Hegel and Religion: Avoiding Double Truth, Twice

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When I was first studying Hegel, I encountered quite divergent readings of his views on religion. The teacher who first presented Hegel to me was a Jesuit, Quentin Lauer at Fordham University, who read Hegel as a Christian theologian providing a better metaphysical system for understanding the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation. When I studied at Yale University, Kenley Dove read Hegel as the first thoroughly atheistic philosopher who presented the conditions of thought without reference to any foundational absolute being. Meanwhile, also at Yale, John Findlay read us a deeply Neo-Platonic Hegel who taught about absolute forms held in a cosmic mind. In giving my own reading, I want to talk about the ways Hegel redefines both metaphysics and religion. I would like to approach these issues by way of the medieval controversy over double truth, which was a previous conflict between religion and science.[1]

I. Double Truth

In the thirteenth century, Aristotle's scientific and philosophical texts were becoming available in European universities from the Muslims in Spain. These texts offered a well-argued, systematic, and more comprehensive scientific view of the universe and its god. Reading Aristotle, people quickly realised that his ideas contradicted some Christian (and Muslim) doctrines. For example, Aristotle argued that the world could not have had a beginning in time, while the religious revelations told of a first moment of divine creation. Aristotle's obscure treatment of the active intellect seemed to argue that there was no individual immortal soul, while the revelations spoke of individual survival after death. And Aristotle's god, the totally self-absorbed first mover, the pure actuality, seemed useless for religious purposes.

Especially during his second stay at the University of Paris, Thomas Aquinas worked to reconcile Aristotelian science with Christian religion. In doing so, he borrowed ideas from earlier Muslim philosopher-theologians, especially from Alfarabi and Avicenna, who had faced the same conflicts. Aquinas adopted their strategy of using Neo-Platonic conceptual tools to modify Aristotle. Using his theory of pure being and existence [*esse*] and a reinterpretation of efficient causality, Aquinas could build a generally Aristotelian conceptual scheme detailing what kinds of entities were real and what they could be and do. His Neo-Platonic adaptations helped soften and

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reinterpret Aristotle on the points of conflict with scriptural statements about God, persons, and the physical world. Aquinas' synthesis became enormously influential in later centuries. But it did not prevent him from being included in the grand condemnation issued by the Bishop of Paris in 1277, three years after Aquinas' early death.

Behind that condemnation was a fear of the force of Aristotle's arguments about the mind and the physical world. The condemnation couched this fear in a denial of the theory of double truth, and this with some reason. Following the expert commentaries on Aristotle written by Averroes in Spain, some philosophers in Paris taught that Aristotle's science should be taken straight as the best available picture of the world, neither watered down nor Neo-Platonized. The resulting conflicts with religion should be admitted, but both sides retained. Revelation was indisputable but also Aristotle's arguments were correct. These thinkers were accused of holding the theory of double truth.[2]

Double truth asserted that both sides were true. In its boldest form, a theory of double truth would claim that there is a set of truths established by science and philosophy, and another set of truths established by revelation and theology, and the two sets contradict each other but both are true. It is unclear if anyone actually held this hard version of double truth, though accusations of it were flung about. It is more likely that proponents taught that religion and science were true in different ways, a view still around today. Or they held that religion and science were aimed at different audiences, offering respectively a figurative truth for the common believer, and a deeper, more accurate scientific truth for the sophisticated intellectual. Call this a soft double truth. Maimonides, perhaps, and Averroes, almost certainly, held views of this latter sort; and if so, they had to be very cautious about expressing them.

Double truth was a pitfall to be avoided. But the medieval thinkers were in danger of falling into it because they saw both religion and science as making truth claims about the physical world, historical events, and our minds and individual fate. Both religion and science offered normative lists of what kinds of entities filled the population of the world, with their histories and their possible behaviours. The Aristotelians offered a list of what kinds of entities could exist, what it meant to exist, and the essential possibilities and actions for different kinds of entities. Religious stories seemed to presuppose a different list.

When they did not directly conflict, these lists could still have difficult relations. To take an extreme example, Aquinas struggles mightily to reconcile his metaphysics of individual substance and his theory of how the intellect works with the many different things the Scriptures and traditions state about the existence and behaviour of angels.[3] He translates religious imagery into his Neo-Platonized Aristotelian categories, which dictate the allowable types of entities, analysing in those terms how a purely immaterial yet finite intellect could be possible, and how it could do the things

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angels were said to do: carry messages, appear in a body, influence material objects. The religious beings from the stories were fitted into his metaphysical picture of what could exist.

Centuries later, during the anti-Aristotelian scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Leibniz faced similar problems reconciling a now mechanistic science with religion. Like Aquinas, he found the key in a revised metaphysics. Redefining what it meant to be, and rethinking the notions of force, physical being, space, time, and causality according to his *Monadology*, Leibniz provided his own normative list of what entities were real and how they could act. Religious claims were then mapped onto this metaphysical picture of the world. Leibniz was less concerned than Aquinas for the details of traditional beliefs, and only restated a few basic religious claims. But his strategy was similar: figure out what beings were metaphysically possible and then translate the religious doctrines into this more disciplined language.

II. Philosophy and Religion

When Hegel explicitly distinguishes philosophy from religion as two forms of absolute spirit, and says they both have the same object, he sets the two up to have their relation further clarified. Hegel's statements about the role of religion in politics and society, where religion gives a content to the feelings which we all should feel toward the social whole and our place in a rational world (E 270), suggest a distinction between truth as presented figuratively to the common person — including the common person in each of us — and truth as known to pure thought, translated into a proper metaphysical language. This can be read as the soft version of double truth.

But such a reading would be mistaken. In fact, Hegel changes both sides of the relation: he did not allow religion to make truth claims about the empirical world, and he did not provide a metaphysical list of entities and their behaviours into which religion should be translated. I am, then, arguing against those who see Hegel as doing what Aquinas and Leibniz did, discerning the normative set of metaphysical commitments and mapping religious claims onto that report about the world. Hegel is in the tradition of those who confront religion with the latest and greatest *Wissenschaft*. But for him, this was not empirical natural science but speculative philosophical science.

It may seem curious that the relation between religion and empirical natural science, so troublesome during both the medieval and the seventeenth-century scientific revolutions, so difficult after Darwin, and so contentious for many today, causes no worries for Hegel. There are several reasons for this. First, Hegel restricted the role of religion. He did not allow the Scriptures to speak about the details of the physical world, such as whether or not the earth goes around the sun, how old the

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earth might be, or the origins of species. Any biblical quotation that might be taken as evidence on such issues of natural history was to be read as representing another, inner meaning. Galileo-style conflicts were thus ruled out.[4] Religion in Hegel stays within its limits. The topics that were so prominent in the Muslim and Christian reactions to Aristotle, debates about whether the world had a beginning in time, about the nature of causality, about whether individual immortality was possible, do not arise when religion is read the way Hegel does. If you want to find out about the natural world, the age of the earth, the details of the solar system, Hegel tells you to go to empirical natural science. That science alone has the right to report on empirical facts. Nor does speculative philosophical logic dispute that right. Hegel says that philosophy adds necessity to empirical scientific laws and findings. It does not replace them. I will come back to what it means to 'add necessity', for Hegel also says this about the relation between philosophy and religion.

III. Religious Representations

If natural science delivers empirical facts, what does religion provide? We know Hegel's answer: religion provides representations, *Vorstellungen*. But religions do many things: inculcate and affirm beliefs, perform rituals, inspire music and art, offer personal counselling, make social affirmations, sanctify some political actors and actions while condemning others, and so on. Which part of what religions do counts as providing representations? In his rather essentialist characterisation of religion, Hegel talks about religious beliefs, religious feelings, and cultic actions as the vehicles of representations. Representations provide the contents that define the objects of religious feelings and so keep them from being dog-like and indeterminate (LPR 144). Representations also provide cognitive structure and historical memories for what is acted out in cultic performances.

Representations are in the ordinary believer's statements and actions; they are in traditions and scriptures. This sounds as if the figurative content of the naive believer's feelings form one pole for a theory of soft double truth. At the other pole, presumably, would be philosophical ontological commitments about what kinds of entities can exist and their necessary properties. Such non-figurative language is found in Aquinas, and Leibniz, and presumably Hegel. We would then compare these different metaphysical translations of religion and determine which one is best.

However, this picture is mistaken. For Hegel, there is a *three*-fold distinction to be made, not a double truth. There are, first, the religious representations, images, and histories. Second, there are metaphysical non-sensible representations and concepts of the understanding. Third, there is speculative philosophical logic.

Hegel says that representations include pictures, such as the image of God as a person who is wrathful or pleased, or the image of the tree of the knowledge of good

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and evil, or the Hindu pantheon's rich repertory of persons and images. He says that religion also provides histories of events that function as representations. Some of these stories are fictional, such as the antics of the Greek gods, and some narrate actual events, such as the life of Jesus (LPR 147). But those events, real or fictional as they may be, function as representations, not as empirical history. The life of Jesus, like the tales of Apollo or Vishnu, is to be read for inner meaning, not for historical truth (LPR 472).

Most importantly for my theme, Hegel also says that while most religious representations involve imagery and stories, there are also non-sensible representations. He gives as an example the concept of the creation of the world. Hegel is not talking here of some picture of a man in a white beard standing amid chaos and calling it to order. He is talking about the theological concept of creation, even when freed from pictorial elements. Creation is like a representation rather than a true speculative concept because it thinks an event where one being makes another separate being. The coherence of the two sides (God and world) is not seen as necessary; instead, we are given a concept of a special contingent external relation of causality between two entities (LPR 421).

Thus, religious representations include more than sensible pictures and figurative stories. Representation can use abstract concepts, and these remain like representations when they speak of independent items. The form of representation is that things (imaged or conceived) are related simply to themselves, as if independent (LPR 149n85). So Hegel classes as representations the way the attributes of God (wisdom, power, love, etc.) are kept separate from one another (LPR 421). Concepts of the understanding affirm isolated determinations (LPR 152). These contrast with the fully speculative logical form of thought, which is an inner manifold that embraces connection, contradiction, and necessity (LPR 154). To the extent that theological concepts stay on the level of the understanding, without necessary dialectical connections, they are closer to representation than to logic and pure thought. So, theology is offering representations not only when it talks figuratively but also when it employs what Hegel calls concepts of the understanding.[5]

Thus, much of the content of Aquinas' and Leibniz's theological elaborations consist of what Hegel would call non-sensible representations that employ concepts of the understanding. The concepts affirm determinations and entities that stand alongside each other, each independently definite, with contingent relations that lack speculative unification. When Hegel says that concepts of the understanding stand closer to religious representations, he is implying that truth claims made with these concepts are not rivals for what he is doing in his logic. They are more like the results of empirical science, to be commented on, located, and perhaps undermined by the logic.

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IV. Representations and Concepts

In making these distinctions, I have been a little unfair to Aquinas and Leibniz. I can be more precise: when Aquinas gives a theological elaboration of the Trinity as internal relations within one quasi-Aristotelian substance, or talks of God as the identity of existence and essence, or when he uses an Aristotelian Neo-platonic theory of causality to explicate theological conundrums, or when Leibniz offers his concept of God as the supreme monad, Aquinas and, to a less explicit extent, Leibniz are actually engaging in two different activities that can be pried apart. The first activity uses concepts of the understanding and is close to representations. Here Aquinas and Leibniz develop normative lists of what kinds of entities are real, their essential characteristics and capabilities, and what kind of relations they can enter into. Then, Aquinas and Leibniz map religious stories onto that list that defines who the agents really are and what they can do. When Aquinas is describing souls, angels, or the persons of the Trinity, he is translating religious representations into language using terms from his metaphysics — definitions and relations employing abstract concepts of the understanding, which remain for Hegel in the vicinity of representations.

There is, however, a second and more fundamental activity, more explicit in Aquinas than in Leibniz, using concepts of a different kind. When Aquinas discusses being and existence in general, for instance, in his treatise *On Being and Existence (De Ente et Essentia),* he is developing concepts about what it means to be and to be thought. These concepts apply to any entity and are somewhat independent of the detailed normative list of entities. This is especially so when Aquinas describes what the medievals called 'transcendental concepts' (*ens, unum, verum, bonum*, *res*; being, one, true, good, thing, which are all versions of the concept of being). As Plato observed *(Sophist* 254-259*)*, the Forms of being and unity and sameness and difference are involved in special ways with all the other Forms. Aristotle then argued, and Aquinas agreed, that the concept of being does not name a genus.[6] It does not get divided; it is equally true of whatever entities are discussed. In such discussions, those thinkers are close to what Hegel is trying to do in his logic, discussing the meaning of being prior to any list of beings, and detailing the fundamental structures of intelligibility that make concepts of the understanding possible.

Aquinas is involved in two activities, sketching the basic meaning of being and the structure of intelligibility, and then providing a normative list of what can exist. Hegel also does both of these activities, but in different parts of his system. Hegel's list of what entities are real comes not in his speculative logic but in his *Realphilosophie*, relying on natural science and historical experience.

The speculative logic provides something different and more basic. It gives us logical categories that are transcendental in the old medieval sense as well as in something like the Kantian sense, that is, they apply to any being that can be thought

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or be. The logic develops — and its method of development is part of what it develops — categories that describe what it means to be and how entities are to be thought. These categories do not form an inventory of approved entities; they give the basic structure and movements of the thought that can discover and develop lists of entities.

The logical categories, like the old transcendental concepts, are applied on many levels. Hegel's logic does not offer a single normative list of actual entities. The logic does not provide a recipe for reducing talk about lions and tigers and bears, and stars and politics and artworks and God down to some basic vocabulary which designates the true entities in the way that Leibniz's theory offers you a translation of talk about those other entities into talk about monads.

Hegel's logic does not replace the other levels it is related to. We continue to talk about entities in nature using science and common sense description. But we see through or under such talk, or in it, the working of the categories of the logic. Those categories are manifested through ordinary language; they do not replace it. We come to understand better how the ordinary languages of the various levels and subject areas embody the categories of thought.

V. Logical Categories in Science and Religion

But wait, I hear someone say. Hegel is not afraid to use the categories of the logic to discuss, say, magnetism (E 314), and also he is willing to take stands on scientific issues, such as the existence of completely independent atoms of matter (E 298). True, he does. But this is not because the logic offers a substitute natural science but, rather, because of the implications of the logic for what can be thought and said fully. The logic limns the underlying structure and movements of thought, and this shows that some proposed theories about nature, physical atomism, for instance, rely on foundational categories about being and unity which are not logically stable, categories which will shatter and change, backing different interpretations of nature.[7]

Hegel is not directly confronting an empirical theory with a rival empirical theory, but is trying to show the weakness of the deficient theory's basic presuppositions. When there were extant rival empirical theories, as was the case in the disputes at the beginnings of chemistry, say, or of embryology, Hegel might support one of the rivals, but this would not be because speculative logic leads directly to empirical conclusions. Rather, it is because the logic could comment on the basic categories and motions of thought presumed by the two theories.[8]

This mode of critique shows up also in Hegel's treatment of religion. Hegel's wife was disturbed when she realised he might not believe in the individual immortality of the soul (Pinkard 2000: 577). This would be an example where the logic of finitude suggests that religious imagery should not be interpreted in such a

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literal way. When Spinoza, on the other hand, discusses individual immortality, he does so with reference to an articulated theory about what substances exist and what kind of attributes and modes they can have or not have.[9] When Hegel shies away from immortality, he does so not on the basis of a list of acceptable entities, but on the basis of the appropriate categories for thinking finite individuality on whatever level and of whatever kind of empirical substances and modifications there might be.

VI. Providing Necessity

Hegel says his logical categories provide necessity for natural scientific results. The logic shows how the thought of determinate finite reality leads to a connected series of categories describing ever more complex and self-involved kinds of unity. Natural science describes what entities exist, and the logic shows how an underlying structure of intelligibility allows and grounds the kinds of laws and unities the sciences discover. When Hegel speaks of adding necessity, he is not saying that the logic will deduce empirical details such as Krug's pen (see Hegel's footnote to E 250). He is talking about rationally necessary general features of nature. But even with that restriction, it is still unclear what 'adding necessity' means.

We might imagine Hegel adding necessity to laws of nature by doing what Spinoza did, providing a deduction of some basic principles about matter and force from general metaphysical principles and lists of what kinds of entities are possible. But I have been arguing that Hegel is not providing metaphysical principles and lists of that sort. The dialectic is not just a more devious way of performing Spinoza's task.

We might then imagine Hegel adding necessity by doing what Kant tried to do, providing general conditions of thought that require that certain physical principles and laws be necessarily affirmed as conditions for there being experience at all. For Kant, this includes not just the law of causality from the first *Critique*, but also the more detailed laws of matter in his *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, and the planned deductions that remained unachieved in his *Opus Postumum*.

This is closer to Hegel, but still not quite right. For one thing, Hegel's logic aims to provide not Kantian conditions of possibility for appearance, but the basic self-reflected patterns and motions of thinking *and* being, since Kant's split between thought and being is denied in the logic, which is meant to encompass and enfold any duality that tries to locate the logical categories on one side and something else on another side. Those patterns of thought are laid out in the third part of the logic, in the dialectic of universal, particular, individual, and in the sections on judgment and syllogism. The two earlier parts of the logic expound more immediate (and more familiar) categories that turn out to be less developed versions of the categories found in the third part of the logic.

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Unlike Kant's, Hegel's categories do not get schematized into one definite set of laws. The logical categories, somewhat like the medieval transcendental concepts, are 'applied' on many levels. For instance, the categories of judgment and syllogism from the third part of the logic are applied in the philosophy of nature and again in the philosophy of subjective spirit and again in the philosophy of civil society and the state. The categories of being-for-self and repulsion from the first part of the logic are applied to nature, and again to theories about the foundation of society, and anywhere else Hegel wants to show the logical fragility of a theory postulating basic separated independent atomic entities, in nature or in society. Categories contrasting bad and good infinities, which show up in all three parts of the logic, are applied over and over in different areas. Some categories, such as mechanism or chemism, seem more appropriate for thinking just one area of science or experience but, in fact, those categories can be applied elsewhere too, as when Hegel follows Goethe in using chemism to describe human relations.[10] Since their 'application' is less direct and immediate, Hegel's categories are less vulnerable than Kant's to counter examples from later developments in science and mathematics.

What, then, does Hegel do to provide necessity in the relation of philosophy and religion? This connection is analogous to that between philosophy and natural science, but it is not the same, because religion is not a report on the natural world, even though the medievals thought it was. Religion is not dependent on empirical experience; rather, its representations shape the background that guides overall interpretations of and attitudes toward empirical experience.

Hegel provides necessity for religion by showing that there are key logical categories underlying the confusing contingent mixes of images, stories, and cultic actions in the historical religions. This essentialism also allows him to critique some versions of historical religions as not being true to the key features and categories embodied in their central symbols, as in his critique of Roman Catholicism (LPR 480).

Also, in another move that has no real parallel in his treatment of natural science, Hegel finds a necessary development of logical categories behind the history of religions. Religion exhibits a growing self-consciousness of our whole situation, where over time more complex logical categories underlie more sophisticated representations in images, stories, cultic actions, and theological elaborations. Hegel sees earlier religions as understanding spirit's life with one set of representations and categories, then as giving way when the underlying categories and social structures shift. Religion's general historical trajectory echoes larger transitions in the logic. As a mode of absolute spirit, religion becomes increasingly self-transparent. Unlike his treatment of natural science, in his treatment of religion Hegel makes an 'end of history' claim, that there is an 'absolute religion', Protestant Christianity, which in its images and concepts of the Trinity and the Incarnation *pictures* most adequately the overall motions of spirit as a whole.[11]

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So Hegel avoids the pitfall of hard double truth about the world. Religion has no conflicts with either empirical natural or speculative philosophical science. Hegel has redefined both sides. Religion gives us representations elaborated by concepts of the understanding, but it does not give us statements about empirical entities and their behaviour. On the other side, philosophy, now as speculative logic, no longer translates religious representations into a new set of truly real entities. When Hegel says that the logic adds necessity, he does not mean that it adds to a list of entities a necessary being.

VII. Spirit as a Whole

But again I hear an objector asserting: 'Yes it does. You are right that Hegel avoids conflict with science but, remember, he says religion and philosophy have the same object. You gave the show away when you spoke just now about religion representing the motion of *spirit as a whole*. If the logic offers philosophical categories for spirit as a whole, what is that if not a statement about the proper normative metaphysical list of entities? Hegel's is a soft double truth. He really is almost Spinoza. Spinoza restricts religion; scripture is not to be mined for empirical assertions. But then Spinoza gives us categories for a normative list of true entities: substance and its modes and attributes. Hegel deals with Spinoza's categories near the end of the second part of the logic, and then offers his new and improved versions in the third part. He is doing just what Spinoza did, providing the true set of ontological concepts and the correct list of real entities. Your reading of Hegel is ignoring Hegel's statements about spirit doing this or that, expressing itself in nature, coming to self-awareness, not to mention that in the logic he talks about the Idea resolving to empty itself into nature. Is it not obvious that Hegel is translating religious representations using a list of true entities, just like Aquinas and Leibniz, only Hegel's, like Spinoza's, is a very short list with only one entry, spirit, which is a single big entity, though its biography and gyrations are complex? If believers have truth in their representations, you are right that it is not empirical truth about the solar system and the origin of species, but for Hegel it is truth about the whole, and the logic conceptualises that, and translates it into talk about Spirit, the one true entity, the conceptually clear *Wahre* that is *das Ganze*'.

To this objection my answer is: No, that is not quite right. But this objection makes the reasonable demand that, after all the methodological talk, I owe an account of the Whole, what religion represents and philosophy delivers. It might seem that such an account must conclude that the whole is a big entity. But no, that misses what I take to be Hegel's point, at least on his better days.

There is no doubt that Hegel himself uses plenty of theological language and representations, including concepts of the understanding that portray spirit as causing

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effects on another level, and images of the idea realising itself. These are from the philosophy of nature, but there are plenty of others:

> The universal, absolute process is the process of the Idea, process in and for itself, through which the earth is created and preserved. But the creation is eternal, it is not an event which once happened; it is an eternal generation, for the infinite creative power of the Idea is a perennial activity. (E 339a)
>
> The Concept tirelessly and in a universal manner posits all particularity in existence. (E 249)

But we should also note that Hegel is reported to have said in his lectures:

> Every spiritual content and all relationships generally — of whatever sort they may be (sovereign, court of judgment, etc.) — are representations; Spirit itself is a representation. (LPR 149)
>
> If we employ the expression 'activity from which the world arises', it is indeed an abstraction, though one that is tailored to representation and still not a concept; for the coherence of the two sides is not posited in the form of necessity. Instead it is either expressed according to the analogy of natural life … or designated as the sort of coherence that is supposed on its own account to be wholly one of a kind and inconceivable. (LPR 149n85)

If we read Hegel as a traditional metaphysician, we are in danger of staying with concepts of the understanding, with spirit on one side and humans and nature on the other. That stays in the realm of non-sensible representations. It also becomes quite mysterious what kind of causality the entity called Spirit or the Idea might be using when it produces — or whatever it does — other levels of reality.

If we then try to avoid that problem of causality by absorbing the other levels into spirit and talking about a big entity which contains the other levels as its moments or parts or expressions or manifestations — redoing Spinoza — if we do all that, we still have not moved beyond the concepts of the understanding, the level where the one being is listed, taken as normative and used to translate religion. Spirit does amazing gyrations but is still an immediate posit we are looking at.

If we want to avoid the problem of looking from the outside at spirit posited as a big entity, we then might try saying that the positing of the big entity happens not immediately but within its own internal motions. Now we are approaching the right notion of the Whole, but we are not quite there yet.

Spirit is not one entity on a normative list of entities, nor is it a unique big entity that subsumes all the other little entities. This is because the whole metaphysical enterprise deploying normative lists of final entities presupposes separations and primacies that Hegel denies. It is not as if the categories of the logic are retrospectively reporting on the results of some causal process happening independently — that would put us back in the first part of the logic, the logic of being. And it is not as if the categories of the logic describe one big entity evolving by

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its own inner laws — that would put us back in the realm of essence, the second part of the logic. When Hegel says that the concrete universal particularises itself, he is not reproducing essence categories. He is speaking of a whole where each moment is both primary and mediated, where questions of essence are ruled out or bypassed as inadequate conceptualisations. We cannot ask what entity enforces or creates the limits and unities announced in the categories. There is no entity with an essence or laws behind the logic. The logic gives categories that open thought and possibility, not limit it down.

What kind of non-metaphysical whole is Hegel talking about? Here is one way to put my point: the absolute idea at the end of the logic must be understood on its own terms. It must be applied to itself, seen as *an sich, für sich, an und für sich*, as describing its own retrospective motions, as a content of thought, but also as mediated in nature and spirit.

That whole is described in the triple syllogism at the end of the *Encyclopaedia* (E 574-77). The idea in its logical completeness and self-reference, nature in its externality, and our own realised self-conscious self-comprehension of our history, each of these three mediates the others and no one of them is first. There is no prior realm where one big being acts to manifest or develop the other levels. That is what is misleading about Hegel's own theological representations. Each of the moments exists as and in the mediation of the other two. Each can be first and each can be in the middle mediating position, and each can be the result. The full description of the whole is only found in all of the three syllogisms progressing in their circle. There is no list of entities which stands behind and is used to map from the outside the gyrations of the syllogisms. Lists of entities find their place within the motions and mediations described in the absolute idea and acted out in the triple syllogisms.

This is in its way an ontological claim, but it is not of the type that would fit Quine's criteria, or be what Aquinas and Leibniz were doing. In nature and spirit, there are levels and levels that can be referred to, but no one reductive list. Those levels of discourse have their own ontological frameworks that can be thought more fully and critiqued in the categories of the logic. But that critique does not lead to a final list. Rather, it gives us the self-understanding of the motion of thought and interpretation.

Should we then say that what I am suggesting here is a kind of fictionalism? That my only ontological claim is that the motions of spirit happen, and within those motions various lists of entities appear and are treated as if they were real, but they are fictions thrown up by the motions of spirit? There is a sense in which what I suggest comes close to what has been called 'hermeneutic fictionalism', which allows reference to controversial entities (such as numbers, sets, and abstract entities) without claiming that they are thereby placed on some master list of 'real entities' just because they are being referred to (Burgess 1983, Stanley 2001). But there are two

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large differences. First, fictionalism was suggested as a way of dealing with limited difficult issues, not with language as a whole. According to Yablo, 'hermeneutic fictionalism is a strategy aimed at particular constructions. There is or need be no general program of understanding things in hermeneutic fictionalist terms' (Yablo 2001:72). Second, even if universalised, the word 'fictionalism' implies a contrast with realism, indicating that the dispute is presuming the ultimate validity of the categories of subject and object, language and world, which are to be connected. But Hegel would say that such a posing of the question sets up a framework using inadequately developed logical categories, and that better categories would overcome those dualities and alter both the questions and their possible answers.

There is no philosophical vision gazing at thought and nature from outside and seeing its movement as an object. The whole is a circle viewed from inside, but the circle is not a big true entity. Religion and philosophy may have the same 'object' but it is not an *object* opposite a subject. Consciousness, subjects facing objects, those are finite moments within the circle; the self-awareness of spirit is not a summation into a big object or by a big subject but the self-accompanying motion of thought that shows itself in everything.

Philosophy and religion do both talk about spirit as a whole. There is a multiple presentation of spirit to itself — it is triple not double, when we count art as a mode of absolute spirit. This resembles a soft double truth, except that to talk about spirit as a whole is not to make assertions about the empirical facts or about a final set of entities. It is rather the presence to itself of the motion of thought that allows sets of entities to be spoken about. Classical metaphysical claims, even Hegel's own, are found within that motion, and are not themselves the last word.

That motion is a whole in which thought, empirical entities, necessary categories, self-consciousness all fit but none is prior, where levels and lists come and go in a whole that is not a final list but a final self-transparent movement of recapitulation and self-understanding and interpretation, the final self-grasp of a process in its form and history. And even if one might be sceptical, as I am, of the purity and necessary completeness of Hegel's procedures, he still leads us in the self-interpretation of the process of historical interpretation and change within a whole that is a circle we do not escape, because it is where we, in the strongest sense of the words, find ourselves.

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Notes

[1] Abbreviations:
LPR: Hegel 1988 (references by page number)
E: Hegel 1959 (English translations: Hegel 1991, 1991a and 2010, references by paragraph number).

[2] For brief discussions of the medieval controversy over double truth and the Condemnation of 1277, see the *Stanford Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (http://plato.stanford.edu) entries for 'Delmedigo', 'Faith and Reason', 'Arabic-Islamic-Influence', and 'Aquinas'.

[3] Aquinas fits angels into his ontology at *Summa Theologica*, first part, questions 50-61.

[4] Note, for instance, the absence of religious considerations in Hegel's discussions of evolution and the age of the earth (E 252, 339, 340; see Kolb 2008), and the way Hegel assumes that Galileo could simply demonstrate to the monks the empirical correctness of his anti-Aristotelian view on the rate of fall in a vacuum (E 267).

[5] See also Hegel's discussion of how mythology and religion (and medieval scholastic philosophy such as Aquinas') do contain 'thoughts' but not 'free' self-developed logical categories: 'The content is true in itself, but it is not self-dependent, not dependent on thought as such. It will be shown later that the content of religion cannot be grasped by the Understanding; and that when the Understanding, calling itself 'Reason', approaches religion and declares itself lord and master of religion's speculative content it makes that content shallow and flat. The content of the Christian religion can only be grasped in a speculative way' (Hegel 1985: 159f.) (Use either '159ff.' or '159-60')

[6] For Aristotle's argument, see *Metaphysics* III.3, 998b21-28; for Aquinas' restatement, see *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book I, ch. 25, §6.

[7] For detailed studies of the way in which Hegel joins his logical categories and empirical scientific results, see Burbidge 1996 and 2007. Burbidge sees a large role for empirical contingency and a complex two-way influence between the logical categories and empirical scientific results. For a more necessitarian and one-way view of this relation, see Winfield 1998 and Halper 1998. I have argued (Kolb 1987 and 2010) that even if Hegel's intentions were more along the line described by Winfield, his actual results in the logic and the philosophy of nature are closer to Burbidge's view. The ways in which Hegel revised his work over time suggest that the claim of unique necessity for one version of the logic is difficult to maintain, and that the skein of categories is connected in multiple ways rather than in one rigid development.

[8] For instance, Hegel takes sides in some of the disputes attending the birth of empirical chemistry (E 326-36 and Hegel 1969: 363-65).

[9] See Spinoza 2005: book V: 29-39, and book II: 8. For conflicting readings of Spinoza's views on immortality, compare Donagan 1988 and 1996 to Nadler 2002.

[10] Hegel discusses at length the chemical term '*Wahlverwandtschaften*' as a logical category of Measure in Hegel 1969: 354-66, and also in his discussion of the chemical process (E 333), and approves of its use in describing human relations in Goethe's novel (Hegel 1975: i: 297).

[11] Hegel discusses 'absolute' or 'revealed' religion in Hegel 1977: §759ff. and E 564ff.

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