as a necessary and radical notion of exteriority or alterity that *imposes* an ethical obligation prior to any presuppositionless beginning in absolute autonomy. Absolute exteriority, the Other, is that which presupposes an absolute obligation prior to the freedom of subjectivity. Thus, all of Levinas's philosophical work is orientated by the attempt to articulate this paradoxical notion of exteriority, beyond *yet* within immanence, as that which exceeds or overflows immanence from within. Such an overflowing radically throws into question the priority of the autonomous and presuppositionless self-determining movement of immanence in the most radical way possible, and cannot, we will argue, be immediately reinscribed back into immanence in the way earlier post-Hegelians such as Schelling, Feuerbach and Kierkegaard can

⁴² *Ibid.* p 304

We will argue that Levinas's responses to the type of Hegelian challenges we have outlined consist of a series of fundamental challenges to the very essence of Hegelian idealism itself, particularly its understanding of autonomy, rationality and immanence. Thus, he claims that Hegelians 'have yet to make understandable how a rational animal is possible'⁴³, and his own philosophical work will largely consist of the attempt to go beyond Hegel in providing an explanation of the very radical ethical founding and explanation of the rational, the social and the autonomous. He radically challenges the Hegelian explanation of the immanent emergence of the universal rational subject, whereby 'the True, not only as Substance, but equally as Subject'⁴⁴ is posited by Hegel. For Hegel, he claims, the I and the Other function purely as emergent, reciprocally related, moments of the subject; Hegel writes that 'the living Substance is being which is in truth actual only in so far as it is the movement of positing itself, or is the mediation of its self-othering with itself...Only this self-restoring sameness, or this reflection in otherness within itself..is the True.'⁴⁵ The I and the Other function, Levinas claims, merely as elements within an 'ideal calculus'⁴⁶, who receive from this calculus their genuine being, or their truth. They only ever approach one another under the auspices of 'ideal necessities which traverse them from all sides';⁴⁷ the I and the Other play the role of mere moments of becoming of truth in the system, rather than as its very origin. Within Hegelian idealism each renounces their unicity in not desiring one another in the sense Levinas claims is essential to desire, rather they merely desire the consummation of the universal:

'The idealist intelligible constitutes a system of coherent ideal relations whose presentation before the subject is equivalent to the entry of the subject into this order and its absorption into these ideal relations.'⁴⁸

Levinas's radical challenge to the fundamental essence of Hegelian idealism consists in the claim that immanent autonomous rationality cannot provide the crucial sense of the origin of society and rationality. He argues that both society and rationality

⁴³ Ibid, p.208

⁴⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, #17, p.10

⁴⁵ Ibid, #18, p.10

⁴⁶ E. Levinas, Ibid, p.216

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Ibid

presuppose a relation whose terms radically absolve themselves from that relation, thus 'separation'. It is in this sense that the true force of Levinas's claims that Hegelian idealism cannot explain the origin of the rational animal become clear. Reason, in the Hegelian sense of an autonomous, immanent and impersonal legislation, cannot permit 'us to account for discourse, for it absorbs the plurality of the interlocutors. Reason, being unique, cannot speak to another reason.'⁴⁹ Levinas challenges the very cornerstone of Hegelian idealism, its notion of the unique totality or reason, by positing a *skeptical* challenge to that totality. This *skeptical* challenge will attempt to disclose the necessary preconditions of reason, i.e. the fact that autonomous reason is itself founded by a relationality always beyond it.

His *skeptical* opposition to the speculative identity of the I and the Other in Hegelian idealism does not merely represent a type of Kierkegaardian protestation of the individual who refuses the system and reason. Such a protestation would, from a Hegelian perspective, be legitimately accused of arbitrariness and dogmatism, whereas Levinas's opposition is inspired by 'the affirmation that makes his opposition live'.⁵⁰ This opposition is inspired by the 'certainty of the surplus which an existence separated from and thus desiring the full or immutable being or being in act involves by relation to that being, that is the surplus that is produced by the society of infinity, an incessant surplus that accomplishes the infinitude of infinity'.⁵¹ This protestation against Hegelianism does not therefore fall prey to charges of arbitrariness and dogmatism; indeed, if it were merely a type of subjective protestation the very absurdity and immorality associated with arbitrariness and dogmatism would be justified. Rather, the protestation represented by his work proceeds from the conviction that the impersonal immanent rational structures of universal being cannot serve as the 'ontological touchstone for a life, a becoming, capable of renewal, of Desire, of society'.⁵² The individual and the personal, he claims, count and act independently of the Hegelian universal, which moulds them, but otherwise than Kierkegaardian protestation. The idea of infinity *in* the Same breaks with the Hegelian 'prejudice of maieutics without breaking with rationalism'.⁵³ This is precisely because

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.207

⁵⁰ Ibid, p.217

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Ibid, p.204

it is the very idea of infinity which conditions non-violence itself, that is, establishes ethics:

'The Other is not for reason a scandal that puts it in dialectical movement, but the first teaching. A being *receiving* the ideal of infinity, *receiving* since it cannot derive it from itself, is a being taught in a non-maieutic fashion, a being whose very existing consists in this incessant reception of teaching, in this incessant overflowing of self.'⁵⁴

Our focus will be on Levinas's radical understanding of the very nature of philosophy and philosophical thought itself in relation to Hegel's own. Our particular approach to this will consist of a consideration of the way Levinas construes the relationship between skepticism and philosophy, i.e. upon his arguments concerning the persistence and significance of skepticism within the very movement of philosophical thought itself. In doing this we will recall Hegel's own discussion of the essence of genuine skepticism and the role he reserves for the skeptical negativity in his speculative idealism, i.e. as the negative-rational moment of dialectic. This moment, for Hegel, emerges immanently as a disturbance to all certainties of the understanding in order for it to be able to raise itself to the level of the speculative, i.e. the positive-rational. Skepticism is for Levinas, as it was for Hegel, not merely a philosophical trend specific to a moment in the history of ideas; rather, it must be understood as an *internal* moment of philosophy itself. The relationship between skepticism and philosophy provides a crucial common point of departure for both thinkers, a point of 'almost absolute proximity', and provides an entrance point by which Levinas will claim he is able to 'leave the system, even if we do so by moving backwards, through the very door by which Hegel thinks we enter it.'⁵⁵ Levinas argues for the persistent recurrence of skepticism as internal to philosophy (as transcendence *in* immanence) but obviously follows a very different path to that of Hegel's speculative idealism. Indeed, it is precisely *the* point by which Levinas initiates an exit from, or resistance to, idealism. For Levinas the radical disruption that skepticism represents cannot be 'domesticated' and effectively submerged by immanence in the way Hegel appears to. It must remain and be recognised, he argues, as a repetitively disruptive and disorientating force coming from *within* immanence, as *otherwise than* the mere

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ibid

process of determinate negation. It functions as an appeal of the absolutely Other. Precisely because of the necessity of having to use the very structures of reason to articulate this *beyond* reason (the concrete content prior to, and resisting the form in which it must, nevertheless, be expressed) the skeptical modality utilised throughout all of his work manifests as the emphasis of the 'perhaps', 'maybe' and the 'if...then'. Indeed, this modality becomes evident in one of the most explicit and important anti-Hegelian passages in *Totality and Infinity*, a passage that reflects all of his efforts in the work and which we will quote here in full:

'If...reason lives in language, if the first rationality gleams forth in the opposition of the face to face, if the first intelligible, the first signification, is the infinity of the intelligence that presents itself (that is, speaks to me) in the face, if reason is defined by signification rather than signification being defined by the impersonal structures of reason, if society precedes the apparition of these impersonal structures, if universality reigns as the presence of humanity in the eyes that look at me, if, finally, we recall that this look appeals to my responsibility and consecrates my freedom as responsibility and gift of self – then the pluralism of society could not disappear in the elevation to reason, but would be its condition. It is not the impersonal in me that has arisen in enjoyment as separated, but whose separation would itself be necessary for infinity *to be* – for its infinitude is accomplished as the 'facing'.'⁵⁶

To outline the nature of the critical dialogue between Hegel and Levinas it is necessary to begin with an account of Levinas's early skeptical positioning of his thought vis-à-vis Hegel in his first major philosophical work *Totality and Infinity*.⁵⁷ Indeed, the importance of having to persistently position one's thought in relation to Hegel is illuminated by a remark once made by Levinas:

⁵⁶ Ibid. p.208

⁵⁷ Levinas had published a number of short philosophical studies, outside of his studies of Husserl and Heidegger, including *De l'Évasion* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1982), *De l'existence à l'existant* (Paris: Vrin, 1978, first edition 1947) in English as *Existence and Existents*, translated by A. Lingis (Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague, 1978) and *Le Temps et l'autre* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1979, first edition 1947) in English as *Time and the Other*, translated by R.A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987)

'For a philosopher, to locate his thought with respect to Hegel is as for the weaver to install his loom prior to attaching or removing the cloth that will be woven and rewoven.'⁵⁸

⁵⁸ E. Levinas, 'Une language qui nous est familier' en *Les Cahiers de la Nuit Surveillée*, 3 (1984), p.327, cited by J. Rolland in his 'Postscript' to E. Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, translated by B. Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000)

IV - Levinas's *Totality & Infinity*

Written as Levinas' *Doctorat d'état* in the 1950's and first published in 1961, *Totality and Infinity*⁵⁹ attempts to retain a 'positive' sense of metaphysics. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas argues that the very essence of metaphysics is the movement towards exteriority or the absolutely Other, a movement he terms throughout the work as 'Desire'. This metaphysical 'desire' thinks being, exteriority, transcendence and the absolutely other together, thus, aiming at a being *as such* or a being *in itself*. Metaphysical 'desire' aims at the absolutely Other in its exteriority or transcendence. *Totality and Infinity* represents Levinas's sustained critique of traditional thought regarding the movement of metaphysics; the tradition, he argues, has failed to enact the 'desire' essential to it. He maintains that the tradition obscures and effaces this 'desire' in two major ways; the first comes from thinking the absolutely Other in negative terms (i.e. Hegel) and the second by thinking being as such within the prior comprehension of Being (i.e. Heidegger). He argues that only through an ethics of sociality can one succeed in accomplishing a 'positive' sense of metaphysical desire (an accomplishment which does not imply arriving at an end) since it is in such an ethics of sociality that a being absolutely other (or exterior) presents itself *as such*. By re-thinking the ethical dimension of the encounter with the Other Levinas is able to redirect metaphysical 'desire' back toward the being that presents itself (i.e. what he terms the *auto-signification* of the 'face') and purge metaphysics of what the tradition has interposed between it and its end. For Levinas this purgation entails as much a confrontation with Hegelian negativity as it does with Heideggerian ontology.⁶⁰

Totality and Infinity consists of a series of detailed attempts to commune with various elements of concrete human existence, both at the level of individual experience and wider social interaction. Thus, it proceeds by way of concrete phenomenological analyses of multiple levels of human experience and aims to articulate, through these analyses, an elaborate defence of the notion of 'ethics as first philosophy' (understood here as *the* 'primordial' intersubjective relation). The 'primordial' site from which

⁵⁹ E. Levinas, *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité* (Livre de Poche; The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971, first edition 1961) in English as *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969)

⁶⁰ For the purposes of this thesis our engagement with Levinas will necessarily almost completely privilege Levinas' critique of Hegelian speculative Idealism, and as such will not attempt to provide any kind of reading of Levinas' sustained critique of Heidegger.

ethics takes its meaning is, he argues, the face-to-face encounter between the subject (in the lived, first person sense) and the other who approaches 'me', looks at 'me', and speaks to 'me'. The face-to-face relation is such an immediate and fragile experience that it ultimately eludes definitive thematisation precisely because it is necessarily reduced and effaced within such an act of thematisation. In its immediacy, fragility and auto-signification, the approach of the face is such a singular event that its excessive signification is pre-representational and pre-conceptual. It is experienced, Levinas argues, as a luminous force, as an affective quality prior to the operations of cognition and understanding. Thus, like Kierkegaard, Levinas also asks whether or not there is something in the conscious subject which enables him to step outside – or cause him to be torn from – his manifold situations and institutions in order to enquire how and as what the absolutely other comes to pass. As he argues in a short essay published a few years after *Totality and Infinity*, 'there must be someone who is no longer agglutinated in being, who, at his own risk, responds to the enigma and grasps the allusion. Such is the subjectivity, alone, unique, secret, which Kierkegaard caught sight of.'⁶¹ He situates the *production* of transcendence in the face of the Other. The face is a primordial ethical resistance, 'the resistance of what has no resistance – the ethical resistance'⁶², and is utterly irreducible to a mere phenomenon:

'The nakedness of the face is not what is presented to me because I disclose it, what would therefore be presented to me, to my powers, to my eyes, to my perceptions, in a light exterior to it. The face has turned to me – and this is its very nudity. It is by itself and not by reference to a system...The relation with the face is not an object-cognition. The transcendence of the face is at the same time its absence from this world into which it enters, the exiling of a being, his condition of being stranger, destitute, or proletarian.'⁶³

Thus, there can be no integration of the lived face-to-face relation into a philosophical system qua speculative idealism, since there is always some aspect of the other person facing 'me' that I can neither predict, enclose or thematise in concepts:

⁶¹ E. Levinas, 'Phenomenon and Enigma' (1967) in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p.72

⁶² E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.199

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.75

'The face resists possession, resists my powers. In its epiphany, in expression, the sensible, still graspable, turns into total resistance to the grasp. This mutation can occur only by opening of a new dimension. For the resistance to the grasp is not produced as an insurmountable resistance, like the hardness of the rock against which the effort of the hand comes to naught, like the remoteness of a star in the immensity of space. The expression the face introduces into the world does not defy the feebleness of my powers, but my ability for power. The face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it. This means concretely: the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge.'⁶⁴

The first part of *Totality and Infinity*, entitled 'The Same and the Other'⁶⁵, outlines much of the logic which guides the entire work. Here the 'same' (*le même*) is the term he uses to characterise what he argues is the 'violence' integral to traditional appropriations of metaphysical 'desire'; for Levinas all such metaphysical thinking, insofar as it is the thought of the Same, is constituted by a fundamental violence against the Otherness of the Other. Our examination of *Totality and Infinity* will almost exclusively concentrate upon the arguments contained in this first part, and more specifically will address the question of how exactly they relate to Hegelian speculative idealism.

In the opening section of *Totality and Infinity* Levinas sets out the fundamental structure of metaphysical desire and infinity of the Other. Echoing Hegel's determination of the Absolute, the Same is not merely substance but subject (the 'I') namely the 'being whose existing consists in identifying itself, in recovering its identity throughout all that happens to it...the primordial work of identification. The I is identical in its very alterations.'⁶⁶ Following Hegel, Levinas argues that the subjective work of identification or recovering self in difference (the work which distinguishes the subject which is 'for itself' from the substance which is 'in itself') is the 'labour of the negative'. Thus negativity is precisely the process by which

⁶⁴ Ibid, pp 197-8

⁶⁵ E. Levinas, Ibid, pp.33-105

⁶⁶ Ibid, p.36

autonomous subjectivity identifies itself in otherness and confirms what he calls the thought of the *same*. For Hegel it is *the* way in which spirit is at home with itself and is the essence of freedom, 'being at home with oneself in one's other, depending upon oneself, and being one's own determinant.'⁶⁷

Established in and through identification, the Same comprehends otherness, grasping it in knowledge and possession. The partial negation (*Aufhebung*)⁶⁸ (which is for Levinas a 'violence') has the effect of denying the independence of beings; they become 'mine'; 'something is sublated only in so far as it has entered into unity with its opposite.'⁶⁹ The Other in being partially negated is thus preserved; it is preserved in its negation, i.e. as the Same. Absolute alterity is reduced to an other that is structurally integral to the Same or I. For Levinas such a reduction of alterity is necessarily a type of violence against the Other: i.e. the Same is intrinsically violent insofar as it necessitates otherness appear only on condition that its alterity be reduced to a comprehensible alterity. In *Totality and Infinity* violence itself is understood as the necessity that the Other dissimulate itself in its appearance for the Same. Autonomous subjectivity is inherently violent, not because it is constituted by excluding otherness but because in its very constitution it includes the Other within it while mastering its otherness. For Levinas, there would only be within the Same the structural other-relatedness designated by Hegelian phenomenology and logic. This type of otherness is one that 'I' distinguish from myself and is, as a consequence, an otherness speculatively identified as the same as myself. Levinas cites the following passage from Hegel:

'I distinguish myself from myself, and in doing so I am directly aware that what is distinguished from myself is not different [from me]. I, the selfsame being, repel myself from myself; but what is posited as distinct from me, or as unlike me, is immediately, in being so distinguished, not a distinction for me.'⁷⁰

⁶⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic*, #24, p.58

⁶⁸ Hegel writes: 'To sublate' (*Aufheben*) has a twofold meaning...to preserve, to maintain, and...to cease, to put an end to... Thus what is sublated is at the same time preserved.' (*Science of Logic*, p.107) and: 'We ought...to recognise here the speculative spirit of language, which transcends the 'either-or' of mere understanding.' (*The Encyclopaedia Logic*, #96, add., p.154

⁶⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p.107

⁷⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, #164, p.102, cited by E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp.36-7

For Hegel, I alter myself immanently by at once negating myself *and* identifying myself *in* the difference from myself. Negation is understood as the movement whereby distinctions are allowed to immanently emerge, and I at once recover myself in these distinctions. In this way, negativity functions as the negation of negation; by negating what is posited as other negativity constitutes the Same or the identity of the I. Thus the attempt to think the Other seems integral to the structural constitution of the Same and therefore bound to a type of violence against alterity. For Levinas, whether the Same as the 'I' is fully established by its mundane experience or stands apart from it in contemplation, it nonetheless forms a closed circuit with the world and stands in relations of continuity with the world. He writes:

'The way of the I against the 'other' of the world consists in sojourning, in identifying oneself by existing here *at home with oneself*. In a world which is from the first other the I is nonetheless autochthonous. It is the very reversion of this alternation. It finds in the world a site and a home. Dwelling is the very mode of *maintaining oneself*.'⁷¹

In phenomenological terms, experience for the Same is always then the result of a variable fit between intention and something which does not refract or deflect that intention. To the Same and the Other understood in this way Levinas introduces the notion of the absolutely Other (which he will also call the *infinite* and the *transcendent*). This notion of the absolutely Other is *beyond* the Same; it is neither the 'I' nor the (false) other (falsely) distinguished from this 'I': 'The Other cannot be contained by me: he is unthinkable – he is infinite and recognised as such. This recognition is not produced as a thought, but is produced as a morality.'⁷²

The Other is identified by Levinas with the notion of infinity; the Other, both within and without the order of being, thus escapes all measure by my reflection. However, given the characterisation of the Same, Levinas immediately poses the question: 'How can the Same, produced as egoism, enter into relationship with an other without immediately divesting it of its alterity?'⁷³

⁷¹ E. Levinas, *Ibid*, p.37

⁷² *Ibid*, p.230

⁷³ *Ibid*, p.38

For Levinas any explicit protest against totality on behalf of subjectivity is structurally identical to the promotion of the Same within Hegelianism. This was the point argued for by our previous discussion of specific elements of Kierkegaard's anti-Hegelianism. Thus, Levinas writes that 'it is not I who resist the system, as Kierkegaard thought; it is the other'.⁷⁴ For him it is not the thought of subjective existence that promises the escape from the totality but the approach of the infinite or the Other. The absolutely Other (i.e. the transcendent face of the Other) is a being that is other *by itself* without its otherness depending on its being primarily distinguished from and by the 'I'. It is neither straightforwardly or dialectically identical with this 'I'. It represents a radical interruption of the continuous flow of 'my' existence in the world without that interruption necessarily being brought about by an 'empirical' force in the way Feuerbach claims. By no longer depending on any distinction from and within the Same, the difference between the I and the absolutely Other cannot be sustained as a difference following from an antecedent sameness or commonality. He writes that the absolutely Other is: 'the Stranger who disturbs the being at home with oneself... Over him I have no *power*. He escapes my grasp by an essential dimension, even if I have him at my disposal. He is not wholly in my site'.⁷⁵ The absolutely Other is a being that stands beyond every attribute, 'which would precisely have the effect to qualify him, that is, to reduce him to what is common to him and other beings'.⁷⁶ Alterity is not attributable to a being fundamentally the same as me. The thought of the absolutely Other is thus a thought of original difference, i.e. a difference preceding, and irreducible to, the integration of the I and its intrinsic other in the Same. In asserting separation to be original, Levinas stands opposed to a thought for which difference (as the distinction between the Same and the Other) signals and results from a fall from primordial unity. Separation is not a matter of the distinction between two finite terms that mutually limit and therefore immanently define the finitude of each other. An example that Levinas cites would be the Hegelian speculative dialectic of lordship and bondage⁷⁷ where each limits the other and is at the same time integral to defining the identity of the Other; i.e. the master is lord only when recognised as such by the slave that the lord is not, and vice versa.

⁷⁴ Ibid. p.40

⁷⁵ Ibid. p.39

⁷⁶ Ibid. p.74

⁷⁷ See Hegel. Ibid. #178-196. pp.111-119

'Self consciousness... must proceed to supersede the *other* independent being in order thereby to become certain of *itself* as the essential being; secondly in so doing it proceeds to supersede its *own* self, for this other is itself.'⁷⁸

For Levinas, if separation is to respect the alterity of the absolutely Other, this Other must not arise on the border or limit that distinguishes while at the same time defining finite beings. Such separation is the distance in and through which the absolutely Other appears. By not being defined by its opposite, the absolutely Other is distinct without this distance depending on its *relation* to another term. Unlike other distances the distance of the transcendent is not relative to a finite term that it would limit, rather, it is constitutive of the transcendent itself. Consequently, it is in keeping with these strictures of distance that Levinas wants us to understand the 'and' of *Totality and Infinity*, thus the 'and' is a non-conjunctive conjunction, i.e. it presents the Same with what remains at a distance from it. In admitting a conjunction with what it cannot join (since it is given in distance) the Same must renounce its claim to totality. Since the absolutely Other remains forever in distance without limiting the Same, Levinas writes that 'this separation is not simply a negation [it] opens upon the idea of infinity.'⁷⁹

With this notion of Infinity Levinas opposes the Hegelian notion of the Infinite that becomes truly infinite by negating the finitude that opposes it. As Hegel writes in the *Science of Logic*:

'The Infinite... is, in fact, the process in which it is deposed to being only *one* of its determinations, the opposite of the finite, and so to being itself only one of the finites, and then raising this its difference from itself into the affirmation of itself and through this mediation becoming the *true* infinite.'⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Ibid. #179-180, p.111

⁷⁹ E. Levinas, *Ibid.*, p.105

⁸⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p.148

Hence, Hegel's genuine infinite is that from which nothing is separate and is posited as being the most *real* since it grasps or comprehends, within its own negation, every other:

'The image of true infinity, bent back into itself, becomes the circle, the line which has reached itself, which is closed and wholly present, without beginning and end. True infinity taken thus generally as determinate being which is posited as affirmative in contrast to the abstract negation, is reality in a higher sense than the former reality which was simply determinate; for here it has acquired a concrete content. It is not the finite which is the real, but the infinite. Thus reality is further determined as essence, Notion, Idea, and so on.'⁸¹

In an entry written for the *Encyclopaedia Universalis* in 1968 on the topic of 'Infinity' Levinas clearly confirms this understanding of Hegel's thought:

'The thought of thought is the infinite. But the surpassing of the *given* knowable – which Hegel calls *negativity* – is a process of determination. Its result is the concept. Hegel showed, precisely, that negativity is a determination and that determination is not completed with the limit of the defined and with exclusion: that it is a totalization absorbing the *other*, or, concretely, the efficacious action of Reason in history. The singularity of consciousness itself is but the labour of the infinite inserting itself into the datum. The totality is not a piling up nor an addition of beings: it can only be conceived of as absolute thought that, without any other thing being an obstacle to it, affirms itself as absolute freedom, i.e. act, efficacious thought qua thought, actual freedom... In Hegel's Logic, contrary to the conception of the classical thinkers, the finite is not determinable in itself, but only in its passage to the other... It is the very mode according to which the infinite is revealed. But it is the fact of revealing itself, knowledge, that is the event of the Absolute itself.'⁸²

In contrast to the genuine infinite of Hegel's thought, Levinas argues for an understanding of infinity as that which precedes and exceeds all comprehension and is

⁸¹ Ibid, p.149

⁸² E. Levinas, 'Infinity' in *Alterité et Transcendence* (Fata Morgana, 1995) in English as *Alterity and Transcendence*, translated by M.B. Smith (London: The Athlone Press, 1999), pp. 70-1

excluded from a supposedly limitless totality.⁸³ Indeed, Levinas's understanding of infinity is firmly situated in the religious tradition of the idea of infinity.⁸⁴ As infinity the absolutely Other escapes comprehension not because it is simply lacking from the same but because it precedes and overflows it; 'Infinity overflows the thought that thinks it. Its very infinitude is produced in this overflowing.'⁸⁵ Levinas describes the preceding, overflowing or exceeding of the Same as an ab-solution of the absolute. In other words, this exceptional idea of infinity is conceived as a relation with the absolutely Other that does not render the Other as merely internal or relative. It is a notion of a relation with the Other that respects the Other's absolution from every relation it enters. Since for Hegel negativity is understood as a structurally constitutive element of reason, the absolutely Other or infinite cannot be, Levinas claims, fully comprehended by reference to traditional notions of negativity. For Levinas, since affirmation and negation (the yes and no) remain negative determinations of each other, neither is capable of comprehending the absolutely Other or Infinity. Thus it is in the context of the attempt to distinguish the absolutely Other from the determinate negation of opposition that Levinas re-introduces a novel and radical form of skeptical 'negativity'. This form of skeptical 'negativity' claims not to function as a merely internal negative element of the Same, i.e. it claims not to function as a principle of ultimate coherence in the manner of Hegel, but as a radical delirium.

Derrida, in his first text on Levinas, describes this skeptical form of negativity as the 'nature of Levinas's writing...to progress by negations, and by negation against negation. Its proper route is not that of an "either this...or that", but of a "neither

⁸³ Indeed, Levinas denies that his position is reducible to Hegel's notion of the bad infinite. In an interview published in 1995 he makes precisely this point: 'Cette constatation de ne pas être quitte désigne dans *Totalité et infini* non pas le grand chiffre, ou l'infini mauvais de Hegel. Le mauvais infini de Hegel, l'etcetera, c'est ce qui conduit toujours plus loin, et dès qu'on est obligé de conduire toujours plus loin, on pense déjà l'idée de l'infini. Mais la relation à Autrui n'est pas toujours la même. L'etcetera de Hegel dilapide l'infini qui est inclus. Chaque pas qui n'est pas terminé n'est pas le même pas, et il n'est jamais terminé. C'est dans ce sens précis que je comprends le concept de l'infini son rapport à l'autre, et assumer la responsabilité ne signifie pas, par conséquent, de constater la singularité. Elle est toujours l'agir (l'action), l'être-coupable. C'est une culpabilité sans crime.' ('Emmanuel Levinas: Visage et violence première (phénoménologie de l'éthique) - Une interview' in *La Différence comme Non-Indifférence - l'éthique et l'altérité chez Emmanuel Levinas* - Sous la direction D'Arno Münster (Paris, Éditions Kimé, 1995), p. 138

⁸⁴ See Levinas's comments at the end of his article on 'Infinity' in *Altérité et Transcendence* (Fata Morgana, 1995) in English as *Alterity and Transcendence*, translated by M.B. Smith (London: The Athlone Press, 1999), p. 76

⁸⁵ E. Levinas, *Ibid.* p. 25

this...nor that'''.⁸⁶ Derrida clearly recognises Levinas's claim that neither straightforwardly affirmative nor negative propositions are able to contain or conceive the absolutely Other. Thus Levinas's philosophical discourse proceeds as a radical type of skepticism, containing as it does an excessive abundance of negations in order to proceed 'otherwise than' the Hegelian speculative dialectic.⁸⁷ The Levinasian neither/nor does not contain or aim to secure an affirmation by its negation (as the Hegelian principle of determinate negation does); as such it is an infinitely disruptive negation (or a negation *ad infinitum*) that traces out the persistent recurrence of a skeptical interruption. Levinas's form of critical skepticism represents a disruptive interruption coming from the absolutely Other or the infinite, and such a form of negation never finally determines that Other or infinite, rather it originates from the approach of the Other. Indeed the proximity to the Other represents for Levinas a 'relation' without determinate negativity and is a 'relation' that avoids becoming a constitutive element within the Same. This 'relation without relation' is proposed by Levinas as the essence of 'discourse' and 'dialogue'. Succeeding sections of *Totality and Infinity* expand upon this supra-ontological significance, beneath or below the Same's constitution of the experience of the Other, as one of response to the Other's summons and speech with him.

Discourse and dialogue are 'prior to the negative or affirmative proposition; it first institutes language, where neither the no nor the yes is the first word. The description of this relation is the central issue of the present research.'⁸⁸ For Levinas, the 'object' that is the 'face of the other' is, indeed, the only 'object' I ever encounter that signifies actively and verbally, and whose signification is both summons and interdiction. The face presents the performativity that summons an ethical *response* that has priority vis-à-vis the circle of representation:

⁸⁶ J. Derrida, 'Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas' in *Writing and Difference*, translated, with an introduction and additional notes by A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p.90

⁸⁷ Hegel writes: 'When the dialectic has the negative as its result, then precisely as a result, this negative is at the same time the positive, for it contains what it resulted from sublated within itself, and it cannot be without it. This, however, is the basic determination of...the *speculative* or positively rational.' (*The Encyclopaedia Logic*, #81, add 2, p.131)

⁸⁸ E. Levinas, *Ibid.* p.142

'The relation between the Same and the Other, metaphysics, is primordially enacted as conversation, where the Same, gathered up in its ipseity as an 'I', as a particular existent unique and autochthonous, leaves itself.'⁸⁹

Faced with the Other, the Same is unavoidably and incessantly in Society with the Other. The Same cannot rid itself of the Other's face, neither through comprehension, partial negation and assimilation or total negation and murder. The Same respects the Other by giving itself to the Other in and through language and discourse. For Levinas the very essence of language is ethical not only because it *announces* the inviolability of the Other but because language itself is structured as *generosity* – it designates things for the Other. Language is primordially an act of generosity that responds to the advent of the face by offering *my* world to him. In offering what is *mine* to the Other, language is not preceded by community or commonality but is the foundation upon which the world is put in common:

'To recognise the Other is therefore to come to him across the world of possessed things, but at the same time to establish, by gift, community and universality... To speak is to make the world common, to create commonplaces. Language does not refer to the generality of concepts but lays the foundation for a possession in common.'⁹⁰

The encounter with the Other thus opens the possibility of approaching the absolutely Other without the conditions which constitute the Same. The relation described by Levinas brings *together* the Same and the absolutely Other *without* constitutive speculative and determinate negativity. Since it precedes all questions asked of it, the presence of the face arises *from itself* and it presents *itself* absolutely. It is not an other merely relative to us. By expressing itself, the absolutely Other reveals *itself*, and with the notion of *expression* Levinas is able to describe the way the absolutely Other presents itself as Other. This auto-signification of the Other entails the disruption of the constitutive structures of the Same; indeed Levinas claims that the auto-signification of the Other (the face) is the very origin of all signification. In other words there would be no signification where the Same had not always already been

⁸⁹ Ibid, p.148

⁹⁰ Ibid, p.76

interrupted or breached by the presence of the Other. By expressing itself before having been disclosed, the expression of the face bears its own meaning and is the very production of meaning:

'Language is a relation between separated terms. To the one the Other can indeed present himself as theme, but his presence is not reabsorbed in his status as a theme. The word that bears on the Other as a theme seems to contain the Other. But already it is said to the Other who, as interlocutor, has quit the theme that encompassed him, and upsurges inevitably behind the said.'⁹¹

Ethics, the non-violent approach of the Other, is presupposed and encountered only in speech with the Other. In language the Other is inviolable because, as the interlocutor, he 'upsurges inevitably behind the said, which pretends to grasp it within the Same.'⁹² In addition to announcing the incomprehensibility of the Other, language is essentially an ethical acknowledgement of the incomprehensible presence of the Other. Levinas will claim later in *Totality and Infinity* that this acknowledgement is generosity, the 'offering which language is.'⁹³

As we explored earlier in this thesis, for Hegel language also marks the passage from the immediate here and now of the thing possessed into the universal. Like Hegel, Levinas believes that language cannot utter the particular or sensuous thing, what is *mine* and what I *mean*, and in fact marks the very *entry* of the thing into the sphere of the universal or the general. However, for Levinas, language dispossesses me of what is mine not simply by the act of designating the thing, of uttering it, as Hegel argues, but because 'in designating a thing, I designate it to *Autrui*. This act of designating modifies my relation of enjoyment and possession with things, places things in the perspective of *Autrui*... The word that designates things attests their apportionment between me and the Others.'⁹⁴ On Levinas's reading of designation, a thing is designated only insofar as it is *given* to the Other. The act of utterance, designation is

⁹¹ Ibid, p.195

⁹² Ibid, p.195

⁹³ Ibid, p.174 See J. Llewelyn, 'Levinas and Language' in *Appositions of Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana U.P., 2002), pp. 164-178 and K. Ziarek, 'Semantics of Proximity: Language and the Other in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas' in *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol. XIX, pp.213-247

⁹⁴ Ibid, p.209

not the act of subjectivity ascending to the universal in and through the dialectical negation of particularity and otherness; rather, it presupposes the *presentation* of the Other, the upsurge of language in the face, to which every act of designation responds. In other words, language, generosity, is essentially a response to the presence of the face in speech. By *designating* the thing that I possess, language gives it to the Other, and in doing so it *institutes* the order of the universal or general where things can be shared and held in common. Thus for Levinas language confers universality to the particular sensuous thing only insofar as language is essentially the *gift* of what is mine to the Other. On his reading generalisation (the becoming universal of the thing in the world) is not what is entered when language negates what is mine, the sensuous thing. Rather things become general in language simply because language *offers* what is mine to the Other, dispossesses me, thereby 'putting in common a world hitherto mine'.⁹⁵ In this way, *Totality and Infinity* provides an *ethical* explanation of how language generalises. Language generalises and universalises insofar as it puts the world in common; but such putting in common is an essentially ethical *event* (if ethics is understood as the donation of what is mine to the Other).

By disclosing the irreducibly ethical essence of discourse Levinas argues that the fundamental essence of 'idealism is refused'.⁹⁶ Discourse and language are not, he insists, limited to the Hegelian maieutic awakening of thoughts common to beings; 'it does not accelerate the inward maturation of a reason common to all; it teaches and introduces the new into a thought. The introduction of the new into a thought, the idea of infinity, is the very work of reason'.⁹⁷ Since reason commences with discourse the subject does not 'abdicate' his unicity', rather it *confirms* his separation. The passage to the rational, as conceived by *Totality and Infinity*, is not the Hegelian dis-individuation (i.e. the negating of the subject's particularity) precisely because it *is* language, that is, language necessarily understood as a *response* to the being who in a face speaks to the subject and tolerates only a *personal* response, i.e. an ethical act. The passage to the rational *is* precisely the passage to hyper-ethico individuation for Levinas.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p.174

⁹⁶ Ibid, p.216

⁹⁷ Ibid, p.219

In his first text on Levinas, entitled 'Violence and Metaphysics'⁹⁸, Derrida also evokes this solicitation of the infinity of the Other (the otherwise than Being) within discourse as the very essence of Levinas's work. Derrida insists that Levinas 'does not seek to propose laws or moral rules, does not seek to determine a morality, but rather the essence of the ethical relation in general...an Ethics of Ethics'⁹⁹. For Derrida this Ethics of Ethics is enacted by Levinas's work as a radical critical essence (what we argue should be recognised as Levinas's radical reconfiguration of *skepticism*) summoning us 'to depart from the Greek site' and towards 'what is no longer a source or a site'¹⁰⁰. The non-violent relationship to the infinitely Other is the only way of opening the space of transcendence and of liberating metaphysics; for Levinas it 'makes us dream of an inconceivable process of dismantling and dispossession'.¹⁰¹ This 'opening of opening' cannot be enclosed within any category or totality and cannot be described by any traditional concepts; rather, it represents a destabilising negativity beyond the soberness of the Hegelian dialectic. It is an attempt to articulate a thinking of 'original difference'. However, Derrida's commentary upon this solicitation towards original difference traced by Levinas's work posits a number of powerful concerns associated with the very nature of Levinas's textuality and its relationship to Husserl, Heidegger and Hegel.¹⁰² Derrida's concerns are focussed on problems seemingly inherent within Levinas's textuality, given its insistence upon opposing ontological thinkers of the western philosophical tradition. Such problems emerge from Levinas's efforts to think *and* solicit a non-ontological and pre-original un-condition necessarily within an irreducibly ontological language. We will proceed by examining the concerns that Derrida raises concerning Levinas's articulation of 'original difference' as a genuine critical and ethical force of skepticism opposed to Hegelianism. His suspicion will be that Levinas is unable to ultimately disentangle

⁹⁸ J. Derrida, 'Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas' in *Writing and Difference*, translated, with an introduction and additional notes by A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp 79-153

⁹⁹ Ibid, p.111

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p.82

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² We will focus only upon Derrida's concerns regarding Levinas's opposition to Hegelianism and ignore Derrida's many penetrating analyses of Levinas's relationship to Husserl and Heidegger. Furthermore, we will focus on only one of those concerns regarding Hegel, identity and difference, at the expense of many other Hegelian concerns voiced by Derrida. The reasons for this concern the relevance to our argument here and the overall limitations concerning space in this thesis. It is our conviction that the other Hegelian concerns are both powerful and suggestive, and would merit an exhaustive treatment at some point in the future.

himself from the speculative dialectic and Hegelian negativity, and as a result is always struggling to sustain a legitimate opposition to it.

V - Derrida's 'Violence and Metaphysics'

Derrida's first essay on Levinas, entitled 'Violence and Metaphysics', claims that it does not posit a sustained and systematic critique of Levinas's thought, but poses 'several questions' which are 'the questions put to us by Levinas'¹⁰³. These questions, Derrida claims, are primarily 'questions of language and the question of language'¹⁰⁴, and as such 'already belong to his own interior dialogue'¹⁰⁵. The function of Derrida's early commentary on Levinas's work (a commentary that spans Levinas's *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*¹⁰⁶ to 'The Trace of the Other'¹⁰⁷) is to emphasise the need for philosophical vigilance by drawing Levinas's attention to the intrinsic limits of philosophical discourse and recalling the sense in which it is an irreducibly Greek conceptuality. Derrida argues that there is an 'indestructible and unforeseeable resource of the Greek logos', namely its 'power of envelopment, by which he who attempts to repel it would always already be overtaken'¹⁰⁸. Despite acknowledging Levinas's awareness of these inevitable difficulties (it would be one of the questions implicitly 'put to us' by Levinas) Derrida does not seem satisfied that Levinas's work is as acutely aware as it *should* be, particularly when it is concerned with displacing Hegel's speculative idealism. Derrida argues:

'Let us confess our total deafness to propositions of this type: 'Being occurs as multiple, and as divided into Same and Other. This is its ultimate structure.' (*Totality and Infinity*). What is the division of *being between* the Same and the Other? Is it a division between the Same and the Other, which does not suppose, at very least, that the Same *is* the Other's other, and the Other the Same as oneself?'¹⁰⁹

Derrida's deafness to these types of proposition put forward by Levinas is part of a strategy concerned with demonstrating Levinas's actual (and perhaps unsuspected)

¹⁰³ Ibid. p.84

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p.109

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁶ E. Levinas, *Theorie de l'intuition dans la phenomenologie de Husserl*, in English as *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, translated by A. Orianne (Evanston: Northwestern U.P. 1973)

¹⁰⁷ E. Levinas, 'La trace de l'autre' in *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, Sep 1963, in English as 'The Trace of the Other', translated by A. Lingis, in *Deconstruction in Context*, ed. M.C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) pp.345-359

¹⁰⁸ J. Derrida, Ibid. p.111

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p.120

proximity to 'him who stands most accused in the trial conducted by *Totality and Infinity*'¹¹⁰, namely Hegel. Despite Derrida's agreement with Levinas for the need to go 'beyond' Hegel, and the fact that he has an overall sympathy with Levinas's efforts to 'make the very difficult passage beyond the debate, which is also a complicity, between Hegelianism and classical anti-Hegelianism'¹¹¹, he asserts that 'as soon as he speaks against Hegel, Levinas can only confirm Hegel, has confirmed him already'¹¹². He attempts at various points throughout his commentary to demonstrate this proximity, complicity or vulnerability to Hegel within Levinas's work by positing a series of problems for Levinas's textuality upon explicitly Hegelian grounds. However, he does so only to demonstrate the extreme difficulty of disentangling philosophy from Hegel and to indicate, to a certain extent, Levinas's own failure in that regard. He claims that these problems demonstrate that:

'Levinas is very close to Hegel, much closer than he admits, and at the very moment when he is apparently opposed to Hegel in the most radical fashion. This is a situation he must share with all anti-Hegelian thinkers, and whose final significance calls for much thought.'¹¹³

Derrida argues that Levinas has clearly been caught 'dreaming the impossible dream', or of walking a path that is forever blocked, a path beyond the questionableness of philosophy that leads to what can neither *be* nor *be thought*. Levinas is dreaming of an absolutely *wholly* Other, as an infinity, an other which is absolutely exterior to, and which shatters the bounds of reason. In this respect Derrida argues that Levinasian ethics represents a kind of continuity with empiricism, i.e. a view of the self-other relation as strangely devoid of interpersonal content and even as resembling the process by which (on an empiricist account) we acquire knowledge through exposure to the stream of incoming sensory data:

'The true name of this inclination of thought to the Other, of this resigned acceptance of the incoherent incoherence inspired by a truth more profound than the "logic" of philosophical discourse, the true name of this renunciation of the concept, of the a

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.84

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* p.111

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.* p.99

prioris and transcendental horizons of language, is empiricism...It is the dream of a purely heterological thought at its source. A pure thought of pure difference. Empiricism is its philosophical name, its metaphysical pretention or modesty. We say dream because it must vanish at daybreak, as soon as language awakens.¹¹⁴

By arguing that Levinas's thought is akin to empiricism Derrida suggests an affinity between Levinas's ethics of the Other and Feuerbach's post-Hegelian empiricism, 'a confrontation of Levinas's thought with Feuerbach's anti-Hegelianism would necessarily uncover, it seems to us, more profound convergences and affinities.'¹¹⁵ He argues that what Levinas calls the positive infinity of the infinitely Other is similar to Feuerbach's notion of sensuous being, 'unthinkable, impossible, unutterable', and adds, 'perhaps Levinas calls us toward this 'unthinkable-impossible-unutterable beyond (tradition's) Being and Logos'¹¹⁶. He argues that if this is the case then it is not something that one is able either to say or think. Hence:

'The attempt to achieve an opening toward the beyond of philosophical discourse, by means of a philosophical discourse, which can never be shaken off completely, cannot possibly succeed within language.'¹¹⁷

However, Levinas clearly affirms language by asserting his thought of the Other in philosophical discourse. For Derrida there is a suspicion that Levinas repeats a gesture intrinsic to all forms of empiricism or absolutely heterological thought (a gesture understood well by Hegel himself), namely that it 'always forgets, at the very least, that it employs the words "to be".'¹¹⁸ For Derrida Levinas's arguments amount to the claim that a non-violent language is a language that does without the verb "to be", it is a language without predication, 'a language of pure invocation, pure adoration, proffering only proper nouns in order to call to the Other from afar. In effect, such a language would be purified of all rhetoric...purified of every verb.'¹¹⁹ Derrida asks whether such a language would still deserve its name as a language. Claiming to follow the Greeks, he argues that 'there is no Logos which does not suppose the

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p.151

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p.111

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p.114 Note: Recall our earlier discussion of Feuerbach's notion of sensuous being.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p.110

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p.139

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p.147

interlacing of nouns and verbs.¹²⁰ Thus, Levinas would seemingly not only claim to posit an Ethics without determinate laws but also a language, i.e. a saying, without phrase. However, there cannot be any language, Derrida claims, 'which does not pass through the violence of the concept'.¹²¹ His attention is entirely focused upon Levinas's articulation of the absolutely wholly other, given the structures, restrictions and necessity of conceptuality, 'the necessity of lodging oneself within traditional conceptuality in order to deconstruct it'.¹²²

Part of Derrida's efforts consist in bringing Levinas's account of the 'absolute Other' into proximity with Hegel's discussion of Absolute Difference in the *Science of Logic*. His aim is to disclose the unsuspected difficulties and complications within Levinas's articulation, or necessary conceptualisation, of the absolutely wholly Other. Derrida's claim is quite straightforward – Levinas underestimates the profound plasticity and force of the Hegelian dialectic. For him Levinas's discourse is necessarily and inescapably entangled within Hegel's dialectic of Identity and Difference by virtue of the fact that it is a discourse; it cannot be 'beyond' or 'exterior' to dialectic since such a dialectic expresses something intrinsic to the very nature of discourse.

Hegel in the *Science of Logic* demonstrates the development of an internal relation between identity and difference. This development occurs in such a way that each passes into the other and thus conjoin in a principle Hegel terms 'Contradiction'. Hegel's immanent logical revision of identity and difference claims to disclose the very structure of 'identity within difference' that is for Hegel so definitive of authentic Spirit. Hegel begins his demonstration by arguing that the category of 'identity' is immediately a simple self-sameness, which is usually considered as being exclusive of difference. Hegel indicates, however, that when such a simple and immediate self-relation is considered it becomes apparent that such abstract 'self-identity' is fundamentally inseparable from absolute difference. Such an abstract self-relation is necessarily mediated by an opposition to and absolute negation of

¹²⁰ *Ibid*

¹²¹ *Ibid*

¹²² *Ibid*, p. 111

'difference', and by affirming itself as an identity it negates itself and becomes its 'opposite' - namely 'difference'.

'This identity is...the negation that immediately negates itself, a non-being and difference that vanishes in its arising, or a distinguishing by which nothing is distinguished, but which immediately collapses within itself. The distinguishing is the positing of non-being as non-being of the other. But the non-being of the Other is sublation of the other and therewith of the distinguishing itself. Here, then, distinguishing is present as self-related negativity, as a non-being that is the non-being of itself, a non-being which has its non-being not in another but in its own self. What is present, therefore, is self-related, reflected difference, or pure, *absolute difference*. In other words, identity is the reflection-into-itself that is identity only as internal repulsion, and is this repulsion and reflection-into-self, repulsion that immediately takes itself back into itself. Thus it is identity as difference that is identical with itself... Identity, therefore, is *in its own self* absolute non-identity.'¹²³

Conversely, difference considered as immediate, pure or absolute (what Derrida refers to as 'external difference') is indistinguishable from identity. Difference defines itself immediately by opposing itself to its opposite, identity:

'Difference is the negativity which reflection has within it, the nothing which is said in enunciating identity, the essential moment of identity which, as negativity of itself, determines itself and is distinguished from difference... This difference is difference *in and for itself, absolute difference, the difference of essence*. It is difference in and for itself... self related, therefore simple difference... as such, it is the negativity of itself, the difference not of an other, but *of itself from itself*; it is not itself but its other. But that which is different from difference is identity. Difference is therefore itself and identity.'¹²⁴

Since Hegel has shown that identity is inherently difference, he shows that by relating itself to its apparent opposite, difference really relates to itself. Thus relation to 'other' turns out to be 'self-relation'. In the act of affirming itself, difference likewise negates

¹²³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, pp 412-413

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* p.417

itself and becomes its opposite - 'identity'. Thus, 'identity' (which is in-itself difference) and 'difference' (which is in-itself identity) conjoin in 'Contradiction', which Hegel shows is the *identity* of 'identity' and 'difference':

'Each has an indifferent self-subsistence of its own through the fact that it has within itself the relation to its other moment; it is thus the whole, self-contained opposition. As this whole, each is mediated with itself *by its other* and *contains* it. But further, it is mediated with itself by the *non-being of its other*; thus it is a unity existing on its own and it *excludes* the other from itself... This consists in containing within itself its opposite determination - through which alone it is not a relation to something external - but no less immediately in the fact that it is itself, and also excludes from itself the determination that is negative to it. It is thus contradiction.'¹²⁵

Inasmuch as identity and difference necessarily include their opposites within themselves, they are, Hegel argues, inherently self-contradictory. Derrida's claim is that by hypostatizing difference as *absolute* alterity Levinas is *at risk* of repeating the kind of abstraction that Hegel disparages as opinion or 'external reflection' whereby 'such thinking always has before it only abstract identity, and apart from and alongside it, difference'¹²⁶. Levinas thus risks a certain naivety in the face of the Hegelian dialectic, and as such risks merely restating what Hegel has already argued, i.e. the contradictory result of hypostatizing, through a notion of 'separation', absolute self-identity and absolute difference. For Derrida 'Hegel's critique of the concept of pure difference is for us here doubtless, the most uncircumventable theme.'¹²⁷ Derrida makes an analogous point regarding Levinas's reformulation of a non-negative notion of infinity. Again Derrida suspects that Levinas rather naively posits a notion of positive infinity without being aware of the degree to which he risks merely hypostatizing infinity and repeating (through abstraction) an element of Hegel's own speculative analysis. Derrida insists upon the impossibility of designating, within discourse, a non-negative notion of the infinite (i.e. as Levinas claims with his notion of the *infinite* alterity of the Other). For Derrida the designation of the infinite is

¹²⁵ Ibid, p.431

¹²⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, Ibid, p.412

¹²⁷ J. Derrida, 'Violence and Metaphysics', footnote 91, p.320

necessarily achieved through a *negation* of the finite; thus infinity cannot be conceived as Other except in terms of the *in-finite*. He argues:

'As soon as one attempts to think infinity as a positive plenitude (one pole of Levinas's non-negative transcendence), the other becomes unthinkable, impossible, unutterable. Perhaps Levinas calls us toward this unthinkable-impossible-unutterable beyond (traditions) Being and Logos. But it must not be possible either to think or state this call.'¹²⁸

Hegel's notion of the bad or spurious infinite¹²⁹ is of an infinite defined by its negative opposition to finitude. Such an infinite is in fact a limited being. For Hegel this notion of infinity is spurious simply because it *is* finite and thought has clearly not yet isolated a genuine thought of infinity. Levinas would seem to agree with Hegel regarding the spurious nature of this infinite (i.e. that the genuine infinity of the alterity of the Other is not to be conceived merely through a negative relation to the finitude of the same), but argues that Hegel's genuine infinity also represents a spurious infinite. Yet Derrida suspects that the Hegelian notion of the spurious infinite inevitably 'haunts numerous gestures of denunciation' in *Totality and Infinity*. By conceiving genuine alterity as essentially non-negative Levinas claims that the Other is a genuine positive infinity and that the realm of the Same is constituted negatively as a false-infinity. However, Derrida asks the Hegelian question of how the alterity of the Other is to be separated from the 'negativity' of false infinity and how absolute Sameness is to be conceived in any terms other than infinity. Thus he asks:

'If, as Levinas says, the Same is a violent totality, this would mean that it is a finite totality, and therefore is abstract more other than the other (than an other totality), etc. The Same as finite totality would not be the Same, but still the Other. Levinas would be speaking of the Other under the rubric of the Same, and of the Same under the rubric of the Other, etc. If the finite totality was the Same, it could not be thought, or

¹²⁸ J. Derrida, *Ibid.*, p. 114

¹²⁹ A notion that Hegel describes in the *Science of Logic* – The spurious infinity is in itself the same thing as the perennial ought; it is the negation of the finite it is true, but it cannot in truth free itself therefrom. The finite reappears in the infinite itself as its other, because it is only in its connection with its other, the finite, that infinite is. The progress to infinity is consequently, only the perpetual repetition of one and the same content, one and the same tedious *alternation* of this finite and infinite.' p. 142

posed as such, without becoming other than itself (and this is war). If it did not do so, it could not enter into war with others (finite totalities), nor could it be violent. Henceforth, not being violent, it would not be the same in Levinas's sense (finite totality). Entering into war – and war there is – it is conceived, certainly, as the Other's Other, that is, it gains access to the Other as an Other (self). But again, it is no longer a totality in Levinas's sense. In this language, which is the only language of western philosophy, can one not repeat Hegelianism, which is only the language coming into absolute possession of itself.¹³⁰

Levinas's fault with regard to Hegel is not that his 'ethics' seeks to effect a breach or interruption of the conceptual totality, indeed that effort is precisely his virtue for Derrida ('It is at this level that the thought of Emmanuel Levinas can make us tremble'¹³¹). The spirit of the effort is something that they undeniably share. However, his fault resides in neglecting the complexities involved in having to necessarily lodge an account of the absolutely Other within traditional conceptuality in order to effect a breach of ontology from within discourse. Levinas seriously underestimates the power, plasticity and force of the Hegelian dialectic by operating with overdetermined hypostatized categories. Ultimately he risks a naive anti-Hegelianism by failing to recognise the extent to which Hegelianism represents the language of philosophy 'coming into absolute possession of itself'. By repeating gestures inherent within the Hegelian dialectic Levinas risks becoming enveloped back within the immanence of Hegelianism. For Derrida the price of escaping Hegel is persistent vigilance when bringing oneself back *within* philosophical conceptualisation to articulate a breach of ontology. There has to be vigilance in effecting this breach so that one avoids the philosophical naivety of hypostatizing notions of absolute difference and infinity. It is a question of being far more attentive than perhaps Levinas is to the way Hegel's dialectic aligns itself with, and brings to completion, the ability of discourse to repair tears, wounds and breaches to its rational fabric. For Derrida it is a question of an ongoing effort to affect a breach, an incessant and recurrent effort rather than an absolute breach. It is in this sense that Derrida

¹³⁰ J. Derrida, *Ibid.*, p. 119

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82

argues for an understanding of 'metaphysics' as 'economy', where it is a question of 'violence against violence, light against light'.¹³²

Despite Derrida's suspicions regarding Levinas's thought he acknowledges that his thought perhaps functions as a profound solicitation. He argues:

'Nothing can so profoundly solicit the Greek logos - philosophy - that this irruption of the totally other; and nothing can to such an extent reawaken the logos to its origin as to its mortality, its other.'¹³³

For Derrida the profound solicitation which Levinas's work performs (which he aligns with Judaism) itself solicits a reflection upon 'the necessity in which this experience finds itself, the injunction by which it is ordered to occur as logos, and to reawaken the Greek in the autistic syntax of his own dream.'¹³⁴ Ultimately Derrida's Hegelian 'critique' indicates the extent of Levinas's failure in this regard, and does not constitute Derrida's adherence to Hegelianism. On the contrary Derrida merely believes himself to be attentive to the overwhelming 'power' of Hegelianism in the face of opposition, decision and assertion within philosophical discourse. In this sense his study should perhaps be read as a 'supplement' or 'corrective' to Levinas's thought, or as an effort to be more Levinasian than Levinas. He indicates a certain necessity to remain self-consciously Hegelian; thus in order to pass 'beyond' Hegel it becomes necessary to inhabit Hegelianism, to discover what resists the Hegelian dialectic from within the dialectic and to 'lodge' oneself within 'traditional' conceptuality in order to deconstruct it.¹³⁵ Quite simply in order to posit a fracture in the Hegelian system it is never enough to simply criticise or oppose Hegel. Rather, eschewing such strategy of direct opposition, Derrida advocates an indirect strategy that seeks to indicate the extent to which Hegel's own interpretation can be reinterpreted against him, i.e. that the bellicosity of his own discourse, under the guise of an 'irenics', can itself be turned against him.

¹³² Ibid. p.117

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid. p.152

¹³⁵ Ibid. p.111

We will proceed by considering Levinas's implicit response to the Hegelian concerns raised by Derrida in 'Violence and Metaphysics'. This response, we will argue, consists largely of an invocation of a persistent and recurrent movement of skepticism in the face of philosophy.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ The claim that Levinas invokes the movement of skepticism as a specific response to some of the central concerns articulated by Derrida in 'Violence and Metaphysics' is also made by R. Bernasconi in his paper on Levinas and Skepticism. He argues – 'Levinas introduced the discussion of skepticism and its refutation... to address certain problems posed by his own exposition of the infinite. These problems were explored most thoroughly by Derrida in his 1964 essay 'Violence and Metaphysics'... Whatever Derrida intended and however Levinas himself understood 'Violence and Metaphysics', it was generally construed as a forceful critique and, as such, in need of some kind of answer... A case can be made on internal grounds that Derrida's essay played an important part in leading to [a] reformulation.' (R. Bernasconi, 'Skepticism in the Face of Philosophy', in R. Bernasconi & S. Critchley (eds.), *Re-Reading Levinas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) p.153

VI - Levinas and Skepticism

There are a number of places in Levinas's later work where he appears to concede that the language of *Totality and Infinity* was perhaps too ontological, and that it tended to ontologically overdetermine the traces of enigma that signify 'otherwise than being'. However, in his defence Levinas argues that its language was never totally *definitive*. He claims that the reliance upon an overly ontologically determined language emerged from a desire to 'not be psychological'.¹³⁷ He did not want to be seen as merely characterising the psychological topology of an 'unhappy consciousness', but to outline that which is 'more ontological than ontology; an emphasis of ontology'.¹³⁸ He argues that the very discourse of *Totality and Infinity* was 'already a search for what I call "the beyond being", the tearing of this equality to self which is always being... whatever the attempts to separate it from the present'.¹³⁹ Indeed, in an interview conducted in 1986, Levinas replies directly to a question concerning Derrida's 'Violence and Metaphysics' by saying:

'Derrida has reproached me for my critique of Hegelianism by saying that in order to criticise Hegel, one begins to speak Hegel's language. That is the basis of his critique. To which I respond that for me, on the contrary, the Greek language is a language which does not imprint itself in what it says, and consequently that there is always the possibility of unsaying that to which you were obliged to have recourse in order to show something.'¹⁴⁰

Indeed, Levinas had argued for such a view of language in the preface to *Totality and Infinity*. There he had argued that the work of the preface is essentially reflective of the essence of language, whereby language is 'continually undoing its phrase by the foreword or the exegesis'.¹⁴¹ He was of course arguing against Hegel's view that a preface to a philosophical work is superfluous. Thus Hegel writes:

¹³⁷ E. Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, p.82

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.87-8

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.82

¹⁴⁰ R. Bernasconi & D. Wood eds., *The Provocation of Levinas - Rethinking the Other* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), p.179

¹⁴¹ E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.30

'Whatever might appropriately be said about philosophy in a preface...[cannot] be accepted as the way in which to expound philosophical truth.'¹⁴²

What a preface indicates in *Totality and Infinity* and in Hegel is the very way language is necessitated to interrupt itself, how it must tear itself away from the fabric of immanence and address another. It unsays its said in an attempt to 'restate without ceremonies what has already been ill understood in the inevitable ceremony in which the said delights'.¹⁴³ For Levinas this *otherwise said* is not superfluous; the attempt to stand outside of the philosophical text (i.e. the immanent development of presuppositionless science) and the maintenance of such an interruption, testifies to the essence of language as a Saying in the Said. The interruptive quality of Saying in the Said is not a dogmatic clutching or grasping onto naively pre-critical assumptions or a dogmatic refusal of immanence; rather, it represents an ethical obligation to what Levinas terms the 'gleam' of exteriority or the 'height' of the other who stands forever 'outside', or 'apart from', the interlocutory relationship. He argues that this transcendence is within immanence insofar as it is the 'other' to whom immanence is ultimately to be addressed; an other necessarily standing outside of that immanence. Levinas's philosophy is the attempt to thematise that unthematisable pre-original relation in order to articulate or express its unthematisability and irreducibility to immanence. Levinas appears to concede that the 'ceremonial' that constitutes his main thesis, i.e. the attempt to thematise the unthematisable, will have failed in its own terms and needs itself to be always unsaid, or interrupted. However, he argues, by failing it will again have testified to the truth of transcendence within immanence. Referring explicitly to this notion in relation to *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas writes:

'Saying must be accompanied immediately by an unsaying, and the unsaying must again be unsaid in its manner, and there is no stopping, there are no definitive formulations. It is for this reason that in [*Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*]...I call my conclusion 'Otherwise Said''.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Preface, p. I

¹⁴³ E. Levinas, *Ibid.*, p.30

¹⁴⁴ E. Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, p.88

Indeed, in addition to the claims made in the preface we also discover Levinas arguing that conclusions are never actually definitive ironically in the section of *Totality and Infinity* entitled 'Conclusions'. Here he "concludes" that 'philosophy is never a wisdom, for the interlocutor whom it has just encompassed has already escaped it.'¹⁴⁵ We will argue that Levinas's later work represents a profound continuity with this "conclusion" reached by *Totality and Infinity* regarding the 'beyond being' that escapes philosophy. This continuity is transfigured by an increased level of hyperbole in the complex series of re-emphases of the 'otherwise than being'. Such re-emphases, we would argue, aim precisely to uncover the 'possibility of unsaying' any discourse that is nonetheless necessarily fleshed out in ontological discourse. These re-emphases emerge from Levinas's growing awareness (arguably as a result of Derrida's commentary on his work) of the care needed in order to signify from within ontological discourse the significance of the 'otherwise than being'; a significance that does not immediately become inscribed back into the fabric of an immanent ontology. There is an ardent realisation that he *must* struggle more carefully to signify a non-reductive element of exteriority from within the necessarily reductive discourse of ontology. His later work is significantly marked by such a struggle and indicates a deeper and more significant engagement with Hegelianism than had been the case in his earlier work. In this later work there is an extraordinary ongoing effort to solicit within discourse itself the significance of what Levinas terms the 'cellular irritability' of the Other in the Same. There is in the later work a marked shift into a radically harsh and, some might argue¹⁴⁶, cruel rhetorical formulations of subjectivity itself.

In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* and the work that followed¹⁴⁷, Levinas attempts to articulate the very meaning of ethics itself as *the* privileged site (or non-site) of delirium in all culture and discourse¹⁴⁸. He argues that this delirium signifies a meaning prior to the very distinction of sense or non-sense; indeed, it founds them. The pre-original delirium of ethics emerges, he claims, from an understanding of the

¹⁴⁵ E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.295

¹⁴⁶ This is a position persuasively argued by R. Brassier in 'Levinas: Cruelty Beyond Being' (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Warwick, 1996)

¹⁴⁷ Particularly *God, Death and Time* and *Of God Who Comes to Mind*

¹⁴⁸ This emphasis of the delirium associated with the ethical is highlighted by T.C. Wall in *Radical Passivity – Levinas, Blanchot & Agamben* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1999)

truly radical nature of 'obligation' towards another; this obligation towards another is radically uncontainable and unrepresentable, and is outside all movements in the economy of thought. In *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence* such an obligation has the radical structure of what he terms 'Substitution'. As infinitely responsible for the other, I am unconditionally "for-the-other", I am the other's substitute and hostage not because of any choice or desire on my part, but because of an election prior to my birth into being. This election, he argues, and not freedom or autarchy, gives humanity its ultimate meaning or signification. He writes:

'The ipseity, in the passivity without *arche* characteristic of identity, is a hostage. The word I means *here I am* [*me voici*], meaning for everything and for everyone...the other in the same is my substitution for the other through responsibility, for which, I am summoned as someone irreplaceable. I exist through the other and for the other, but without this being alienation. I am inspired.'¹⁴⁹

The structure of substitution, the 'one-for-the-other', articulates the pre-originary transcendence of the 'always already' in its purest form. According to Levinas the absolute identity of the unique 'I' consumes itself in the extreme contraction of its singularisation and thus passes outside itself toward absolute exteriority. In this way what Levinas terms the all-embracing *essence* of being is interrupted by irrecoverable excess; thus, being *transcends* itself. In other words, being transcends itself precisely because of the infinite scission of the substituted *self* that recurs both within and without identity. As a consequence, the absolutely other is the other *in* being and is that which allows being to transcend itself.

'In the exposure to wounds and outrages, in the feeling proper to responsibility, the oneself is provoked as irreplaceable, as devoted to the others, without being able to resign, and thus as incarnated in order to offer itself, to suffer and to give. It is thus one and unique, in passivity from the start, having nothing at its disposal that would enable it to not yield to the provocation. It is one, reduced to itself and as it were contracted, expelled into itself outside of being.'¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, p.114

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p.105

Levinas emphatically denies that the 'beyond being' is to be understood as simply 'outside' being in some naively spatial sense. On the contrary, the absolute exteriority of the 'otherwise than being' is simultaneously an absolute 'interiority' constitutive of the immanence of being itself. However, it constitutes 'otherwise' than the way in which Hegel describes it, i.e. as a necessarily *constitutive* element *within*, and *of*, immanent ontology. There is a notion of 'impossibility of possibility' that functions almost as a signature of the Other in Levinas's later work; the Other is both an impossibility *of* being and an impossibility *in* being. Through substitution, understood as the irrevocable over-individuation of the one assigned through the other, the excess of identity knits and unknits the seam of essence; being has *always already* interrupted itself:

'What we are here calling oneself, or the other in the same, where inspiration arouses respiration, the very pneuma of the psyche, precedes this empirical order, which is a part of being, of the universe, of the state, and is already conditioned in a system. Here we are trying to express the unconditionality of a subject, which does not have the status of a principle. This unconditionality confers meaning on being itself, and welcomes its gravity. It is as resting on a self, supporting the whole of being, that being is assembled into a unity of the universe and essence is assembled into an event. The self is a sub-jectum; it is under the weight of the universe, responsible for everything.'¹⁵¹

The over-individuation of the absolute, whereby the subject bears the weight of responsibility for the whole universe, expresses an infinite scission of identity as indivisibility beyond being (Levinas calls it 'unity without identity' but it could equally be called 'identity without unity'). This scission of the absolute, or division of the indivisible, represents the in-scission of an identity differing more radically than any possible intelligible difference in being; an in-scission of the One beyond being which simultaneously constitutes and deconstitutes being. For us Levinas's theory of 'substitution' represents a radical and fundamental challenge to Hegel by explicitly proposing a novel definition of the absolute. Substitution *is* the absolute as a relation

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. 116

of relation and non-relation, rather than the identity of identity and difference so characteristic of Hegelian dialectical ontology.

What one must recognise is that such an ethics of obligation signified by the being-for-the-other structure of substitution is inexorably 'betrayed' by positive notions of morality. Laws and ethical maxims would inherently seek to constrain this delirium of being-for-other through the wisdom and justice of rationality or the 'Said'. What Levinas's work aims to solicit is that which is radically 'outside' such wisdom of rationality; it attempts, through a reduction (*epoche*) of the Said in which morality, laws and politics are articulated, to discover a relation to the 'other' older than self-relation (which Levinas characterises as 'egology') and the relation to objects in the world. Levinas argues that 'the ethical situation of responsibility is not comprehensible on the basis of ethics.'¹⁵²

Also, it is important to recognise that the 'relation' which Levinas describes does not involve two terms, the self and the other, 'it is... a relationship, but one where there is no disjunction between the terms held in relationship'.¹⁵³ For Hegel the type of relation involving the self and the other emerges purely immanently (ultimately as symmetrically dissymmetrical) as a moment of self-relation in the self-determining dialectical development of absolute concrete subjectivity.¹⁵⁴ In contrast the relation Levinas seeks to discover is 'older' than the *self*, and is thus a relation not conceived in terms of self-determination. The *anteriority* of the other which conditions the relation Levinas attempts to discover has the characteristics of absolute dissymmetry and a goodness without measure. This anteriority operates to destructure the self as a 'relation' with a 'never present' other. As immemorial this anterior relation can *only be betrayed*, i.e. it can actually only be conceived in terms of a relation between two terms on the same ground. However, such a betrayal is an absolutely necessary conception, and one which functions to express (yet never fully contain) the radical truth of the relation. Thus, any 'relation' to another, however it is expressed, remains paradoxically faithful to the Levinasian ethical position. This is a point Derrida emphasises in a recent work on Levinas:

¹⁵² Ibid, p. 120

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 108

¹⁵⁴ Recall our earlier discussion of Hegel's arguments concerning precisely this point in the *Science of Logic*.

'Hospitality is not simply some region of ethics, let alone... the name of a problem in law or politics: it is ethnicity itself, the whole and the principle of ethics. And if hospitality does not let itself be circumscribed or derived, if it originarily conveys the whole of intentional experience, then it would have no contrary: the phenomena of allergy, rejection, xenophobia, even war itself would still exhibit everything that Levinas explicitly attributes to or allies with hospitality.'¹⁵⁵

Levinas offers no concrete critique of existing ethics, morals or political maxims to which we must or ought accord. Rather, all of Levinas's thought gravitates toward an obsessive 'relation without relation' that *refracts* all actual relations; which holds each 'relation' to that immemorial relation without relation, and which each necessary relation cannot fail but to betray. In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* this ethics is understood and articulated as *essentially* ambiguous. What 'binds' me to the other person must be understood, Levinas claims, as the immemorial non-relation to the Other, the 'nothing' or no-relation that I, myself, am. Thus, outside of any particular defined relation to the other, there is always a prior exposure in the self to the 'no relation at all', which Levinas characterises as a restless obsession with the Other.¹⁵⁶ This relation without relation functions to fundamentally orientate me as absolutely obligated to the Other, but also escapes me. The notion of radical diachrony (diachrony without synchrony) allows us to discern, Levinas claims, a significance in anteriority that defines the very meaning of the ethical. This diachrony eludes the temporal continuum, synchrony or immanence of consciousness and is what he terms the *trace* of the other in me, a *trace* that is older than me. Indeed, I am nothing but its echo. As its echo I find myself always already *ordered, orientated and obligated*: 'The ego is in itself like a sound that would resound in its own echo, the node of a wave which is not once again consciousness.'¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ J. Derrida, *Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas* (Editions Galilée, 1997) in English as *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, translated by P-A. Brault & M. Naas (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 50

¹⁵⁶ Levinas writes: 'Obsession traverses consciousness countercurrentwise, is inscribed in consciousness as something foreign, a disequilibrium, a delirium. It undoes thematisation, and escapes any *principle*, origin, will, or *ἀρχή*, which are put forth in every ray of consciousness. This movement is, in the original sense of the term, an-archival. Thus obsession can nowise be taken as a hypertrophy of consciousness... Obsession is a persecution... it designates the form in which the ego is affected, a form which is a defecting from consciousness.' (*Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, p.101)

¹⁵⁷ E. Levinas, *Ibid.* p.130

No concrete rational morality can contain this 'otherwise' than me; indeed, its radical priority functions to throw all such morality into doubt. Ethics is for Levinas a command that cannot be recalled, and that is forgotten prior to any distinction between the activity of 'memory' and 'forgetting'.¹⁵⁸ It is this radical forgetting which transports *me* outside of all egoity. It, Levinas argues, 'denucleates' the ego, stripping it bare and exposing it to absolute exteriority. I am commanded out of an immemorial time when I am not yet 'present', 'prior to the for-itself...older than the time of consciousness'.¹⁵⁹ It is, he claims, the anonymity and diachrony of the Other that is so commanding, imperious, confounding, and perplexing. Here no-thing obligates me, and I am unable to distance myself from such an obligation – for I *am* it. In other words, it is 'I' who instantiate absolute obligation. In radical passivity I *am* ordered, I *am* obligated, thus in short I am *Autrui*:

'The event...is not grasping of self in consciousness. It is an assignation to answer without evasions, which assign the self to be a self. Prior to the play of being, before the present, older than the time of consciousness that is accessible in memory, in its 'deep yore, never remote enough', the oneself is exposed as a hypostasis, of which the being it is as an entity is but a mask. It bears its name as a borrowed name, a pseudonym, a pro-noun. In itself, the oneself is the one or the unique separated from being.'¹⁶⁰

For Levinas then I *am* only insofar as I am always already *Other*, only insofar as I am identified/substituted for this Other, this no-one other than I. The Other obsesses me because I am that Other, who is no other than myself; 'In the form of responsibility, the psyche in the soul is the other in me, a malady of identity, both accused and *self*, the same for the other, the same by the other.'¹⁶¹ Ethics, in Levinas's sense, marks the very event of the self, and represents the very constitution of subjectivity. The self (always already involved with the Other) comes to me from an 'outside' that is all the more exterior in that it precedes any interiority. Radically outside, prior to any inside,

¹⁵⁸ See E. Casey, 'Levinas on Memory and the Trace' in *The Collegium Phaenomenologicum: The First 10 Years*, ed. J. Sallis, G. Moncrieff & J. Taminiaux (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988)

¹⁵⁹ E. Levinas, *Ibid.* pp. 106-7

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 106

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 69

this identification, this trauma, is just as radically forgotten. Yet it is me: in me but beyond me. I thus incarnate that which calls me to myself. The self is responsibility incarnate. All of the ego's power of self-determination, mediation and immanent self-relation, are shadowed by this anterior unpower, characterised by Levinas in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* as the signifying of an originary Saying. For him it is I who incarnate this Saying:

'My responsibility for the other is the *for* of the relationship, the very signifyingness of signification, which signifies in saying before showing itself in the said. The one-for-the-other is the very signifyingness of signification!'¹⁶²

'Saying' (*le dire*) is Levinas's difficult expression of that which is beyond or otherwise than the 'Said' (*le dit*) or thematic discourse. However, insofar as both terms are necessarily thematically inscribed, it is clear that they operate as no more than a model. The term 'Saying', thus, is no more than a 'way of speaking', a substitution for the ethical signification that Levinas cannot articulate without at once reducing it to a thematic 'Said'. The 'reduction' of the Said to the Saying is, we would claim, again a type of model designed both to show that the Saying has an ethical sense that is separate from the Said, but also that this Said is always presented by a Saying. The Saying is my exposure – corporeal, sensible – to the Other, my inability to refuse the Other's approach. It is the performative stating, proposing, or expressive position of myself facing the other. On the other hand, the Said is a statement, an assertion or a constative proposition (of the form 'S is P'), about which truth or falsity in discourse can be ascertained.

In what might be called the 'sincerity' of the Saying¹⁶³, the subject expresses its originary responsibility as *Me Voici*, (Here I Am). But it is unthematizable and is that which resists the movement into (and envelopment by) universality. It is then the very subjectivity of the subject (i.e. its being absolutely *subject* to the Other) which

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p.100

¹⁶³ P. Davies in his paper 'Sincerity and the End of Theodicy: Three Remarks on Levinas and Kant' (unpublished paper, 1998), aligns Saying with sincerity, thus being sincere is not simply one type of linguistic behaviour amongst others. He writes: "'Sincerity' is, perhaps, Levinas's last word on what he calls the Saying of the Said, the Saying of all the – *de jure* and *de facto* – systematisable, theorisable and describable Sais. It permits us to speak of the sincerity of the always unsaid 'yes' or 'hello' presupposed in everything that is said.'

prevents the unique elected subject's transition into absolute other-relatedness, i.e. its move into universality, sociality, culture, politics and ethics proper, is thus always marked by radical excess. Such radical excess is a more radical form of other-relatedness, and is one which cannot be adequately or definitively thematised or expressed by the sincerity of the Said. Thus, Levinas writes:

'This dedication to the other, is a sincerity, and this sincerity is Saying... The Saying is therefore not a communication of something Said... When the Saying has meaning only through the Said, the Saying is covered over and absorbed by the Said. To the Saying without a Said an opening is necessary that does not cease to open, and that declares itself as such. The Saying is that declaration. It is necessary that the Saying be a Saying of the Saying itself, a Saying that goes without thematisation, but that exposes itself ever more. This is a Saying turning back on itself as though it were a matter of exposing the exposure, rather than standing there as in an act of exposing.'¹⁶⁴

The question then becomes one of how Levinas can, in the Said, convey a genuine sense of this Saying or sincerity. How is the Saying, my exposure to the Other, to be Said, or given a philosophical exposition without utterly betraying this Saying? How does one write the pre-original interruption of the 'otherwise than being' in the language of being without this simply becoming a being otherwise? In other words how does one avoid merely repeating, as Derrida had argued, Hegel? Levinas's answer seems to be, in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, that the ethical necessarily signifies ambiguously. Because Saying is prior to its origination or showing forth in the light of the Said, and because the Saidness of discourse is part of a movement related to the constitutive operations of a consciousness organising the world in relation to itself, the Said is necessarily 'unfaithful' to Saying. Ethical signifyingness remains an-archival. Yet, pre-original Saying *does* move into language. Indeed, such a movement appears to be essential to Levinas's account of it rather than a lack of coherence or vigilance on Levinas's part. Pre-original Saying requires the language of the Said, but the moment Saying moves into a Said, the moment it becomes thematised, it is betrayed, usurped and sullied. His task is to posit a type of

¹⁶⁴ E. Levinas, *Dieu, la mort et le temps* (Paris: Grasset, 1993) in English as *God, Death and Time*, translated by B. Bergo (Stanford: Stanford U.P. 2000), p. 191

strategy to somehow undo or unsay the Said of his discourse. Thus anything he can say *about* Saying is already part of the 'intrigue' between the Saying and the Said that the reduction is designed to dislocate. It seems that he can only attempt to unsay by rehabilitating this very intrigue. Having said that that which is beyond essence is necessarily beyond thematic discourse, Levinas attempts to slide *in between* the Saying and the Said. An 'opening' is posited as an invisible 'fissure' in the seam of time, a fissure which is at once a crucial factor in what Levinas terms the amphibology of being¹⁶⁵ and the theoretical space wherein infinity signifies. For Levinas it is a matter of finding a strategy that can indicate 'the incompressible nonsimultaneity of the Said and the Saying, the dislocation of their correlation.'¹⁶⁶ As F. Ciaramelli writes in an essay on Levinas:

'The transcendence in play here cannot be described as in any way definitive. It is a transcendence whose movement is always frustrated by the medium in which it is set and on which it depends, namely, language. Perpetually in the moment of betrayal, the movement is always 'to be made'... At this point we can begin to see a fracture open up in time: that which, however ambiguously, resists conceptualisation is not itself contemporary with this resistance. In other words, the transcendence of conceptualisation is marked by diachrony.'¹⁶⁷

The solicitation of being to responsibility represents an anachronism within the core of being itself. However, Levinas cannot actually argue for the sense of this radical diachrony except through terms of synchrony. There is seemingly no vocabulary available to him that would *say* diachrony in any other way than that in which it is said. By struggling to say the unsayable, Levinas can only proceed indirectly; the

¹⁶⁵ Amphibology refers to Heidegger's notion of ontological difference. In a section of *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* entitled 'The Amphibology of Being and Entities' Levinas writes: 'In the said, the essence that resounds is on the verge of becoming a noun. In the copula *is* scintillates or sparkles an ambiguousness between the essence and the nominalized relation. The said as a verb is essence or temporalization. Or, more exactly, the logos enters into the amphibology in which being and entities can be understood and identified, in which a noun can resound as a verb and a verb of an apophansis can be nominalized... Logos is the ambiguousness of being and entities, the primordial amphibology.', pp.41-2

¹⁶⁶ E. Levinas, 'Tout Autrement' in *L'arc*, No.54 (1973) in English as 'Wholly Otherwise', translated by S. Critchley in R. Bernasconi & S. Critchley (eds.) *Re-Reading Levinas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p.5

¹⁶⁷ F. Ciaramelli, 'Levinas's Ethical Discourse Between Individuation and Universality' in R. Bernasconi & S. Critchley (eds.), *Re-Reading Levinas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) p.96

chief tool of rhetorical indirection he employs in his later work is the suggestiveness of paradox, as an iridescence of exteriority. However, an important question remains. How is it that that which simultaneously ravel and unravels the fabric of being still possesses a sense of *absolute* unravelling or what he terms the 'truth of truths'? If the sense of *absolute* unravelling is lost we are left with mere indecision. It would remain an unravelling suspended between sense and non-sense, where the unilaterality of ethical 'sense' would revert immediately into ontological non-'sense'. However, it is his account of the incision of the *absolute*, as a pre-originary interruption of essence, which makes it entirely legitimate to interpret the incision as providing a radical 'sense' to ambiguous undecidability. This incision of the One beyond being is a 'transcendence within immanence', and is an unexcisable incision of the *absolute*. This betrayal of ethical Saying by the inevitable ontological discourse in which it is said is necessitated by the *recurrence of substitution* as a pre-originary interruption of the ontological resumption of ethical interruption. This is an interruption that renders the ontological betrayal of the ethical possible, *but always betrays its own betrayal in advance*. In the attempt to elucidate this further Levinas, at this point in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, introduces the figure of the movement of skepticism and its refutation.

Allusions to the alternation of skepticism and its refutation are found throughout *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*¹⁶⁸, but it receives its most detailed consideration toward the end of the book in a section entitled 'Skepticism and Reason'.¹⁶⁹ For Levinas the importance of the skeptic's viewpoint lies in the contestation of the very possibility of truth. It is clear for him that neither philosophy nor truth are able to find their ultimate justification immanently within themselves, indeed the claim that they can represents nothing more than the 'presumptions of

¹⁶⁸ The movement of skepticism is evoked from the very beginning of *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Thus he writes in the opening pages: 'Skepticism, at the dawn of philosophy, set forth and betrayed the diachrony of this very conveying and betraying. To conceive the otherwise than being requires, perhaps, as much audacity as skepticism shows, when it does not hesitate to affirm the impossibility of statement while venturing to *realize* this impossibility by the very statement of this impossibility. If, after the innumerable 'irrefutable' refutations which logical thought sets against it, skepticism has the gall to return (and it always returns as philosophy's legitimate child [*et il revient toujours en enfant légitime de la philosophie*: Lingis erroneously translates *légitime* as 'illegitimate'])). it is because in the contradiction which logic sees in it the 'at the same time' of the contradictories is missing, because a secret diachrony commands this ambiguous or enigmatic way of speaking, and because in general signification signifies beyond synchrony, beyond essence.', p.7

¹⁶⁹ E. Levinas, *Ibid.*, pp.165-71

philosophers, presumptions of idealists!'¹⁷⁰ He asks whether or not the beginning of philosophy is preceded by something that cannot be synchronised into immanence, 'if an anarchy is not more ancient than the beginning and freedom.'¹⁷¹ If that were the case then the apparently immanent order of the Said, to which philosophy and truth belong, would always refer to what he terms the *transcendence* of Saying, (as the exposure of oneself to the Other). The recurrent rebirth of skepticism, despite its inevitable refutation, is seemingly utilised by Levinas as a model to depict the way the Said is interrupted, and its priority as a self-grounding and self-determining totality put into question by the diachrony of the Saying. For Levinas the true significance of Saying always exceeds its thematic statement in the Said, which, in turn, always bears irreducible traces of Saying

Levinas's discussion of skepticism in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* emerges directly from the question of the risk that his discourse runs by attempting to articulate a 'difference', the risk being that it is ultimately reducible to a moment of immanent speculative dialectics. Hence we should acknowledge the way he is directly engaging with a number of the 'questions' posed by Derrida in 'Violence and Metaphysics', (most notably the ones we have outlined here). For Levinas the recurring rebirth of skepticism in the face of its own logical refutation provides a means for understanding how the priority of immanence is to be challenged by a notion of transcendence which ultimately remains irreducible to the immanence of speculative dialectical ontology. It also provides a means for understanding how Levinas is able to attempt to articulate (or thematise) within his discourse (i.e. within a Said) a radically non-thematisable notion of transcendence. It indicates a profound sense of the radically non-speculative aspect of transcendence that he attempts to signify within his work, the Saying in the Said. Indeed, we would argue that it indicates a radical transcendence ultimately irreducible to a naïve uncritical form of dogmatic presupposition inferior to the rigours of immanence. Thus it is precisely here that powerful insights are to be gained with regards to the genuine configuration and relationship to Hegel's thought in Levinas's work. His discussion of the movement of skepticism and its refutation impinges upon all of the most important

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p.122

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p.165

questions regarding the very status of Levinas's 'transcendental' ethics with respect to Hegel's immanent speculative ontology.

Robert Bernasconi argues in his own work on Levinas's account of skepticism in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Being*¹⁷², that Levinas is not himself adhering to or adapting a skeptical position; rather, his focus is upon skepticism, its refutation and its return despite that refutation, as a 'model':

'It is important to recognise that Levinas is giving skepticism and its refutation the status of a metaphor or 'model'. He is not himself adopting a skeptical position. He gives no indication of having made a detailed study of the history of skepticism. Nor does he attempt to situate historically the argument about skepticism to which he refers, except to locate it at the dawn of philosophy.'¹⁷³

Our own view of Levinas's evocation of skepticism departs from Bernasconi's account by arguing that Levinas should be recognised as attempting to radicalise the relationship between skepticism and philosophy, and as articulating the significance of the very essence of critical equipollence associated with skepticism. In doing this Levinas should be recognised as radicalising Hegel's own reformulation of the

¹⁷² See R. Bernasconi, 'Skepticism and the Face of Philosophy' in R. Bernasconi & S. Critchley (eds.), *Re-Reading Levinas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) pp.149-161. Bernasconi does not discuss Levinas's account in relation to Hegel's thought; the focus of Bernasconi's work is the relationship between Derrida and Levinas. See also J. de Greef, 'Skepticism and Reason' in R.A. Cohen ed., *Face to Face with Levinas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), pp. 159-179, which also focuses upon Derrida and Levinas. There are discussions of Levinas and skepticism in P. Alterton, 'Levinas's Skeptical Critique of Metaphysics and Anti-Humanism' in *Philosophy Today*, Winter 1997, pp.491-506 and A.T. Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1997), pp.148-153. Also Jean Greisch in his article 'The Face and Reading: Immediacy and Mediation', translated by S. Critchley in *Re-Reading Levinas*, writes: 'We should recall... what place Hegel reserves for the moment of skepticism on the threshold of his logic. It occupies, for Hegel, a very specific moment in the economy of logico-real comprehension: it is the negative-rational moment of dialectic which, in the first place, comes to disturb all the certainties of the understanding in order to be able to raise itself to the level of the speculative, that is to say, the positive-rational. In Levinas, as in Hegel, skepticism is not a philosophical trend relevant to the history of ideas; it is an internal moment of philosophical comprehension itself. But the Levinasian rehabilitation of skepticism follows very different paths from those of the Hegelian dialectic', p.78. Our account of Levinas and skepticism will be guided by Greisch's insight that it contrasts directly with Hegel's account of skepticism.

¹⁷³ R. Bernasconi, *Ibid.* p. 150. Indeed, Bernasconi claims to indicate an instance in Levinas where he makes this point very clearly: 'The refutation of skepticism, which we have evoked as a *model*, [my emphasis] also operates at the heart of a rationality proper to the knowledge of being, proper to ontology whose regime is already established.' E. Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, p. 178

relationship between skepticism and philosophy.¹⁷⁴ Both Hegel and Levinas do more than merely evoke skepticism's relationship to philosophy as a model; rather, they must be recognised as thinking the degree to which skeptical equipollence functions internally as a negative/critical force within philosophy/ontology. We began this thesis by demonstrating how Hegel radicalises the whole question of the relationship between skepticism and philosophy as part of a response to a post-Kantian problematic. We will argue that Levinas in his later work reconsiders Hegel's claim that skepticism (when understood as an abstract challenge to reason) is refuted. Hegel's demonstration of the refutation of skepticism functions to reveal that its critical and negative force is in fact a determinate force immanent to reason. Levinas rethinks the whole question of the relationship between skepticism and philosophy by implicitly adopting Hegel's own approach, but arguing that it *persists* and *recurrs*, despite refuting itself, simply because it is radically immanent to philosophy without philosophy being able to contain it. The radical immanence of skepticism represents a transcendence in immanence operating as a delirious critical and negative force within the very fabric of philosophy/ontology. For Levinas the persistent recurrence of skeptical equipollence (despite refutation) represents and signifies a persistent interruptive force, rather than the domesticated form of *determinate* negation Hegel arguably reduces the essence of skepticism to.

Levinas's account concentrates upon the fact (a fact itself the focus of attention in Hegel's own studies of skepticism) that skepticism is ultimately self-defeating or self-negating as soon as its own arguments are turned against it. At the beginning of *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* Levinas alludes to a moment when skepticism does not falter in affirming 'the impossibility of statement while venturing to realise this impossibility by the very statement of this impossibility.'¹⁷⁵ By concentrating upon this paradoxical movement he addresses the very essence of absolute skepticism that Hegel had associated with genuine ancient skepticism.¹⁷⁶ What seemingly impresses both thinkers is that skepticism (despite losing the argument on its own grounds) returns unabashed, as if somehow deaf to the objections that its position is self-refuting or self-negating. For Hegel that deafness ultimately

¹⁷⁴ This reformulation was the subject of the first part of our thesis.

¹⁷⁵ E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, p.7

¹⁷⁶ Recall our discussion in Part One.

implies the adoption of a dogmatic form of subjective assuredness in skeptical claims, which in turn represents the beginning of the degeneration of skepticism away from a genuinely negative critical perspective. Its deafness, in absolute negativity, to the essential positivity at its heart means that skepticism simply fails to recognise the essentially determining negativity in the very content it considers. It fails to consider the essentially self-negating aspect of the content upon which it brings its methodology of skeptical equipollence to bear, and considers itself to be a merely external negation. However, by bringing its negation to bear upon its own negation (i.e. in self-reflective skepticism) it is able to discern a notion of immanent self-negation that necessarily results in the transition to an elevated philosophical perspective, namely speculative dialectic or determinate negation itself. Subjective skepticism, whilst it might have the merit of displaying the beginnings of the independent freedom of self-consciousness through its adoption of an essentially negative perspective towards all being, has all the philosophical *gravitas* one associates with squabbling children, each merely repetitively contradicting the other.¹⁷⁷ For Hegel the *truth* of skepticism (a *truth* wholly internal to skepticism) resides in the very notion of a 'self-accomplishing skepticism' that he articulates within the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Its truth is thus the determinate negation at the very heart of immanent rationality.

Levinas, whilst also being concerned with the persistent recurrence of skepticism, attempts to uncover a *forgotten* meaning within the very alternation of recurrence and refutation. He argues that this alternation signifies the truth that the correlation of the Saying and the Said represents a diachrony of that which cannot be conjoined. This forgotten meaning (which he terms a 'secret diachrony') ultimately signifies a powerful resistance to Hegel's arguments concerning the inevitable slide into subjectivism that the recurrence of skepticism represents. Levinas is concerned with articulating what it is that makes the seemingly *impossible* recurrence of absolute skepticism *possible* and legitimate outside of any consideration of subjective dogmatism. This concern is closely aligned with the question of how Levinas is able to indicate a notion of radical alterity without being open to charges of naïve

¹⁷⁷ See Hegel's remark in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that the recurrent form of skepticism is 'like the squabbling of self-willed children, one of whom says A if the other says B, and in turn says B if the other says A, and who by continually contradicting themselves buy for themselves the pleasure of continually contradicting one another', #205, p. 126

pathological dogmatism or subjectivism from Hegelians. For Levinas the genuine significance of the recurrence of the movement of skepticism indicates not the *refusal* by subjectivism of the truth of skepticism's immanent determinate self-negation, as Hegel insists from a speculative perspective. Rather, for Levinas the alteration of skepticism and its refutation, when considered as a persistent movement, necessarily signifies a 'secret diachrony' refractory to the immanence of consciousness and reason. It signifies a diachrony able to *repeatedly* evade the fabric of the synchrony of immanence, despite the seeming ease with which such a notion is reduced to speculative dialectics. It is not a question of merely evading synchrony through the contingent whim of subjective wilfulness. As we have demonstrated, Levinas argues that it is not I who selfishly resist or contest the System, but the Other. Thus the inherent contradiction associated with the refutation and subsequent recurrence of skepticism fundamentally evades 'the "at the same time" of contradictories'¹⁷⁸, a coinciding that Hegel invokes when discussing skepticism's attempt to articulate a challenge to the totality of reason. The alternation associated with the refutation and recurrence of skepticism ultimately indicates, for Levinas, two distinct times, the diachronic and the synchronic. By understanding the critical essence of skepticism as a radically diachronic disjunction coming from the Other, its persistent recurrence is removed from the realm of mere dogmatic and wilful subjectivism. It represents a disjunction no longer recoverable, as Hegel argues, by the immanence of the synchrony of reason and consciousness, the whole, or the One. Levinas articulates the persistence of this radically diachronic disjunction as a question:

'How in consciousness can there be an undergoing or a passion whose active source does not, in any way, occur in consciousness? This exteriority has to be emphasised. It is not objective or spatial, recuperable in immanence and thus falling under the orders of – and in the order of – consciousness; it is obsessional, non-thematisable and...anarchic.'¹⁷⁹

This radical diachrony of Saying (whereby Saying escapes the total re-envelopment within the Said of presence or immanence) provides the basis for an attempt to articulate the significance of the recurrence of skepticism. Thus the persistent

¹⁷⁸ E. Levinas, *Ibid.* p.7

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p.102

recurrence of the critical essence of skepticism provides Levinas with a potent instance of an excessive signification that signifies the incessant movement beyond totalising synchrony and the immanence of the Said. Skepticism itself is characterised as being both a form of immanence (i.e. as a Said) and a force beyond immanence (i.e. its critical essence as Saying). Thus it necessarily enters a realm reducible to immanence by being articulated as a philosophical viewpoint contesting all truth and philosophy, and once it is within that realm it is demonstrated, as Hegel argues, to be a fundamentally *self-negating* viewpoint:

'The truth of skepticism is put on the same level as the truths whose interruption and failure its discourse states, as though the negation of the possibility of the true were ranked in the order restored by this negation, as though every difference were incontestably reabsorbed into the same order.'¹⁸⁰

However, he argues that skepticism is able to signify radically *otherwise than being* precisely because of its recurrent and persistent skeptical questioning of the order of rationality and truth, i.e. 'to contest the possibility of truth is precisely to contest this uniqueness of order and level':

'Skeptical discourse, which states the rupture, failure, impotence or impossibility of disclosure, would be self-contradictory if the saying and the said were only correlative, if the signifyingness of proximity and the signification known and said could enter into a common order, if the saying reached a full contemporaneousness with the said, if the saying entered into essence without betraying the diachrony of proximity, if the saying could remain saying by showing itself to be knowledge, that is, if thematization entered into the theme in the form of memory.'¹⁸¹

The gesture of recurrence signifies the truth of that which never enters into a wholly synchronous theme, i.e. the 'truth of truths' that remains *beyond* or *outside*. This signification is produced precisely by its persistent movement of recurrence; it is a signification produced 'out of time', out of essence and *beyond* being. For Levinas it is not produced by mere subjective dogmatism but rather as a radical form of

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 168

¹⁸¹ Ibid

questioning, inscribed pre-originally as a critical essence in Being, by the Other. Thus skepticism occurs 'in two times without entering into either of them, as an endless critique, or skepticism, which in a spiralling movement makes possible the boldness of philosophy, destroying the conjunction into which its Saying and its Said continually enter.'¹⁸² The very difference between the Saying and the Said relates directly to the persistent recurrence of skepticism and its refutation, but not in such a way that skepticism becomes paradigmatic of Saying and its refutation merely the Said. It is clear that what skepticism actually states in its Said, i.e. in its philosophical contestation of rationality and truth, through an equipollent proposition, cannot itself avoid becoming a *philosophical* proposition. However, by virtue of its 'refusal' to abide by its inevitable self-refutation, the critical essence of skepticism seemingly demonstrates a disdain for the very philosophical logos it necessarily employs. It seemingly demonstrates that it is not prepared, by becoming lodged within the immanence of philosophical reason, to submit to the movement of immanence itself. Rather, it attempts to remain as a persistent contestation of the truth of that immanence by its persistent recurrence. As we know this persistent alternation between the recurrence of skepticism and its refutation has, for Hegel, no other philosophical significance apart from indicating the very beginning of the concrete realisation of the absolute freedom of self-consciousness, i.e. a dogmatic abstract form of subjectivity. Skepticism is unable, from his perspective, to launch an authentic challenge to speculative philosophy. However, for Levinas the alternation has a much greater significance than that accorded to it by Hegel, and represents more than a contingent and wilful disdain for the philosophical logos. For Levinas it ultimately represents the way in which the subject is ultimately and radically orientated by a 'secret diachrony'. He argues:

'The skeptical saying undone by philosophy in fact recalls the breakup of synchronizable, that is, the recallable, time. Then, the trace of saying, which has never been present, obliges me; the responsibility for the other, never assumed, binds me; a command never heard is obeyed. The trace does not belong to the assembling of essence. Philosophy underestimates the extent of the negation in this 'not appearing', which exceeds the logical scope of negation and affirmation. It is the trace of a

¹⁸² Ibid, p.44

relationship with illeity that no unity of apperception grasps, ordering me to responsibility.'¹⁸³

Levinas argues that skepticism exhibits an acute sensitivity to the difference between the Saying and the Said, and argues that it is as if skepticism 'were sensitive to the difference between my exposure without reserve to the other, which is Saying, and the exposition or statement of the Said in its equilibrium and justice.'¹⁸⁴ Such an argument is based upon recognising the ultimate inability of skepticism to apply its absolute denial of truth to its own claims in any concrete and determinate way. It is as if the Saying (the very sincerity of the critical essence of skepticism) does not occur 'at the same time' as its inevitable articulation as a philosophical Said. In this way skepticism is able to signify a tendency utterly divorced from that trajectory of Western philosophy culminating, for Levinas, in Hegel's idealism.¹⁸⁵ However, it is not only skepticism that is sensitive to the interval between the Saying and the Said. Indeed, when Levinas writes that 'language is already skepticism'¹⁸⁶ he means that *all* language resides in this difference between Saying and the Said. This has profound implications for the assessment of the nature of philosophy and philosophical discourse; 'philosophical speaking...remains as a Saying, a proximity and a responsibility.'¹⁸⁷ In other words, philosophy itself cannot legitimately be reduced ultimately to pure immanence, qua Hegel, and cannot be reduced to the immanence of the synchrony of the Said even if, as Hegel shows, this is where it situates itself (i.e. as radically and immanently self-determining). The genuine truth of all philosophy for Levinas is this movement of radical diachrony *within* synchrony, transcendence *in* immanence:

'The truth of truths lies in the Said, in the Unsaid, and in the Otherwise said – return, resumption, reduction: the history of philosophy or its preliminary.'¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ Ibid, p.168

¹⁸⁴ Ibid

¹⁸⁵ For example, Levinas writes: 'The works of Hegel, into which all the currents of the Western spirit have come to flow, and in which all its levels are manifested, is at once a philosophy of absolute knowledge and of the satisfied man. The psyche of theoretical knowledge constitutes a thought that thinks to its measure and, in its adequation to what is thinkable, equals itself and shall be conscious of itself. It is the Same that finds itself anew in the Other.' (*Of God Who Comes to Mind*, p.170)

¹⁸⁶ E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, p.170

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p.168

¹⁸⁸ E. Levinas, 'Wholly Otherwise', p.6

Skepticism and its recurrence is itself witness to reasons that reason *does not know*. The question that all of Levinas's work addresses is whether or not transcendence has a meaning. Levinas wants to suggest that even immanent philosophical reason is able to hear *those* reasons that signify beyond the ontological forms that philosophical reflection reveals to it. Thus he argues that it is transcendence in immanence that will allow a philosophy to emerge that recognises that 'Truth is in several times':

'The meaning that philosophy lets us see with the aid of these forms frees itself from the theoretical forms which help it to see and express itself as if these forms were not precisely encrusted in that which they allow to be seen and said. In an inevitable alternation, thinking comes and goes between these two possibilities.'¹⁸⁹

For Levinas skepticism is not just a denial or rejection of the possibility of knowledge; it represents an affirmation transcending the realm of the immanence of the Said at the same time as sustaining it. Thus when Levinas writes that Saying is 'both an affirmation and a retraction of the Said', it is pre-eminently true of the Saying of skepticism. The truth of skepticism is thus placed upon the same level as the very truths its own discourse seeks to disrupt. It is as if the very negation of the possibility of the true is itself ranked within the very order restored by this negation: it is 'as though every difference were incontestably reabsorbed into the same order. But to contest the possibility of truth is precisely to contest this uniqueness of order and level.'¹⁹⁰ Consequently the differentiation signified by skepticism is not ultimately recoverable through immanent rationality. Levinas argues for a radically diachronous difference between the Saying and the Said which immanent philosophical discourse fails to mark explicitly enough. By drawing upon the notion of the recurrence of skepticism he is able to signify the degree to which it must refer to an irrecoverable excess as the very ground for its recurrence outside the reductive immanence of philosophical discourse. Philosophy becomes radically reconfigured within his thought as a discourse able to uncover and articulate the recurrent movement of transcendence in immanence. Indeed, he re-inscribes the very task of philosophy as a necessary traversal of this alternation between the diachronic interruption of the

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, p.180

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, p.168

Other, and as a necessary reduction of that diachrony back into the very fabric of the synchrony of the Same as the inevitable consequence of such an articulation.

We will proceed by examining Derrida's second major text on Levinas, a paper entitled 'At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am'¹⁹¹. We will argue that this paper represents Derrida's significant reappraisal of Levinas's efforts to respond to the challenges outlined in 'Violence and Metaphysics' by adopting a strategy of persistent and recurrent skeptical opposition.

¹⁹¹ J. Derrida, "En ce moment même dans cet ouvrage me voici" in *Textes pour Emmanuel Levinas* (Paris: Editions Jean-Michel Place, 1980) in English as "At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am", translated by R. Berezdivin in R. Bernasconi & S. Critchley (eds), *Re-Reading Levinas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) pp. 11-48

VII - Derrida's 'At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am'

In the second text that Derrida wrote on Levinas he explicitly marks out the radically diachronous difference between Saying and the Said evoked by Levinas in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. He specifically addresses the question of how Levinas indicates the diachrony solicited by the 'mode' of skepticism and its refutation, together with the question of how to genuinely respond to the demands of his work.

Derrida immediately observes that the risk of comprehension by the intelligibility of the Same necessarily contaminates the very 'possibility' of incomprehensible and unintelligible Saying; but recognises that it is a contamination which is simultaneously constitutive of the possibility of its uncontaminated occurrence:

'To make us (without making us) receive otherwise, and receive otherwise the otherwise, he has been unable to do otherwise than negotiate with the risk: in the same language, the language of the Same, one may always ill receive what is thus otherwise said. Even before that fault, the risk contaminates its very proposition.'¹⁹²

Indeed, Derrida argues that the question of how Levinas is able to signify the wholly other within the economy of reductive language must in fact be reversed in the light of *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. The real issue becomes one of whether or not the language of the Same is itself unbound and thus open to the *wholly* other. For Derrida:

'It is less a matter of exceeding that language than of treating it otherwise with its own possibilities. Treating it otherwise, in other words to calculate the transaction, negotiate the compromise that would leave the non-negotiable intact, and to do this in such a way as to make the fault, which consists in inscribing the wholly other within the empire of the same, alter the same enough to absolve itself from itself.'¹⁹³

The risk run by Levinas's work is its attempt to negotiate a thematisation of that which uniquely *forbids* thematisation. Derrida argues that by understanding Levinas's

¹⁹² J. Derrida, *Ibid.* P. 12

¹⁹³ *Ibid.* p. 17

notion of the recurrence of the One as an identity without unity (as *substitution*) we can begin to understand the recurring serial structure in which the perpetual alternation of Saying and Said are inextricably woven together. Within this perpetual interweaving 'another language comes to disturb the first one'¹⁹⁴, and 'haunts' the first one. The first moment of interweaving belongs, Derrida suggests, to dialectics, i.e. by interweaving the trace as a negative into a systematised totality of discourse. The second moment of interweaving, he argues, makes the first possible by functioning to make it possible it represents a diachronic moment which infinitely overflows the synchronous order. The examples that Derrida gives close attention to are those interweaved moments where Levinas draws attention to a certain *present* via the inscription of "at this moment" or "at this very moment" in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. We must briefly examine Derrida's analyses in order to recognise how it further illuminates the way in which Levinas's later work no longer risks merely repeating Hegelianism but enacts a powerful displacement of it.

Derrida focuses his attention on those instances in *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence* where Levinas is most concerned with articulating the procedure for negotiating the non-negotiable (i.e. the *Saying* of the Saying in the Said) and its inevitable and necessary betrayal. Derrida argues that this act of negotiation is elaborated within a complex process of serial repetition that functions, through the indication of a 'lapsus', to disrupt or interrupt immanence. We will argue that the process of serial interruption described by Derrida is identical to the recurrent movement of skepticism and refutation evoked by Levinas. Both serial repetition and the movement of skepticism attempt to indicate a pre-original dislocation within a movement of apparent conjunction; in other words, to indicate the disjunction of two distinct times. Derrida attempts to identify two such distinct moments of 'presence' within the fabric of Levinas's text, the first of which he cites as follows:

'Every contestation and interruption of this power of discourse is at once related and invested by discourse. It thus recommences as soon as one interrupts it... This discourse will affirm itself to be coherent and one. In relating the interruption of discourse or my being ravished into discourse I connect its thread... Are we not *at this*

¹⁹⁴ J. Derrida, *Ibid.*, p. 18

very moment [my italics J.D.] in the process of barring the issue that our whole essay attempts, and of encircling our position from all sides? The exceptional words by which the trace of the past and the extravagance of the approach are said – One, God – become terms, reenter into the vocabulary, and are put at the disposition of philologists, instead of confounding philosophical language. Their very explosions are recounted... Thus the ladder-proof equivocation that language weaves signifies.¹⁹⁵

For Derrida this inscription of “at this very moment” essentially constitutes a citation of the enveloping power of immanent textuality, a text ‘resuming without end all its tears within itself’¹⁹⁶ (i.e. what Levinas characterises as the Said). However Derrida argues that the same “at this very moment”, occurring as it does two pages later, signifies radically *otherwise*. Here it signifies that “at this very moment” an interruptive fracture has *always already* occurred; which is, for Levinas, certain at the very moment that immanence pretends, as Derrida writes, to ‘reappropriate for itself the tear within the continuum of its texture’. Levinas writes:

‘The intervals are not recuperated. Does not the discourse that suppresses the interruptions of discourse by relating them maintain the discontinuity under the knots with which the thread is tied again? The interruptions of the discourse found again and recounted in the immanence of the said are conserved like knots in a thread tied again, the trace of a diachrony that does not enter into the present, that refuses simultaneity. And I still interrupt the ultimate discourse in which all the discourses are stated, in saying it to one that listens to it, and who is situated outside the said that the discourse says, outside all it includes. That is true of the discussion I am elaborating *at this very moment* [my italics J.D.]. This reference to an interlocutor permanently breaks through the text that the discourse claims to weave in thematising and enveloping all things. In totalising being, discourse qua discourse thus belies the very claim to totalize.’¹⁹⁷

Derrida acknowledges that both inscriptions of “at this very moment” are of course the same remark or expression; however, from one moment to the next moment they

¹⁹⁵ E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, p. 169, cited by J. Derrida, *Ibid*, p. 21

¹⁹⁶ J. Derrida, *Ibid*, p. 22

¹⁹⁷ E. Levinas, *Ibid*, p. 170, cited by J. Derrida, *Ibid*, pp. 21-2

are *no longer* the same. Thus they contrast radically with Hegel's remarks in his account of 'Sense-Certainty' concerning the differentiation of the 'Now'. Here the immediate 'Now' is no longer the same because of the time that will have passed. To recall Hegel's own words on the same matter:

'Now does indeed preserve itself, but as something that is not...as a negative in general. This self-preserving Now is, therefore, not immediate but mediated; for it is determined as a permanent and self-preserving Now through the fact that something else...is not...it is still just as simply Now as before, and in this simplicity is indifferent to what happens to it.'¹⁹⁸

For Derrida both of the occurrences within Levinas's text are inscribed within two radically different gestures, and this explicitly recalls the 'two times' solicited by Levinas in the discussion of the recurrent movement of skepticism and its refutation. The first *present* moment is itself determined by the present of a thematisation, in precisely the same way Hegel thematises the present 'Now' in his account of sense-certainty. As for Hegel it is a moment whose 'presentation...pretends to encompass within itself the Relation which yet exceeds it, pretends to exceed it, precede it, and overflow it.'¹⁹⁹ Hence, the first moment returns to the Same or to the immanent dialectic. However, the second inscription of the present moment is no longer and never has been a present 'same' in the manner of the first moment. This second present moment suggests the critical essence of skepticism that Levinas evokes. To recall, for Levinas the recurrence of skepticism is rendered possible by a radical critical essence irreducible to immanence. Writing of the second inscription of presence Derrida writes:

'Its 'same' is (will have been) dislocated by the very same thing which will have (probably, perhaps) been its 'essence', namely the Relation. It is in itself anachronic, in itself disparate, it no longer closes in upon itself. It is not what it is, in that strange and only probable essence, except by allowing itself beforehand to be opened up and deported by the Relation which makes it possible. The Relation will have made it

¹⁹⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, #96, p.60

¹⁹⁹ J. Derrida, *Ibid*, p.21

possible – and, by the same stroke, impossible as presence, sameness, and assured essence.²⁰⁰

In this second 'moment' Levinas is attempting to make explicit the fact that he is pursuing the paradoxical thematisation of the radically unthematisable relation of substitution that does not permit further envelopment within the fabric of the same. Despite there being, between the two 'moments' (the "now" of recoverable thematisation and the "now" of paradoxical diachrony), a chronological, logical, rhetorical and ontological interval (just as there was with the alternation associated with the movement of skepticism and its refutation) it is nevertheless, Derrida claims, the 'same moment, written and read in its difference... One belonging to dialectic and the other different from and deferring from the first, infinitely and in advance overflowing it. The second moment has an infinite advance on the first. And yet it is the same.'²⁰¹

It is the persistent traversal between the two moments that comes to constitute what Levinas calls 'transcendence in immanence'. Derrida characterises this movement with a notion he terms '*sériature*'. This notion is understood as a process of repetition²⁰², without which Levinas would be unable to offer the probable essence of language as a relation to the Other, or what he terms the *hors série*.²⁰³ The *hors série* represents the fact that the series comprises not only the 'threads' or the paths that interweave the mesh of language, but the interruption of the threads or paths. Saying persistently interrupts the very weaving of linguistic threads only to be simultaneously rewoven back into the torn mesh. Yet this reweaving is not, Derrida claims, a simple relinking of torn thread; thus a new knot is not only to be woven from threads but from the very interruption of threads. The *hors série* does not therefore weave threads but the interruptions or the intervals of hiatus between them. The *hors série* is, strictly

²⁰⁰ Ibid. p.24

²⁰¹ Ibid

²⁰² The notion of '*sériature*' introduced here by Derrida here has clear resonance with Levinas's own discussion of the recurrence of skepticism despite its refutation. Both skepticism and '*sériature*' suggest the notion of repetition in order to signify an 'absolute' beyond immanence, i.e. a means to signify pre-original transcendence despite immanence. Derrida writes: 'Obligation binds and unbinds. He will have obligated: bound and unbound, bound in unbinding "together", in the "same" *sériature* (*sériature*) in the same dia-synchrony, in a serial at once, the "many times" that will have taken place only once. He will have bound/unbound an obligation that obligates', p.30

²⁰³ See E. Levinas, Ibid. p.170, 'The approach, or saying, is a relationship with what is not understood in the together, the out-of-the-series (*hors série*)'.

speaking, without a single knot simply because it links a multiplicity of interruptions without threads. These serial interruptions are what Derrida terms *sériature*, which he characterises by a notion of '*de-stricturation absolue*', which indicates the absence of the destination of the trace and impossibility of return. This 'absolute de-stricturation', the impossibility of stricture, has to be, Derrida claims, mediated through the stricture of language. The reason for this, he claims, is that 'in order that two annulments or two excesses not be equivalent, within indetermination, the absolving erasure must not be absolutely absolute. I must therefore make each atom of an utterance appear faulty and absolved'.²⁰⁴ It *must* be negotiated in terms of stricture and series. However, such a contamination is not wholly 'negative' since it does not detract from the trace but constitutes the very process of *tracing*. For Derrida the necessity of negotiating the trace makes one interruption, one trace, insufficient for guarding the alterity of the other. There must be a persistent process of *sériature*. Thus *Sériature* characterises an ongoing interweaving of the trace of the Other which lets the trace abandon its trace, absolve itself from it and remain other. *Sériature* is therefore not only an interweaving or an interlacing (*entrelacer*) but also what Derrida terms an en-tracing (*entracer*); *sériature* is the very performing of what Derrida calls '*l'entr(el)acement*'. This represents his understanding of Levinas's notion of 'letting-the-trace', a process whereby the Other announces itself on its own basis rather than on the basis of being. This letting-of-the-trace implies abandonment, a leaving of the trace, which does not insist upon a sign, but effaces itself only to let-the-trace of a trace of the Other. Thus letting-the-trace of the Other performs otherwise than letting-be. Indeed it marks, for Levinas, a meaning *beyond being*.

Derrida argues that the repetitive inscription whereby Saying is betrayed in the Said manages to un-say the Said, and betray its betrayal of ethical Saying. By inscribing that betrayal of ethical Saying, *writing* is able to articulate the serial structure of *sériature* whereby the an-archic betrayal of betrayal is effaced and the wholly Other liberated. Through the power of iteration *writing* is able to efface traces of Saying's effacement in the Said and thus reinscribe Saying as the trace of the un-sayable within the Said. The *present* of iterative inscription allows an unrepresentable notion to exceed the present of its representative inscription in scriptural iteration because the power of

²⁰⁴ J. Derrida, *Ibid.*, p.35

iteration peculiar to writing always *serially* exceeds the presence of the present in which it presents itself. So when Levinas seeks to tell, "at this very moment", of that which exceeds all telling he inevitably betrays it. However, what exceeds all telling is the Saying of this telling itself, i.e. the evocation of the One to whom it is addressed. Yet it can only ever be partially and unsuccessfully betrayed because it remains addressed by Saying even in the Saying of the Said in which it is betrayed. The coherence of the "at this very moment" as a present of the Said encompassing the ethical interruption of the present, is itself realised through the in-coherence of *another* "at this very moment". This is a moment of Saying offered to the Other that *interrupts* the encompassing present in which it is incorporated without comprehension (even as it renders its own inclusion within that present possible). For Derrida the ontological present itself is constituted and deconstituted across an immeasurable interval of a lapse which separates the presence of the Same as present from itself in order to bind it into the unity of the present.

Levinas recognises that ethical signification can only be paradoxically counterpoised to the significance he *intends* to convey; thus every word he writes is necessarily a self-interruption. Such failure may be sufficiently interrupted (an interruption of interruption) by Saying which 'resounds' or is heard *otherwise* within the thematic denotative constraints of language. Thus it would be a grave error to interpret Levinas's procedures of disengaging ethics from immanent ontology through the careful and emphatic use of the concepts of ontological discourse as *conclusively* succeeding, or as stating with certainty the modality of transcendence. It should be clear that that kind of success (a success arguably demanded by Hegelians) would be an automatic defeat of Levinas's thought. Such a demand would simply function to reduce the transcendence of the ethical back into immanence, rather than as signifying an irrecoverable transcendence in immanence. (As we outlined earlier, such a failure was one of the central concerns of Derrida's early commentary.) However his texts are only able to 'successfully' signify a pre-original obligation toward the Other by means of a profound enigma or epiphany, i.e. as an undoing of every undoing, as an interruption of every thematic investiture, and as a failure in terms of what Hegelianism would measure as a success. His work must function as a deliberate auto-interruption akin to the persistent recurrence of the critical essence of skepticism if it is to avoid falling prey to the type of Hegelian concerns articulated by Derrida's

early article, and the charges of naivety, dogmatism and abstraction made by Hegelians. The ultimate effectiveness of his work lies beyond anything he is actually able to definitively demonstrate, and our response as readers cannot be the result of a type of persuasion garnered through arguments organised around the priority of the logos. Levinas cannot make us respond ethically on this level precisely because his work functions to trouble and disrupt the very connection between persuasion and veracity. Indeed the disruption of good conscience *is*, for Levinas, ethics. Only within the order of being does rectification, truth, falsity and certainty obtain a meaningful purchase. Levinas's task is to demonstrate that the involutions of being qua being neither exhaust nor exercise a monopoly over 'sense'. Indeed, as he argues in his essay 'God and Philosophy':

'We must ask if beyond the intelligibility and rationalism of identity, consciousness, the present, and being – beyond the intelligibility of immanence – the signifyingness, rationality, and rationalism of transcendence are not understood. Over and beyond being, does not a meaning whose priority, translated into ontological language would have to be called antecedent to being, not show itself.'²⁰⁵

With the understanding we have developed of the way Levinas evokes an affective quality that allows for a persistently recurrent movement of skepticism (a movement analogous to the recurrent and disruptive articulation of the ethical) we are able to understand the way in which he attempts to displace the priority of Hegelian immanent ontology. The way in which he solicits a sense of the wholly other in his later work is intrinsically bound up with the critical essence that permits its legitimate recurrence despite its refutation in rational and ontological discourse. It is necessary to conclude our thesis by proceeding with a detailed and rigorous examination of a specific example of the type of displacement of Hegel's thought that Levinas's work actually permits. This more detailed textual engagement with Hegel occurs in the context of Levinas's lectures on *Death and Time*, to which we must now turn our attention.

²⁰⁵ E. Levinas, 'God and Philosophy' in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, translated by A. Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), p. 154

VIII - Death in Hegel – A Scandal

Between November 1975 and May 1976 Levinas presented a lecture course under the title *La Mort et le Temps (Death and Time)*.²⁰⁶ The overall theme of these lectures is the negativity of death, and their fundamental contention is that there has been an insufficient thinking of the nothingness proper to death by the philosophical tradition. Indeed, he claims that 'In death...we arrive at something that European philosophy has not thought.'²⁰⁷ Throughout the lectures Levinas provides a series of powerful insights into how the thought of Kant, Hegel, Bergson, Heidegger, Bloch and Fink fare with regard to the attempt to think what he argues is a nothingness *proper* to death. For Levinas the authentic *negativity* of death is a negativity that exceeds thought and which represents an *enigma*. Crucially it is a form of negativity that differs radically from the spirituality of German Idealism, particularly Hegelianism, where the nothingness or negativity of death is the condition of the life of the Spirit. As Jacques Rolland writes in an essay on Levinas's lectures:

'It is a negativity to be grasped – or suffered – in the ineffectiveness that it induces, in what Blanchot would call its neutrality. A negativity...that Levinas does not avoid, and before which he does not turn away...but of which he only asks whether nothingness is sufficient to it.'²⁰⁸

In the lectures Levinas does not deny the nothingness of death, rather he argues that it is the task of the philosopher to search for and analyse the quality proper to this nothingness. For Levinas it is a crucial task to think that nothingness with which, for an entire philosophical tradition, death is confounded or reduced. As Jacques Rolland writes, 'thinking about death must *cross over* the nothingness or, as Hegel would say,

²⁰⁶ These lectures were published together with his 1975/6 lectures entitled '*Dieu et l'onto-théo-logie*' (*God and Ontotheology*) as *Dieu, la mort et le temps* (Paris: Grasset, 1993) in English as *God, Death and Time*, translated by B. Bergo (Stanford: Stanford U.P. 2000)

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 70

²⁰⁸ J. Rolland, 'Death in its Negativity', translated by B. Bergo in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, Vol. 20 No.2 – Vol. 21 No.1, 1998: *Levinas's Contribution to Contemporary Philosophy*, eds. B. Bergo & D. Perpich, p.463. See also J. Rolland's postscript to these lectures 'De l'autre homme – Le temps, la mort et le Dieu', pp.263-279 ('On the Other Man: Time, Death and God', pp.225-239). Further insights into these lectures are contained in T. Chanter's paper 'Traumatic Response - Levinas's Legacy' in *Philosophy Today*, 1997 Supplement, pp.19-27 and J. Derrida's *Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas* (Editions Galilée, 1997) in English as *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, translated by P-A. Brault & M. Naas (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999)

must "look it in the face".²⁰⁹ By crossing over this notion of nothingness Levinas is able to posit what he claims is nothingness *proper* to death. This is a notion he argues has defied the philosophical tradition:

'In death, as pure nothingness, as foundationless – which we feel more dramatically, with the acuteness of that nothingness that is greater in death than in the idea of the nothingness of being (in the *there is* [*il y a*], which wounds less than disappearance does) – we arrive at something that European philosophy has not thought. We understand corruption, transformation, dissolution. We understand that shapes or forms pass into and out of being, while something subsists. Death contrasts with all that; it is inconceivable, refractory to thought, and yet unexceptionable and undeniable. It is not a phenomenon; hardly thematizable, unthinkable – the irrational begins there. Even in anxiety, even through anxiety, death remains unthought. To have experienced anxiety does not allow one to think it. Nothingness has defied Western thought.'²¹⁰

By seeking a non-ontological meaning in death he attempts to uncover the radical *alterity* of death, its refusal of the categories of being and the precise way it presents us with *excess*:

'Death indicates a meaning that surprises – as if annihilation could introduce us to a meaning that is not limited to nothingness.'²¹¹

Levinas attempts to disclose how death is radically disquieting by arguing that there is in death a surplus of meaning that is uncontainable. The 'Is it possible that he is dead?' represents a question beyond the remit of rational ontology; it represents, he claims, a fundamentally ethical question. His approach essentially consists of thinking the nothingness proper to death through an analysis of the significance of the death of the Other. He argues that the death of the Other represents a *scandal* as if it were a question of murder, and approaches the question of the death of the Other as *my*

²⁰⁹ Ibid, p.467

²¹⁰ E. Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, p.70

²¹¹ Ibid, p.13

taking on the responsibility of being a survivor. In an interview given in 1987 Levinas claims:

'I think that to approach the face of the other is to worry directly about his death, and this means to regard him straightaway as mortal, finite. The directness of death is the face of the other because the face is being looked on by death. It is like the origin of the straight line. One can neither prove the origin, nor define it. It is directness in itself, the directness of death. And his death, your death, is immediately present to me, even though I do everything possible in order to forget it. What nonetheless remains behind the scenes is the ethical, an original being delivered over to the other – love.'²¹²

By invoking the tradition that is unable to sustain the thought of nothingness proper to death Levinas introduces his detailed engagement with the thought of Hegel. Thus his discussion of Hegel is prefaced by a brief discussion of Aristotle; he argues that Aristotle's thought represents a refusal to think nothingness *in itself*. For Aristotle it is always a matter of the way in which being *becomes* another being; becoming is a movement and for Levinas this renders it impossible to think the negativity proper to death. Aristotle's notion of '*metabolē*' may seem, he argues, to admit the turning of being into nothingness, and it may appear to admit the separation of nothingness from being. However, corruption in his analysis is always thought as closely related to generation. Although Aristotle distinguishes corruption and generation from alteration, Levinas argues that '*metabolē* preserves the style of alteration, where being subsists in nothingness in such a way that nothingness is not thought as a pure nothing'.²¹³ For Levinas, the notion of nothingness thought here is 'nothingness as *dissolution*; annihilation as *decomposition* in which something subsists even if the forms of things pass away'²¹⁴.

'For him, it is impossible to think annihilation with the acuteness with which it announces itself in anxiety. For Aristotle, where becoming is movement, it is impossible to think the change that is death. The *metabolē* is the turning of being into

²¹² E. Levinas, *Is It Righteous To Be? – Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, edited by J. Robbins (Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 2001), pp.134–5

²¹³ E. Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, p.71

²¹⁴ *Ibid*

nothingness, and Aristotle seems in this sense to acknowledge the possibility of thinking being and nothingness separately. But in his analyses, corruption, or the passage to nothingness, is always thought of in connection with generation... Thus nothingness appears, in Aristotle, as a moment of essence, as the negativity proper to being, whose essence is finite. *Not-yet-to-be* or *no-longer-to-be* will be negative for Aristotle.²¹⁵

Levinas's thinking of the nothingness of death is a thought of nothingness 'pregnant with nothing at all [*n'est gros de rien*]... an absolutely indeterminate nothingness that alludes to no being'.²¹⁶ Thus the fundamental nothingness proper to death cannot be legitimately conveyed by the notion of annihilation, non-being or nothingness; rather, it is a certain experience for the survivor of what he terms the 'without-response'. The nothingness proper to death is conveyed by the sense of the death of *someone*, and the having-been of someone is carried not by the one dying but by the survivor. Levinas argues:

'We should think of all the murder there is in death; every death is a murder, is premature, and there is the responsibility of the survivor. Aristotle does not think nothingness in this way. For him, that does not "demolish" the world; the world remains.'²¹⁷

In these lectures he argues that the nothingness proper to death is absolutely inseparable from my relation to the Other, and that 'my relation with death is... made up of the emotional and intellectual repercussions of the knowledge of the death of others'.²¹⁸

'The death of the Other who dies affects me in my very identity as a responsible "me" [*moi*]; it affects me in my nonsubstantial identity, which is not the simple coherence of various acts of identification, but is made up of an ineffable responsibility. My being affected by the death of the Other is precisely that, my relation with his death. It

²¹⁵ *Ibid.* pp.69-70

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ *Ibid.* p.72

²¹⁸ *Ibid.* p.10

is, in my relation, my deference to someone who no longer responds, already a culpability – the culpability of the survivor.²¹⁹

In these lectures Levinas argues that the nothingness proper to death is conveyed by my responsibility for the death of the Other, and that 'the death of the Other affects me more than my own'.²²⁰ The death of the Other has the effect of putting me in question and poses the question of my response as a survivor. The question of my responsibility for others includes my responsibility for the death of the Other as a survivor. This responsibility is elevated above my anxiety before my own death, and another question arises behind the question of being, a profound question irreducible to its terms, a question regarding whether the very humanity of man is defined by that which man 'is'. Levinas writes:

'We are asking whether the humanity of man is defined only by that which man *is*, or whether in the face that *asks for me* a meaning other, and older, than the ontological one is in the process of becoming meaningful and awakening us to another thought than that of knowledge.'²²¹

Levinas asks whether a thinking of the nothingness proper to death can in fact be discerned in certain moments of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, moments where the nothingness of death is thought apart from a process or thought of 'becoming' or Aristotelian *metabolē*. Is there in Hegel a thinking of the nothingness proper to death as an end to all 'becoming'? Levinas claims that in the opening pages of Hegel's analysis of 'Spirit' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*²²² we indeed arrive at an authentic thinking of death, and it is to these arguments that we will now turn.

(i) *Levinas's Reading of Hegel's 'Phenomenology'*

The entire effort of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* might perhaps be read as a meditation upon the 'negativity' of death, but a very specific notion of death. Hegel argues that what is limited to a natural life (what he terms *Dasein*) is not able to

²¹⁹ Ibid, p.12

²²⁰ Ibid, p.105

²²¹ E. Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, p.167

²²² G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, #438-476, pp.263-289

transcend itself immanently. An other must, he argues, push it beyond itself. This being pushed or torn from its position is *its* death. *Dasein* is only what it *is* and its concept, Hegel argues, is entirely outside it. Thus *Dasein* belongs to *nature*. The negation of *Dasein*, on account of its finitude must necessarily come about as a negation alien to it, a negation it does not include for itself. However, this is not the case with consciousness. Consciousness, he claims, is for itself its *own* concept, which is to say that it is for its own self the negation of its limited forms, or, of its own death. Thus, whereas in nature death is an external negation, consciousness or spirit carries death within itself and posits a positive meaning to it. The meditation on death in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a meditation on the notion of death carried by consciousness that (far from being exclusively negative or an end point in an abstract nothingness) is an *Aufhebung* – an ascent or a becoming.

The death of natural *Dasein* is merely the abstract negation of a term, which is only what it *is*. However for consciousness death is a necessary moment by means of which it survives itself and rises to a new form. Death is therefore only the beginning of a new life of consciousness, and in this manner consciousness (being for its self its own concept) incessantly transcends itself; the death of what is held as its truth is the appearance of a new truth. Thus Hegel writes:

‘The life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. It is this power, not as something positive, which closes its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing or is false, and then, having done with it, turn away and pass on to something else; on the contrary, Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being.’²²³

For Hegel the anguish that possesses human consciousness drives it before itself until it is no longer an abstract human consciousness, but reaches absolute knowledge. This absolute knowledge is at once a circle of knowledge of the object and self-knowledge.

²²³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Ibid.* #32, p.19

For Levinas, however, there exists a thinking of the nothingness proper to death in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* which approaches an adequate thinking of 'the whole scandal that is this end, which is expressed in the affective register...and which shall be stated here in moral terms (responsibility for the death of another, the scandal of every new death)'.²²⁴ If there is a thinking of the nothingness proper to death in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, it is precisely because of the ethical significance it attains there. Levinas argues:

'We must search not for a positive thought for death but rather for a responsibility according to the measure or the beyond-measure of death. We must search for a response that is not a response but responsibility, that is not of the same measure as a world but belongs to the beyond-measure of the infinite.'²²⁵

The specific moment of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Levinas analyses in the lectures is the moment of Immediate Ethical Substance that emerges from the transition to Spirit from Reason. This transition describes the point at which the individual transcends its own particularity in which it had seemed terminally enclosed towards the self understood as universal self. In reason the individual self-consciousness takes itself to know what is immediately just and good, and proclaims edicts that must be immediately valid, such as 'Everyone must tell the truth' or 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. However Hegel demonstrates how these edicts actually prove to be inadequate with regard to the necessity that they express. Thus the necessity undoes itself through manifesting a degree of contingency that derives from the individuality of the consciousness that formulated them. Whilst we must tell the truth, doing so depends upon one knowing what truth is, and that knowledge depends upon specific circumstances and individual conviction. Hegel argues that to understand the commandment 'Love your neighbour as yourself' properly must mean to understand it as 'Love your neighbour intelligently' – 'Unintelligent love will perhaps do him more harm than hatred'. However, as Hegel argues:

'Intelligent, substantial beneficence is, however, in its richest and most important form the intelligent universal action of the State – an action compared with which the

²²⁴ E. Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, p.79

²²⁵ *Ibid*

action of a single individual, as an individual, is so insignificant that it is hardly worth talking about.²²⁶

These immediate commandments lose their immediateness and are shown to be as arbitrary as the individual consciousness that formulates them. For Hegel the contingency of merely particular content is transcended by substance qua universality and necessity. However when the individual claims to legislate, his commandments appear *as if* from a particular self-consciousness and remain merely arbitrary orders – the orders of a master. In substance these orders are not only orders but exist and are valid in themselves. They are in-themselves, but the commandment by a specific consciousness gives them a persisting arbitrary character that in no way corresponds to their ‘absolute’ nature.

Hegel then shows that the specific self who has thought through universality and necessity still has one final recourse. Rather than legislating immediately it can examine the laws themselves. The content is given, and now consciousness becomes the mere unit of measure that tests that content in order to ascertain its absolute validity. Thus we are brought to an implicit engagement with Kant, who had proclaimed the rule that expresses nothing but the general condition in which any maxim can be established as an absolute universal law. For Hegel this manner of testing of an already existing content can proclaim nothing but tautologies. Indeed he claims that the scrutiny of laws may already be the beginning of the immorality of an individual consciousness:

‘If I inquire after their origin and confine them to the point whence they arose, then I have transcended them; for now it is I who am the universal, and they are the conditioned and limited. If they are supposed to be validated by my insight, then I have already denied their unshakeable, intrinsic being, and regard them as something which, for me, is perhaps true, but also is perhaps not true. Ethical disposition consists just in sticking steadfastly to what is right, and abstaining from all attempts to move or shake it, or derive it.’²²⁷

²²⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Ibid.*, #425, p.255

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, #437, p.261

Thus far individual consciousness has appeared in its negative behaviour towards ethical substance and substance has thus far appeared only in the form of the particular individual's will and knowledge. It exists only as the 'must-be' of a commandment that lacks actual reality, or as the knowledge of a formal universality. Laws are not the arbitrary commandments of specific individual consciousness, and are not grounded in the will of a specific individual. Rather, they are valid in themselves. Thus Hegel argues:

'The law is equally an eternal law which is grounded not in the will of a particular individual, but is valid in and for itself; it is the absolute pure will of all which has the form of immediate being...it is not a commandment, which only ought to be: it is and is valid; it is the universal 'I' of the category, the 'I' which is immediately a reality, and the world is only this reality. But since the existent law is valid unconditionally, the obedience of self-consciousness is not the serving of a master whose commands were arbitrary, and in which it would not recognise itself. On the contrary, laws are the thoughts of its own absolute consciousness, thoughts which are immediately its own...Ethical self-consciousness is immediately one with essential being through the universality of its self.'²²⁸

Consciousness has suppressed itself as a specific consciousness and has effected the mediation by which laws lose their arbitrary nature. It is only because such mediation is accomplished that consciousness again becomes the self-consciousness of ethical substance. The essence *is* self-consciousness, and self-consciousness *is* the consciousness of essence. We have reached the notion of Spirit, insofar as Spirit is the concrete substance, i.e. reason posited as being. Spirit is a 'we' and is history – it realises itself only through a historical development because each of its moments, in making itself essence, must realise itself as an original world, and because its being is not at all distinct from the action through which it poses itself. Spirit is knowledge of itself in its history – it is ultimately a return to itself through, and by means of, that history – a return such that nothing alien subsists in and for Spirit and such that Spirit knows itself as what it is and is what it knows itself to be.

²²⁸ Ibid. #436, pp.260-1

At first Spirit exists immediately (it is there as an immediate historical given, i.e. as the existence of a people) as a community aware of itself as living within a concrete totality. The world now is reason rendered real and self-consciousness is not counterposed to it. Rather self-consciousness recognises itself in the world immediately. To say, as Hegel does, that Spirit exists immediately is to show that it is still nature – that morality is custom, and that the self immediately knows the laws of its action. Hegel insists, contra Kant, that such immediateness is a necessary condition of moral action. He claims that no decision is possible without a certain presence of what must be done – an existential ‘this’ or givenness, or what Hegel comes to term ‘Divine Law’. This is a term explicitly derived from Hegel’s introduction of Sophocles’ *Antigone* and, more specifically, Antigone’s appeal to ‘the unwritten and infallible law of the gods’.²²⁹ As he argued earlier, the merely legislative activity of a formal consciousness does not culminate in action, and an examination of laws is already a slide toward immorality. In the Immediate Ethical Substance Divine Law is given and immutable and must simply be accepted, whereas the Human Law that emerges parallel to it must be constructed and intelligible, it is a proper object of rational deliberation. However, the two realms remain in a complex reciprocal relationship with each other, as Hegel writes:

‘Human Law proceeds in its living process from the divine, the law valid on earth from that of the nether world, the conscious from the unconscious, mediation from immediacy – and equally returns whence it came. The power of the nether world, on the other hand, has its actual existence on earth, through consciousness, it becomes existence and activity.’²³⁰

For Hegel this is ultimately a movement in consciousness characterised by a consciousness which grasps its being only in contrast to an other, and sets itself off against a background of unconsciousness. Divine Law is marked as much by its hiddenness as it is by its givenness; and the effort within the Immediate Ethical Order to clarify it through the institutions of government is to be recognised as a natural imperative that is present within Divine Law itself. Thus:

²²⁹ Ibid, #437, p.261. See also Sophocles *The Three Theban Plays – Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus*, translated by R. Fagles (London: Penguin, 1984)

²³⁰ Ibid, #460, p.276

'The commands of government have a universal, public meaning open to the light of day; the will of the other law, however, is locked up in the darkness of the nether regions.'²³¹

Both realms here are expressed primarily through the notion of immediate natural necessity where male consciousness assigns itself to the realm of the Human Law, whilst female consciousness remains devoted to the older, primary, Divine Law (as Hegel writes, 'the self-consciousness confronting the substance assigns to itself according to its *nature* one of these powers'²³²). Hegel argues that each power complements the other, though essentially each is the other for the other. Human Law expresses the actual action or 'deed' of self-consciousness, whilst Divine Law has the form of immediate substance, or the substance posed only in the element of being. Thus it is the Family that is the very substance of ethical life as pure and simple immediateness, i.e. as nature. He writes:

'This moment which expresses the ethical sphere in this element of immediacy or [simple] being, or which is an immediate consciousness of itself, both as essence and as this particular self, in an 'other', i.e. as a natural ethical community – this is the Family. The Family, as the unconscious, still inner Notion [of the ethical order], stands opposed to its actual, self-conscious existence; as the element of the nation's actual existence, it stands opposed to the nation itself; as the immediate being of the ethical order, it stands over against that order which shapes and maintains itself by working for the universal; the Penates stand opposed to the universal spirit.'²³³

Levinas begins his own analysis by briefly outlining the essential characteristics of Hegel's notion of Immediate Ethical Spirit, before proceeding with a discussion of what he recognises as a significant notion of death there. He begins with an outline of Hegel's claim that the life of the whole, the overall interaction of Divine and Human Law is characterised by a double movement of expansion and contraction. Hegel argues that specific individuals existing at the level of Immediate Ethical Spirit are

²³¹ Ibid. #466, p.280

²³² Ibid. #445, p.266

²³³ Ibid. #450, p.268

able to become aware of their being-for-self because of the power of what he terms 'the simple self of the entire ethical substance'²³⁴, i.e. the State. This power flows within the individual by virtue of belonging to an immediate ethical order. He writes:

'This simple power does indeed allow the Family to expand into its constituent members, and to give to each part an enduring being and a being-for-self of its own.'²³⁵

However, this expansion ultimately threatens to culminate in negating the simple individuality of social spirit, i.e. the State, that is its condition of possibility. Hegel shows how this expansion that threatens to negate the State and the unified ethical realm of human law is itself negated:

'Spirit is at the same time the power of the whole, which brings these parts together again into a negative unity, giving them the feeling of their lack of independence, and keeping them aware that they have their life only in the whole.'²³⁶

This negation of negation occurs through the imposition of a state of war. In its negative action the government or state acts to essentially restrict particular systems, i.e. Families, which are in the process of splitting off from the whole. Hegel writes:

'In order not to let them become rooted and set in this isolation, thereby breaking up the whole and letting the [communal] spirit evaporate, government has from time to time to shake them to their core by war.'²³⁷

In the absence of war individuals return, through enjoyment, acquisition of wealth, etc., to a state of pure and simple immediate nature. War is needed by governments to resist the centrifugal movement that is the individualisation into separate isolated Family units under the direction of the feminine, or what Hegel terms that principle of 'specificity'. As the negation of that negation war brings about a return of the

²³⁴ Ibid, #455, p.272

²³⁵ Ibid

²³⁶ Ibid

²³⁷ Ibid

awareness of their ultimate dependency on the human law. Levinas gives an account of this moment in his lectures:

'Individuals can become aware of their being for self within the State, because the awareness the State has of itself is a force from which everyone benefits, since everyone has been recognised by this law. Nonetheless, being recognised in this way, the units inside the State, that is, the families, can in this atmosphere of security separate themselves from the Whole; that is, they can become abstract. It is war that will back those individuals detached from the Whole. Without war, individuals would return to the state of pure and simple nature, to the immediate, to the absolutely abstract.'²³⁸

Levinas cites Hegel's argument that government in the realm of human law must act upon the potentially corrosive and destructive forces of the 'individuals who, absorbed in their own way of life, break loose from the whole and strive after inviolable independence and security of the person, are made to feel in the task laid on them their lord and master, death.'²³⁹ Death appears as an absolute master, and such an appearance is significant for Levinas. How this notion of death becomes important for Hegel will not become clear until we have explained precisely in what the 'ethical spirit' of the family consists. We must understand the role death has in returning the family from its expansionary abstractness to an immediately ethical realm. As Levinas writes:

'The family is... some-thing natural, it is the substratum of life from which the human law detaches itself. But family is also the immediate nature of *spirit*, and thus it is not pure nature; it has an ethical principle.'²⁴⁰

Our task now is to attempt to understand this ethical principle, the ethic proper to the family, and the role that death as its master plays in it. Hegel begins by arguing:

²³⁸ E. Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, p.81

²³⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Ibid.*, #455, pp.272-3

²⁴⁰ E. Levinas, *Ibid.*, p.82

'The Family is immediately determined as an ethical being, it is within itself an ethical entity only so far as it is not the natural relationship of its members, or so far as their connection is an immediate connection of separate, actual individuals; for the ethical principle is intrinsically universal, and this natural relationship is just as much a spiritual one, and it is only as a spiritual entity that it is ethical. We have to see what constitutes its peculiar ethical character. In the first place, because the ethical principle is intrinsically universal, the ethical connection between the members of the Family is not that of feeling, or the relationship of love.'²⁴¹

Hegel argues that the fundamental ethical goal of the Family is to 'create' individual virtuous citizens. Indeed, it would seem that the principal function of the family is to be an ethical means, where its authentic ethical goal would appear to be to sublimate itself through 'creating' individuals capable of purely civic life. Its function would seem to consist, as Hegel argues, 'in expelling the individual from the Family, subduing the natural aspect and separateness of his existence, and training him to be virtuous, to a life in and for the universal.'²⁴² On this understanding the Family itself, as an ethical institution, aims wholly to foster the creation of the citizen. However, in this process of 'creating' citizens within the Natural realm of the Family there exists no truly ethical relationship at all – there is there no relationship of free commitment and equal recognition. The question remains how it is that the necessarily ethically independent 'citizen' remains ethically related to the family that 'created' him or her as independent. Hegel expresses these difficulties thus:

'The positive End peculiar to the Family is the individual as such... The content of the ethical action must be substantial or whole and universal; therefore it can only be related to the whole individual or to the individual qua universal.'²⁴³

Since the ethical is in-itself universal, it cannot bear on any notion of contingent individuality (such as this specific existing family member) rather, it can only bear on the idea of individuality, on what individuality becomes as a shadow when it is finally liberated from all the accidents of life. For Hegel the ethical principle or 'deed' proper

²⁴¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Ibid.*, #451, pp.268-9

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

to the family concerns neither the citizen per se, nor the individual who is to become a citizen. Such an individual, he argues, ceases to count as this particular individual. Therefore, the 'deed' ultimately concerns 'this particular individual who belongs to the Family, but is taken as a universal being freed from his sensuous, i.e. individual reality. The deed no longer concerns the living but the dead, the individual who, after a long succession of separate disconnected experiences, concentrates himself into a single completed shape, and has raised himself out of the unrest of the accidents of life into the calm of simple universality.'²⁴⁴ Death appears here as the movement of the specific individual into the universal. In merely living nature the species transcends the specific individual in a way that the negation appears wholly external. The specific individual does not carry his own death within himself and death appears as a natural negation: 'This universality which the individual as such attains is pure being, death; it is a state which has been reached immediately, in the course of Nature, not the result of an action consciously done.'²⁴⁵ Death appears as a fact of pure nature in the spiritual world where the dead person is reduced to a pure thing, prey to elemental forces, to the earth, or to other living beings. However, this movement of the specific individual into the universal occurs within a community, which is why the primary ethical function of the family is to restore to death its true meaning. Thus, the primary ethical function of the family is to remove death from nature and to make of it a spiritual act. Levinas will claim that here 'the relationship with death is inscribed, or more precisely, with the dead one'.²⁴⁶ The family replaces the action of nature with its own. It gives meaning to death by substituting itself for nature and raises the dead to the universality of Spirit. Thus death itself becomes an action of consciousness. Hegel writes:

'The duty of the member of a Family is on that account to add this aspect, in order that the individual's ultimate being, too, shall not belong solely to Nature and remain something irrational, but shall be something done, and the right of consciousness be asserted in it.'²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ Ibid

²⁴⁵ Ibid, #452, p.270

²⁴⁶ E. Levinas, Ibid, p.83

²⁴⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, Ibid

Burial, as a conscious act performed by the surviving family members, completes the record of a life of free rational activity with an act of ethical recognition. The essential truth that this free rational life belongs to a persistent communal ethical continuity must be maintained. As a mere material thing, the dead body returns through dissolution and putrefaction to the universal order of inorganic Being:

'The dead individual, by having liberated his being from his action or his negative unity, is an empty singular, merely a passive being-for-another, at the mercy of every lower irrational individuality and the forces of abstract material elements, all of which are now more powerful than himself.'²⁴⁸

The survivors cannot allow the essential universality of spirit to appear to be produced by nature, and they must act to make the ethical truth visible. Hegel characterised such a responsibility as an interruption of the work of nature itself, and as the 'rescuing' of the dead individual from destruction. Thus it takes upon itself the act of destruction. The responsibility proper to the Family is to resist the power of the natural forces of dissolution and putrefaction by replacing its own power in its place. This power is the ritual or ceremony of burial, where the family 'weds the blood-relation to the bosom of the earth, to the elemental imperishable individuality'.²⁴⁹ The family rescues the dead individual from the natural elemental destructive forces, and as such reinscribes him or her back into the ethical community 'which prevails over and holds under control the forces of the particular material elements and the lower forms of life, which sought to unloose themselves against his and to destroy him'.²⁵⁰ Levinas writes that 'the act of burying is a relation with the deceased, and not with the cadaver'.²⁵¹

The completion of a free existence in death must be recognised, and this act of recognition ultimately renders the free self into a 'spirit' by identifying it with the universal ethical community to which it naturally belonged, i.e. the Family. The ethical requirement that recognition must be accorded displays the ethic proper to the Family, and it is in the communal respect for the family cult of the dead that the true

²⁴⁸ Ibid, #452, p.271

²⁴⁹ Ibid

²⁵⁰ Ibid

²⁵¹ E. Levinas, Ibid, p.83

ethical substance comes to exist. As such, for Hegel, the obligation to bury the dead is an absolute and infinite responsibility. To claim that burial is essentially the very essence of Divine Law is to believe that no humanly constituted authority ought to interfere with the way that 'custom' has structured the very 'feelings' that exist as recognised bonds of kinship. For Hegel, the ceremony of burial is the only genuine ethical aspect of custom beyond the range of self-conscious human authority. As an infinite responsibility or obligation, it must remain unconditional. He writes:

'This last duty thus constitutes the perfect divine law, or the positive ethical action towards the individual. Every other relationship to him... belongs to human law and has the negative significance of raising the individual above his confinement within the natural community to which he in his [natural] existence belongs.'²⁵²

Levinas argues that within the act or ceremony of burial 'there is an exceptional relationship of the living with the dead'. The burial rite is a deliberate relationship of the living with death, through their relationship with the deceased. With this notion of an infinite responsibility for the death of the Other Hegel's thought approaches a certain proximity to Levinas's notion of a thought of nothingness proper to death, a thought of the nothingness of death as a 'responsibility according to the measure or the beyond-measure of death... to the beyond-measure of the infinite'.²⁵³ There is at this moment in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Levinas claims, a notion of death as a scandal 'measurable' *only* through the affective qualities that the death of the other reveals as the infinity of the survivor's responsibility. Levinas claims: 'Here, death is thought and not simply described. It is a necessary moment in the conceptual progress of thought itself, and in this sense it is thought.'²⁵⁴ What Levinas admires about this moment in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is that death is not merely being described but that its negativity is being thought. It is thought as a necessary moment of the movement of Spirit toward itself, a necessary moment in the history of Spirit, and as such it is thought, Levinas claims, in the least reifying manner possible. However, in the midst of what he reveres as a thinking of death, Levinas wonders whether there is not something deeply unfounded in the description:

²⁵² G.W.F. Hegel, *Ibid.*, #453, p.271

²⁵³ E. Levinas, *Ibid.*, p.79

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.86

'We must wonder whether there is not, in these descriptions, a supplementary element – already stemming from the fact that the region of death is identified with the earth – just as there is also something unfounded in the description, that is, the relationship of death and of blood... In this composition of the idea of ground, or final ground, this ground of being and death, there is a certain phenomenal model that seems to remain in Hegel... A supplementary step is made when the return to the elements is interpreted as a return to the ground of being.'²⁵⁵

The exemplary case would be, he argues, the relationship that Hegel surreptitiously establishes between *death* and *blood*. Burial of the dead is accomplished by the blood relatives despite the fact that we are clearly within the dimension of citizenship. Likewise, Levinas wonders whether it is legitimate, i.e. whether it is adequate to the level of nothingness proper to death, to 'recover' or 'raise up' this exception in and through the funeral ceremony accomplished in the guise of a burial or in-humation, of a meeting of the deceased with what Hegel calls the 'elementary individual'. Levinas questions the validity of this union of the deceased with the elemental, with the earth, as a return to the depths, to the very bottom of being beyond nothingness. He asks:

'Is Hegel not drawing from a symbol a meaning that does not escape the model of the world? Everything seems to be modelled on the relation of the living to the dead. There is the earth, where the blood relatives carry out the burial, the earth is something particular in reality (Hegel calls this the 'elemental individual'). But at the same time the earth is not a particular thing but an element, in which there is something other than things... The earth... refers to a fundamental *where*, to a stable ground by which precisely the earth is defined. From there comes the temptation to take the ground of things for the ground of being. Burial is interpreted as the return to the ground, and the ground of the earth as the ground of being... Thus there is a passage from the phenomenal order to the nonphenomenal order of the earth, that is, a passage from the bottom of things to the bottom of being. In this way, death is thought in the world as a moment of the grasping of self by self.'²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Ibid. pp.86-7

²⁵⁶ Ibid. p.89

Hegel's thinking of the nothingness of death in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, despite approaching a thought proper to death, remains for Levinas fundamentally conditioned by the fact that it is being thought of as a necessary moment in the history of Spirit. The thought of the nothingness of death is reduced to the status of a mere synchronic moment recovered within Hegel's immanent phenomenology. Hegel's evocation of a thought of the scandal of the nothingness of death as an infinite responsibility upon the survivor signifies an enduring diachronic moment. It signifies, for Levinas, an unrecoverable excess that Hegel's argument concerning the ultimate union enacted by burial between the deceased and the depths of the earth (as the depths of being) functions to efface. For Hegel the nothingness of death, its scandal, is ultimately recovered by the unifying act of burial undertaken by the survivors (i.e. the blood relatives or the 'family'), and death becomes inscribed once more in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a necessary negative moment of the synchronic immanent order, a moment in the progress of Spirit towards Absolute Knowledge. For Levinas the thought of the nothingness of death approached here by Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* demonstrates clearly the very essence of the negativity associated with Hegelian dialectic. For Levinas the Hegelian dialectic is a 'dialectic in which diachronically traversed moments are recovered, that is, identified, sublimated, and conserved...the identity of the identical and the non-identical'.²⁵⁷ It is Levinas's contention that Hegel's dialectic ultimately functions to reduce the 'scandal' of the nothingness proper to death. Despite approaching a thinking of death based on a thinking about the relationship with the deceased, Hegel ultimately effaces the significance of the very concreteness of the impossibility of abandoning the other to his or her solitude, the impossibility of leaving him alone to bear the scandal of the nothingness of death. Within Hegel's phenomenological dialectic there is a reduction of what, for Levinas, can only be thought of as an irreducible diachronic interruption to a merely immanent vicissitude of totalising dialectic. By seeking to uncover and emphasise what he claims are moments of irreducible diachrony Levinas is attempting to articulate a justified and coherent resistance to Hegel's attempt to construct a stable totality of the history of consciousness. Levinas must be read, we claim, as

²⁵⁷ E. Levinas, 'Philosophy and Awakening' in *Entre Nous: Essais sur le penser-à-l'autre* (Editions Bernard Grasset et Fasquelle, 1991) in English as *Entre Nous - On Thinking-of-the-Other*, translated by M.B. Smith and B. Harshav (London: The Athlone Press, 1998), p.79

interrupting that process whereby consciousness acts to gather itself up into a unity or totality and become in 'full possession of self'.

To conclude, Levinas argues that Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* approaches a thinking adequate to the radical excess or scandal of the nothingness proper to death. However, insofar as death becomes reduced by Hegel's account to a 'moment in the appearance of the world' and rendered 'intelligible to the survivors, death loses its sense of transcendental excess, or its 'sting'. It becomes reduced by customs that come to organise it, and which function to reduce the scandal of the death of the other as an intra-worldly event; 'Hegel always focuses on death in an interpretation of the behaviour of the survivor. As a moment in the appearing of the world, death is intelligible.'²⁵⁸ The objections Levinas raises here to Hegel are important ones for they fundamentally share what Levinas will oppose in Hegel's *Science of Logic* too and we will proceed by examining those objections as they are articulated in Levinas's lectures.

(ii) - Levinas's Reading of Hegel's 'Logic'

In the lectures on Hegel's *Science of Logic* given as part of his course 'Death and Time', Levinas claims that there is indeed a thinking of 'nothingness'. However, he claims that it is inadequate since it is conceived by Hegel as *awaiting* being, as *desiring* being or passing *into* being. Hegel's thinking of nothingness is not, and cannot be, he claims, the result of a purely negative operation that repels being. In the lectures on 'Ontotheology', he claims that Hegelian 'negation keeps, on the soles of its shoes, the dust of the ground it left behind it. All nothingness is the nothing of something, and this something, whose nothing remains nothingness, remains thought. Being and nothingness are linked.'²⁵⁹ Given such an understanding of Hegel's notion of nothingness Levinas's initial question has a distinctly Schellingean flavour²⁶⁰, i.e. whether there is the presence of an implicit and illegitimate teleology operative in the *Science of Logic*:

²⁵⁸ E. Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, p.89

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p.124

²⁶⁰ See our earlier discussion of Schelling's critique of Hegel's *Science of Logic* and his comments regarding the presence of an implicit and inevitable teleology within it.

'One may...wonder whether one is not supposing entities as already there. One may wonder whether the beginning is not, thus, the beginning of some thing, the beginning of *that which* begins. This is a beginning...that has the structure of a something.'²⁶¹

With this Schellingean question in mind Levinas begins a detailed analysis of the introductory remarks made by Hegel in the *Science of Logic* regarding 'beginning'.²⁶² He immediately identifies Hegel's arguments for the necessity of beginning philosophical science without extraneous determination:

'Hegel says that the beginning cannot first be thought of as determinate. We must take the beginning in indetermination and in its immediacy. The beginning of philosophy thus becomes a philosophy of the beginning.'²⁶³

We must ask whether Levinas is merely repeating the Schellingean form of critique with regard to Hegel's *Science of Logic*. As we outlined in our earlier examination of Schelling, Hegel argues in the *Science of Logic* that thought is no longer presupposed as an ability to establish relevant propositions regarding being.²⁶⁴ Rather, he claims, thought is now able to articulate the actual structure of real Being by pursuing an absolutely presuppositionless speculative logical discourse. Thus Hegel begins philosophical science with the thought of pure being rather than the thought of nothing; i.e. he begins with the thought of pure Being, of what *is* without any further determination:

'The beginning must be an *absolute*...it may not presuppose anything, must not be mediated by anything nor have a ground; rather it is to be itself the ground of the entire science. Consequently, it must be purely and simply an immediacy, or rather merely *immediacy* itself. Just as it cannot possess any determination relatively to anything else, so too it cannot contain within itself any determination, any content; for

²⁶¹ E. Levinas, *Ibid*, p.73

²⁶² See G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 'With What Must the Science Begin?', pp.67-78

²⁶³ E. Levinas, *Ibid*, p.72

²⁶⁴ Indeed, as we have argued, it was the role of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to deconstruct such a view and allow the transition to genuine philosophical science.

any such would be a distinguishing and an inter-relationship of distinct moments, and consequently a mediation. The beginning there is *pure being*.²⁶⁵

In order to distinguish the genuine radicality of Hegel's thought of 'beginning' Levinas begins by raising Schellingean concerns regarding implicit teleology. This is performed by way of an account of Hegel's own consideration of an alternative proposal of beginning other than with pure indeterminate being. In the remarks considered by Levinas, Hegel addresses an alternative demand regarding how philosophical science is to begin; this alternative demand is that a *pure* or *absolute* beginning be made just with the very notion of 'beginning':

'In that case, we have nothing but the beginning itself, and it remains to be seen what this is...thus we should have nothing at all beyond the general idea of a mere beginning as such. We have therefore only to see what is contained in such an idea.'²⁶⁶

By thinking what is 'contained' in this notion of pure or absolute 'beginning' and what is implied by it, and by contrasting it with his own notion of an immanent presuppositionless beginning with pure being, Hegel is able to demonstrate the fact that beginning with 'beginning' contains an implicit teleology. With a notion of simple, immediate and pure beginning there is a notion of *nothing* from which there is to become something. He claims that there is not a pure nothing but a nothing from which *something* is to proceed; therefore being is already contained within such a notion of beginning. The point of Hegel's consideration here is that by attempting to begin with a notion of pure absolute beginning one begins with an unwarranted implicit notion of a 'not-yet': 'The beginning points to something else – it is a non-being which carries a reference to being as to an other; that which begins, as yet is not, it is only on the way to being.'²⁶⁷ The idea of 'beginning' contains an unwarranted moment of mediation, and as such is clearly illegitimate from Hegel's presuppositionless perspective. For Hegel genuine beginning ought not to be already a first *and* an other, 'for anything which is in its own self a first and an other implies

²⁶⁵ G. W.F. Hegel, *Ibid.*, p. 70

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 73–4

that an advance has already been made.²⁶⁸ By concentrating initially upon these considerations by Hegel Levinas is able to distinguish his own subsequent critique from what we have identified as Schellingean critique. Levinas is able to demonstrate that he recognises Hegel's thought to be not nearly as naive as Schelling had maintained. Indeed he recognises that it is in fact a good deal more sophisticated and 'is, in fact, much more radical than this.'²⁶⁹ He distinguishes Hegel's actual beginning to philosophical science from the Schellingean approach that insists upon the presence of an implicit and inevitable teleology. Once he has differentiated himself from such an account, he is able to return to a much more faithful account of Hegel's *Science of Logic* and subsequently articulate a much more sophisticated, original and radical critique.

Levinas proceeds by outlining Hegel's argument that by beginning with the thought of pure being (being without determination) thought will immediately and logically develop into the thought of becoming. This rests upon the fact that pure being is shown to immediately vanish into the thought of pure nothing: 'There is nothing to be intuited in it...Being, the indeterminate immediate, is in fact nothing, and neither more nor less than nothing.'²⁷⁰ The thought of pure being vanishes into the thought of pure nothing. This is a transition to a different notion than pure being but equally one into which pure being vanishes. When one attempts to think that pure nothing, it is logically 'simply equality with itself, complete emptiness, absence of all determination and content – undifferentiatedness in itself.'²⁷¹ The thought of pure nothing is shown to logically and immediately vanish back into the thought of pure being. A logical distinction initially emerges insofar as 'it counts as a distinction whether something or nothing is intuited or thought'²⁷², but that distinction immediately vanishes when thought. It vanishes because by thinking pure nothing 'nothing *is* (exists) in our intuiting or thinking, or rather it is empty intuition and thought itself, and the same empty intuition or thought as pure being.'²⁷³ Therefore the thought of pure nothing immediately vanishes back into the thought of pure being:

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p. 75

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 73

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 82

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² *Ibid.*

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

'Nothing is, therefore, the same determination, or rather absence of determination, and thus altogether the same as, pure being.'²⁷⁴

What we have here is a speculative proposition or thinking, i.e. 'Being is Nothing', where two terms despite being conceptually differentiated by thought, cannot in fact be held apart and as such form an identity. Hence that which defines being also appears to define nothing. They are conceptually differentiated insofar as thought necessarily moves immanently *from* thinking being *to* thinking nothing, and from nothing back to being. The logical moment, which is the immediate vanishing of one into another, indicates that they are conceptually differentiated but that thought cannot sustain them apart from one another. Thought must either, Hegel claims, remain at this level of an eternal vacillation or must come to consider the logic of the very movement by which each vanishes immediately into the other and then back again. This logical process of immediate vanishing, this vacillation, is an identity but not a static one. It would seem that it is not (as we demonstrated earlier with our analysis of Schelling's critique of Hegel's *Science of Logic*) a matter of an unwarranted and naive introduction of a notion of becoming; rather 'becoming' for Hegel describes the immanent movement of the differentiated moments of pure being and pure nothing:

'Their truth is, therefore, this movement of the immediate vanishing of the one in the other: becoming, a movement in which both are distinguished, but by a difference which has equally immediately resolved itself.'²⁷⁵

By coming to focus upon this movement thought is able to discern a logically immanent notion of what enables the two categories of pure nothing and pure being to be *differentiated* and sustained as *related* moments of 'becoming'. This movement from being to nothing to becoming is, Hegel claims, purely immanent insofar as it does not rely upon an unwarranted and illegitimate interpolation of a teleological notion of a 'not yet real being' or 'being to come'. Levinas's recognition of this aspect of Hegel's thinking represents (despite the fact that he does not make any explicit mention of it) a fundamental rejection of a Schellingean approach to Hegel's thought

²⁷⁴ Ibid

²⁷⁵ Ibid

in favour of, on the one hand, a far more faithful understanding of what Hegel's thought is, and on the other a much more radical and successful critical strategy.

This critical strategy rests upon Levinas's accurate understanding of what Hegel understood the truth of Being and Nothing to be, i.e. their absolute difference. This notion of absolute difference is offered as a passage or a process – 'a movement of the disappearing of the one in the other... a movement wherein the two are different, but they are so by way of a difference which has dissolved just as immediately.'²⁷⁶ This passage, process or movement is what Hegel terms 'Becoming'. Levinas claims that Hegel's thought of Pure Being (a thought limited by nothing) and Pure Nothing (a thought limited by being) generates two distinct logical notions; i.e. the notions are generated reciprocally from each other. For Levinas this precise movement represents the very essence of Hegel's view that the *process* or *movement* of thought rather than the reified abstractions of the understanding, *is* reality. Since Pure Being and Pure Nothing mutually implicate each other they cannot exist as abstracted, isolated or reified notions. Their truth is the process of thinking them together speculatively. Levinas acknowledges that this process does not exclude contradiction but *is* contradiction. Thus it is not a matter of a contradiction between two abstract notions for the understanding but contradiction as a single notion for reason. Contradiction as a single notion is generated by reason's ability to deny the negativity between the notions of Pure Being and Pure Nothing when abstractly considered and thus create a process, passage or movement. The notion of Pure Nothing signifies in Hegel's *Science of Logic* the non-existence or unsustainability of 'nothingness in its pure state' just as Pure Being signifies the non-existence of being in its pure state. The one and the other signify their impossibility and unsustainability as abstract notions, or, as Levinas claims, their 'already-being-within-becoming'. Levinas acknowledges that for Hegel these notions appear as abstracted and opposed to one another simply because they have not yet been sufficiently thought:

'To think that being goes into nothingness as separated and separable nothingness, is a thought insufficiently thought. There is no separable nothingness.'²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ Ibid, p.76

²⁷⁷ Ibid, p.76

For Hegel thought has yet to discover the corresponding negations that will de-reify these entities into 'moments' of 'becoming' and deprive them of their abstract independence. 'Becoming' is the purely logical existence that signifies the non-existence of being in its pure state and the non-existence of nothing in its pure state, by preceding them: 'Becoming is the absolute, and, consequently, one cannot think before this.'²⁷⁸ Indeed, Levinas acknowledges Hegel's claim that 'One cannot think being and nothingness without becoming.'²⁷⁹ What this ultimately signifies is that the *origin* or *substratum* in Hegel is a process that creates everything else and that that origin or substratum is thought itself. Levinas's identification of this substratum allows him to claim that Hegel's thinking of Pure Nothing is always tied to being. In many ways it is paradigmatic for Levinas of how Hegelian negativity operates. Such negativity does not resemble the delirious skeptical negativity that Levinas associates with the pre-original proximity of the Other, but represents a constrained form of negativity always thought within the Same.

For Levinas Hegel's identity of the difference between Pure Being and Nothing represents a speculative proposition, i.e. a thought of pure reason rather than an act of understanding that 'separates' notions. Hegel's speculative identity cannot be justified, he claims, through definitions since Hegel demonstrates that every definition already presupposes the speculative identity. As Levinas writes, 'every definition is an analysis, a separation, and presupposes the thought of the non-separable.'²⁸⁰ For Levinas the consequence of Hegel's arguments are that we are unable to name a difference between Pure Being and Pure Nothing since such a differentiation would always entail reification and abstraction which themselves presuppose a pre-original speculative identity. Ultimately, Levinas claims:

'Difference therefore does not turn on what they are in themselves. The difference appears here as that which embraces them: it is in becoming that the difference exists, and becoming is only possible by reason of this distinction.'²⁸¹

²⁷⁸ Ibid, p.74

²⁷⁹ Ibid, p.76

²⁸⁰ Ibid, p.77

²⁸¹ Ibid, p.78

Clearly Hegel's notion of Pure Nothing does not exceed the process, passage or movement of becoming that encompasses it at the same time as it comprehends Pure Being. Hegel writes:

'Both are the same, becoming, and although they differ so in direction they interpenetrate and paralyse each other. The one is ceasing-to-be: being passes over into nothing, but nothing is equally the opposite of itself, transition into being, coming-to-be. This coming-to-be is the other direction: nothing passes over into being, but being equally sublates itself and is rather transition into nothing, is ceasing-to-be. They are not reciprocally sublated – the one does not sublate the other externally – but each sublates itself in itself and is in its own self the opposite of itself.'²⁸²

Hegel's thinking of Nothingness here represents for Levinas a paradigmatic instance of thinking the Same, and he simply asks whether 'death is equivalent to this nothingness tied to being?'²⁸³ Clearly for Levinas it is not. For Levinas the nothingness proper to death is a *total* nothingness: 'In death, one does not make an abstraction of being – it is of us that an abstraction is made.'²⁸⁴ The thought of nothingness proper to death is for Levinas an utter annihilation that cannot be thought adequately within the merely speculative proposition of an identity between Being and Nothing. This annihilation proper to death, for Levinas, signifies primarily through emotional and ethically affective categories such as anxiety and responsibility for the death of the Other. Thus Hegel's account affirms the non-existence or understanding of this abstract Nothingness. In this sense Levinas argues that Hegel's speculative proposition ultimately repeats, in a speculative mode, the Aristotelian definition of change, of the *metabolē*. Thus, as it was for Aristotle, disappearing is only the inverse of coming-into-being, i.e. it is the *same* thing.

²⁸² G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p.106

²⁸³ E. Levinas, *Ibid.* p.78

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p.78

IX – Conclusion: A Persistent Skepticism

We have argued throughout this thesis that the essence of Hegel's philosophy represents a radicalisation of Pyrrhonian skepticism and a reformulation of the critical negativity associated with the essence of that skepticism into the principle of immanent dialectic capable of generating an authentic philosophical science of the Real. We have argued that the 19th Century post-Hegelians sought to further radicalise skeptical negativity in an effort to articulate a notion necessarily excessive to Hegel's philosophical science of the All. However, we sought to identify the way in which each of the three approaches adopted by Schelling, Feuerbach and Kierkegaard had significant weaknesses. These weaknesses concerned not only their failure to articulate a legitimate notion of skeptical opposition to Hegel's speculative philosophy, but also their failure to fully comprehend Hegel's thought, particularly the way in which he had aligned his thought with the critical essence of skepticism itself.

We have attempted to argue that Levinas's thought, despite being located upon the post-Hegelian trajectory initiated by the 19th Century post-Hegelians we have discussed, does not repeat their mistakes with regard to Hegel. We have attempted to provide an account of the development of Levinas's ethics as first philosophy by explicitly aligning it with the critical and negative force of skeptical opposition to philosophical reason. Such an alignment has allowed us to counterpoise Levinas's thought to that of Hegel's in a clear and hopefully illuminating way. By understanding how Levinas radicalises the notion of skeptical opposition to philosophical reason with the notion of the ethical affectivity of the Other we have tried to demonstrate how Levinas is able to argue that Hegel's philosophy (itself a radical reformulation of the relationship between skepticism and reason) fails to adequately think the radically negative quality of the Other.

Through our analysis of Levinas's lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Science of Logic* we have attempted to demonstrate how Levinas argues that Hegel's thought emerges from a pre-original identity, origin or substratum. This pre-original substratum is the movement of becoming, and Levinas recognises the degree to which Hegel attempts to radically align his own philosophical thought with the

pure immanent becoming of thought or reason. By aligning his philosophical science with the pre-original substratum of the movement of becoming in pure reason or thought, Levinas claims, Hegel's thought merely displays a thinking of that substratum itself. For Levinas it *is* thus paradigmatic of a thought of the Same. It is the pure self-relation of absolute rationality grounded upon a pre-original substratum of becoming rather than a genuinely radical critical essence. The critical essence that Hegel identifies as inherent within pure immanence supposedly emerges from a radical reformulation of what Hegel takes to be the essence of the historical manifestation of genuine ancient Pyrrhonism. From Hegel's reformulated perspective skepticism as an abstract negative force of opposition to reason becomes unsustainable, impossible and self-refuting. If such an abstract skeptical opposition is maintained it signifies nothing more for Hegel than a wilful naivety and dogmatism.

Levinas clearly understands this aspect of Hegel's thought and the inevitable difficulties entailed by maintaining a skeptical opposition to pure speculative reason. Yet he proceeds to develop a nuanced and sophisticated skeptical strategy that avoids the weaknesses and failures of his 19th Century predecessors. This strategy, as we have tried to show, involves a radical re-alignment of the critical essence of skepticism with a notion of pre-original separation between the Same and the Other. This pre-original separation is conceived as the essence of the persistent force of skepticism, but is not a separation maintained through mere wilful opposition to reason by the subject. Rather, for Levinas the pre-original separation is maintained by the alterity of the Other and thus the skeptical disruption comes from the pre-original obligation that the Other inscribes into Being and thought. For Levinas this notion of a pre-original separation is always more radical than the type of pre-original speculative identity of becoming thought by Hegelian Idealism. Yet he acknowledges that such separation can only ever be articulated in the language of reason, and that language clearly presupposes the type of pre-original identity that Hegel discloses. For this reason Levinas argues that pre-original separation of the Same and the Other must be signified through an understanding of how the radical persistence of skepticism functions to constantly disrupt the pre-original identity of the rational discourse in which it itself becomes disclosed and refuted. For Levinas by understanding how the genuine critical essence of skepticism persists and signifies an element beyond reason one is able to glimpse the radical separation of the Other that

is always already inscribed within the very texture and topology of rationality, thought and being.

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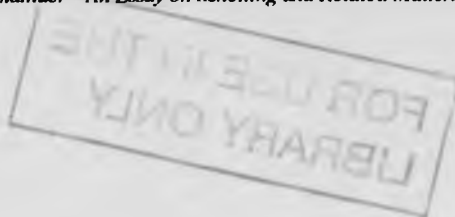
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