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Approaching Hegel's Logic, Obliquely

Melville, Molière, Beckett

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Angelica Nuzzo

Approaching Hegel's Logic, Obliquely

SUNY series, Intersections: Philosophy and Critical Theory

Rodolphe Gasché, editor

Approaching Hegel's Logic, Obliquely

Melville, Molière, Beckett

ANGELICA NUZZO

SUNY
PRESS

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Published by State University of New York Press, Albany

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For information, contact State University of New York Press, Albany, NY
www.sunypress.edu

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Nuzzo, Angelica, author.

Title: Approaching Hegel's logic, obliquely : Melville, Moliere, Beckett /
Angelica Nuzzo.

Description: Albany : State University of New York, 2018. | Series: SUNY
series, Intersections: philosophy and critical theory | Includes bibliographical
references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017060003 | ISBN 9781438472058 (hardcover : alk. paper) |
ISBN 9781438472065 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 1770–1831. | Logic. | Literature—
History and criticism.

Classification: LCC B2949.L8 N875 2018 | DDC 193—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017060003>

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Acknowledgments

I want to thank Rodolphe Gasché for accepting this book in his series. In 2015 he invited me to hold the Eugenio Donato Lectures in Buffalo, giving me the opportunity to discuss Hegel's Logic and *Billy Budd*. I am also grateful to Marìa del Rosario Acosta for inviting me to the Collegium Phaenomenologicum in 2015, and to all the participants in that Collegium for the exchanges on Hegel's Logic, violence, and *Billy Budd*. The topics of *crisis* and *stasis* and the connection to Gramsci's "interregnum" were at the center of fruitful discussions with Peg Birmingham and Étienne Balibar at a wonderful conference at DePaul University.

Introduction

Thinking Transformation

This is an unconventional book on Hegel's logic. It is a book that arises out of the need to provide a philosophical account of the puzzle that is our present time of crisis. Indeed, the prelude that opens the first chapter has been written over and over again during the years I have been working on this book: there always seemed to be a situation of crisis going on—the content changing (an environmental crisis, a financial crisis, a political crisis), the predicament of crisis always the same. At stake is the dialectical puzzle of how we can provide the story of the present—a present of deep, unsettling, critical transformation—while living immersed in it. How can or should transformation be thought? Moreover, since our thinking is immanent in the very transformation it aims at comprehending, thinking itself must be able to change with the actuality it describes. Hence the previous question goes hand in hand with a second one: How can or should thinking transform itself? (I articulate these questions in chapter 1.)

This work proposes to view Hegel's logic as what I call a “logic of transformation” or a “logic of transformative processes.” The two questions I just formulated occupy its very core. This work also proposes to view the logical forms or determinations developed therein as pure *figures of action*. (I justify this idea in chapter 3.) Hegel's logic is concerned with the transformation of pure thinking's most proper action. The question then is, How can transformation be assessed and performed at the same time? This I take to be the central problem Hegel addresses in the last chapter of the *Logic* dedicated to the method. But this is also the problem that we all face in living in our times of deep historical transformation. We are, inescapably, trying to make sense of what is happening in our world as well as agents constantly engaged in this world.

There is a sense in which thinking's own transformation can be followed in a linear reading of Hegel's logic that moves from the sphere of Being to Essence on to the Concept. But there is another possibility, which, I suggest, Hegel outlines at the end of the book in finally bringing to light the "method" that has been immanently developing the linear progression throughout those logical spheres. This is a *synchronic* reading of the logic—the reading that occupies the long argument of the present book. The idea is a simple one, an Aristotelian idea. The "absolute method," Hegel argues, has three moments: beginning, advancement, and end. They are the structures that articulate the *mythos-method* that is the logic; they are the structures of all meaningful story. Now, if the dialectic-speculative forms of the logic are figures of action, at stake in the method are the pure figures of the action that begins, advances, and ends. What is the action of beginning *as such*, in its pure form, independently of *what* it is that begins, independently of *who* it is that begins? This is the question raised by the method (and the topic of chapter 2).

Now, if at the end of our first linear reading of the Logic, instead of closing the book and moving on to some other activity, we start all over again, we are confronted with Being's action of beginning. At this point, instead of reading on to the end of the first logical sphere, moving linearly to Essence as the sequence of the book suggests and as we have done in our first reading, we will skip right to the beginning of Essence, and from here again right to the beginning of the Concept. What we produce, in this way, is a synchronic presentation or reconstruction of three logical actions of beginning in their respective specificity: Being's action, Essence's action, the Concept's action. By doing so, we are able to confront, synchronically, these three figures of the beginning and assess in one overarching account the transformation that occurs as the way of beginning changes across the three logical spheres. The three chapters of the second part of the book (chapters 4–6) offer precisely such a synchronic reading with regard to the action of beginning, advancing, ending. Thus, the synchronic reading is a device, suggested by Hegel's own account of the method, whereby the *transformative* character of Hegel's logic is brought to center stage.

Why is the reading proposed by this book important, both with regard to Hegel's logic, given the overwhelming baggage of interpretations and interpretive problems raised and debated during almost two centuries, and with regard to the issue I addressed earlier, namely, the understanding of transformation in reality and in thinking? Many are the interpretive questions that constitute the background of my present inquiries—issues that

have occupied me for many years and that I presently take on in a somehow indirect and unconventional way (I discuss interpretive issues in chapters 2 and 3). Let me mention here only two major ones. The first regards the way in which Hegel's logic, which, he suggests, explores the "realm of shadows" of pure thinking, relates to the 'real' world—the world we live in, the world Hegel investigates in his *Philosophy of Nature* and *Philosophy of Spirit*. The second issue regards the task Hegel poses to us, philosophers who think and act *after* him. What is to be done with his famous-infamous "system"? What with his "dialectic" and dialectical "method"? I address both issues indirectly, answering them through the method I use in articulating the synchronic reading of the logic's multiple beginnings, advancements, endings. In order to show the *real* import of the logical forms, their significance for human action in a context that is not necessarily nor exclusively Hegelian (and also, in addition, not exclusively philosophical), I appeal to literary texts such as Herman Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative)*, Molière's *Le Tartuffe, ou l'imposteur*, Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, and Giacomo Leopardi's and Elizabeth Bishop's late poems. Importantly, I do *not* offer an alleged "Hegelian" reading of these texts; rather, I use other voices and other narrative forms in order to offer a fresh and utterly unprecedented analysis of Hegel's text, an analysis able to bring to light how concrete, versatile, open to unimagined possibilities, the argument of the logic is.

This is, very briefly, how it works. The claim that the forms of Hegel's logic are *logical* figures of action allows me to *exemplify* their validity with regard to specific *real* figures of human action. I take Violence as one of the many possible real figures of the action that begins, and with the help of Melville's last novella, I show what is the difference between the violence—or the beginning—of Being, Essence, and the Concept (chapter 4). I take Fanaticism and Hypocrisy as the real figures of the action that refuses to advance, and with Molière's *Tartuffe* I show the importance of parsing out different forms of fanaticism (chapter 5). The end has a split story. Indifference is a real figure of the end pursued with Beckett's *Endgame*. But the end as the highest imaginative and creative action is exemplified by the poets—Leopardi and Bishop (chapter 6).

I close my introductory remarks here. The argument of this book is already way too extensive, and I want to leave the reader with the curiosity to pursue the relation between Hegel and Melville, Molière, Beckett, Leopardi, and Bishop further—with the chance to be thrilled, as I am, or skeptical and unconvinced, or perhaps even outraged as many other readers I am sure will be.

PART I

HEGEL'S LOGIC OF TRANSFORMATION

Choose one set of tracks and track a hare
Until the prints stop, just like that, in snow.
End of the line. Smooth drifts. Where did she go?

Back on her tracks, of course, then took a spring
Yards off to the side; clean break; no scent or sign.
She landed in her form and ate the snow.

Consider too the ancient hieroglyph
Of 'hare and zig-zag,' which meant 'to exist,'
To be on the *qui vive*, weaving and dodging

Like our friend who sprang (goodbye) beyond our ken
And missed a round at last (but of course he's stood it).
The shake-the-heart, the dew-hammer, the far-eyed.

—Seamus Heaney, *from* "Squarings"

Chapter 1

Thinking in Times of Crisis

Hegel's Logic of Transformation

These queer little sand castles, I was thinking. I was finishing Herbert Read's autobiography this morning at breakfast. *Little boys making sand castles*. This refers to H. Read, T. Eliot, Santayana, Wells. Each is weathertight, & gives shelter to the occupant. I think I can follow Read's building, so far as one can follow what one cannot build. *But I am the sea which demolishes these castles*.

—Virginia Woolf, *Diary*, 1936–1941,
Monday, November, 18, 1940

Prelude: After the Crisis, Telling the Story

It is a well-known Hegelian claim, at once descriptive and normative with regard to what should be taken as the activity of philosophizing: philosophy is its own present time apprehended in thoughts. This claim, however, is apparently contradicted by another, equally famous claim: in its task of comprehension of the present, philosophy comes always too late. Philosophical thinking is and is not *in* and *of* its own historical present. The synchronicity connecting thinking to the present is not perfect as they do not entirely overlap; there is an excess at once necessary and problematic that separates them; their developments unfold at a different pace. The question that this interesting predicament raises is the following: How can and how should the story of the present be told? In particular, how can it be told when the present is a situation of crisis and fragmentation that does not seem to lend itself to easy conceptualization and a straightforward narrative? How can the story of the present be told from the position of immanence, that is, while living in the present, immersed in the crisis of the present?

This book has begun by attempting to tell the story of its own shifting present many times during the years it has taken to reach its conclusion. It has always failed. As crisis followed crisis, the current one rendering the preceding one no longer relevant, what I was able to weave together was a chronicle with little meaning and even less interest, especially when considered retrospectively. Better, then, to turn to another story altogether—to the story of thinking apprehending its own time in thoughts, to the story of thinking finding its way into the present. This different story requires, at the same time, a philosophical and a poetical endeavor. It yields, at the same time, a philosophical and a poetical transfiguration of the present. Ultimately, Hegel suggests, it is “absolute spirit” that is in charge of such a story. Herein, spirit’s philosophical and poetic resources must go hand in hand. Perhaps what philosophical reflection cannot accomplish in the immediacy of the present (whereby its comprehension is shifted to a posthumous “too late”) can be disclosed by the poetic act of thinking. And reciprocally, what poetic thinking may lack in forward-looking universality, sacrificing it to the concreteness of immediacy, is overcome by the grasp of conceptual thinking. Aristotle may have been right: poetry is more philosophical than history.

1. From Today’s Present to Hegel’s Logic as a Logic of Transformative Processes

It is a truism that philosophical thinking is by no means neutral with regard to the historical reality in which it flourishes, for this reality contributes to shape it in an essential way. But the reverse claim should also be taken for granted, namely, that the historical present is intelligible to us only if reconstructed according to categories and conceptual tools that belong to a certain philosophical discourse—a discourse somehow sensitive, responsive and alive to the contemporary reality, and fundamentally relevant to it. These premises, however, taken in isolation still leave the problem of historical intelligibility wide open—among the many questions they raise is the one regarding the selection of the philosophical discourses and categories that should fulfill the task of reconstruction. Thus, in order to justify and persuasively articulate these claims, I want to bring to the fore the central point that will occupy me in the chapters that follow. My suggestion is that Hegel’s logic is the crucial intellectual tool that can help us weave the elusive stories of our own present—the stories of which we seem so much in need today. My thesis is that Hegel’s dialectic-speculative logic can fulfill

this crucial function because it is what I shall call a “logic of transformation” or a “logic of transformative processes”—that is, to put the point in another way, a “logic of crisis.”

The entire discussion that ensues will be dedicated to explaining in what sense Hegel’s logic should be viewed as a “logic of transformation”—what this characterization brings to our understanding of the logic and in what sense it helps discovering and putting to use its “actuality”—as well as to specify the different types and modes of transformation. By way of introduction though, I can anticipate here two fundamental tenets that already recommend such designation as worth exploring. For one thing, if contrasted to the aims and the accomplishments of both Kant’s transcendental logic and of formal logic in the classical and modern traditions, Hegel’s dialectic-speculative logic is the only one that aims at—and succeeds in—accounting for the dynamic of real *processes*: natural, psychological but also social, political, and historical processes. It is a logic that attempts to think of change and transformation in their dynamic flux not by fixating movement in abstract static descriptions but by *performing movement itself*. By bringing change to bear directly on pure thinking, by making thinking one with the movement it accounts for, Hegel’s logic *does* the very thing that it purports to understand. Thereby the question of the intelligibility of actuality taken in its purely logical form becomes a practical issue or an issue of praxis as much as one of theory.¹ The descriptive function that the logic claims toward actuality goes hand in hand with a fundamentally normative function that concerns the ways in which transformations are actually produced. Thereby, the doctrine that Hegel finally consigns to the *Science of Logic* and the first part of the *Encyclopedia* differs methodologically from the development staged in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which still distinguished the static, external standpoint of the philosophical “we” from the ever-changing, experiential position of consciousness. Unlike the *Phenomenology*, Hegel’s logic is the logic of movement itself immanently developed in its pure or purely formal structures. The only way to understand change without turning it into its opposite is to take change upon oneself, that is, to perform it. On the other hand, however, within Hegel’s system of philosophy this is also what distinguishes the logic from the *Realphilosophie*—the philosophy of nature and spirit. The logic offers an account (and a performance) of the structures of change independently of the question of what it is that changes, that is, it takes transformation in the constellation of its pure forms, independently of the particular contingent and empirical conditions under which it may occur.

For another thing, the development of the determinations of pure thinking staged in Hegel's logic shows how thinking can and does change—and why it should change—the ways in which it thinks, how thinking ought to transform itself but also how thinking, in point of fact, does transform itself. Here again, the traditional descriptive aim that makes of logic the formal account of the laws of pure thinking (or, with Kant, the transcendental account of a priori concepts) is supplemented by a crucial normative dimension that prescribes to thinking its own principled transformation. It should be noted that the claim that concepts and ideas do—dialectically—change along with the view that a proof of this claim is the proper task of the logic, are specifically Hegelian claims and mark Hegel's radical distance from both Plato and Kant (for whom, by contrast, ideas and ideals belong to an unchangeable and ahistorical order).

In sum, the transformation process with which Hegel's logic is concerned (descriptively as well as normatively) is both the movement of reality's dynamic transformation and the process of thinking's own internal transformation. The task of this logic is to answer both the question of the rational intelligibility of real changes taken as changes—how transformations in nature, society, and history can be brought to concepts or understood in terms of pure forms of change—and the question of why and how thinking can and ought to change the ways in which it thinks—of itself and of the world in which it lives and acts. My contention is that these two closely interconnected sides of Hegel's program make this logic the candidate of choice for the understanding of the present age of epochal transformations, the philosophical tool that can help us weave the much-needed story of the crises we are presently living.

Moreover, in framing Hegel's dialectic-speculative logic as a logic of transformative processes, I intend to provide an answer to two related issues that have vexed the interpretation of this part of the system since the second half of the nineteenth century. The first issue comprises a set of different questions, and regards, in its core, the proper status of Hegel's logic in relation to traditional philosophical disciplines. How does Hegel's logic relate to metaphysics in general and ontology in particular? Is this logic an anachronistic reprise, after Kant, of old metaphysics and ontology; does it inaugurate a new brand of post-Kantian metaphysics; or is it rather no metaphysics or ontology at all? Alternatively, and using cues offered by Hegel himself, the logic has been viewed by interpreters as the enumeration of the successive determinations of God or the Absolute through its predicates, hence, ultimately, as a speculative theology of sort, as a new form of post-

Kantian metaphysics that continues the tradition of Kant's critique, and as no metaphysics at all.² Another unsettled question concerns the relation between dialectical logic and epistemology. It is debated whether Hegel's logic offers a plausible epistemology that is meant to guide the development of the other philosophical disciplines (i.e., the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of spirit) or whether epistemological concerns as such are either utterly foreign to it or condemned to fail on the basis of this logic's speculative endeavor. Wide open and even more puzzling and intriguing are the questions that the *Science of Logic's* status as a logic pose to interpreters. Does it deal with categories at all (in the Aristotelian and Kantian sense) or does it rather present thought forms abstracted from the concrete reality and such as to necessarily presuppose such reality as its condition? How does speculative logic relate to traditional formal logic (for example, in the presentation of concepts, judgments, and syllogisms that occupies its second division, the Subjective Logic)? And what is its relation to contemporary nontraditional logics (paraconsistent logic, aletheism)? Finally, with regard to its general philosophical aim, Hegel's logic has generated readings as different as those that see its process as the speculative mystification of autarchic thinking, and most recently those that interpret it as a theory of meaning or a theory for the pragmatic institution of norms.³ On many of these questions, I will come back more or less directly at different points in the course of this study. However, it is fair for now to say that all possible answers to such questions have been attempted to date; that the decisiveness of the affirmation or denial of each question may vary but that the entire spectrum of possibilities has been covered; and, finally, that despite all this work none of these issues have definitively been settled.

In regard to this first set of issues, I have taken an indirect path. Metaphysical as well as epistemological questions will certainly come up in my discussion; yet, in my view, they are not the central—or maybe, better, the original—problem that Hegel's logic intends to solve. All those issues depend on the answer to the crucial problem of how transformation as such should be conceptually thought and of how it can be practically enacted. What is the formal theory that answers to both parts of this problem even before the determinate conditions under which particular changes occur (natural, psychological, historical, social, political, economic) have been specified? I suggest that it is this more original concern that orients Hegel's answer to metaphysical and epistemological problems.

Once this is assumed as the unique central issue of Hegel's dialectic-speculative logic, it is also no surprise that such logic leads on to a philosophy

of nature and a philosophy of spirit that take into account the determinate ways in which change and transformation are produced in actuality under specific empirical and historical conditions. Accordingly, my discussion will offer a fresh look at another vexing problem of the scholarship, namely, the issue of the relationship between logic and reality, or, systematically, between the *Science of Logic* and the *Realphilosophie*. With regard to this problem as well, interpretations seem to have covered all possible positions. Here again, by contrast, I shall change the terms of the question assuming from the outset that the problem, for Hegel, is inconsistent. The pressing issue—for Hegel just as for us today—is to find the logic that can account for the critical complexity of the present age and that is, at the same time, co-original in its internal development to the movement of the very reality it attempts to understand (indeed such logic succeeds in its task of comprehension precisely because it is co-original with its actuality).

In the remainder of this introductory chapter I offer an initial discussion of the status of Hegel's dialectic-speculative logic. I am interested in the function of Hegel's dialectic for our philosophizing in and understanding of the contemporary world. The central thesis of this book is that the abstract forms of Hegel's logic find unexpected underpinnings in the reality of the contemporary world because they are co-original with the development of Hegel's own historical present. To articulate this thesis, I start by raising the general questions mentioned previously: What kind of theory does Hegel offer in the first part of his system of philosophy? What kind of logic is dialectic and what are its philosophical aims and tasks? And what is this logic *about*, or, what kind of objects does it thematize? These questions are all indirectly addressed in a first step that frames Hegel's logic as a "logic of transformative processes."⁴ Thereby I lay the foundations for an argument that moves from the study of the modes in which transformation is logically thought to the exploration of the ways in which transformations in thinking and in reality are practically achieved and brought about.

In the next sections, I will get to the question of what Hegel's logic is *about* and hence to the question of what kind of logic it is by first discussing and determining the problematic context in which it should be placed and read. In other words, I will start out by indicating the broader issues, which, I contend, lay at the heart of the development of Hegel's dialectic from his early years.⁵ This will give us a peculiar perspective on the crucial aim of Hegel's logic, and consequently will indirectly allow us to measure its distance from and proximity to the concerns of traditional and Kantian logic as well as to the problems faced by philosophy today.⁶ I

then turn to Hegel's idea of a dialectic-speculative logic able to overcome the flaws of the "logic of the understanding" (*Verstandeslogik*), the flaws that Hegel assesses precisely in relation to the objectives he set for philosophy with regard to the contemporary world.⁷ Herein I discuss in a first general way the idea of a logic of transformative processes. The fruitfulness of this framework is supported by a look at Hegel's account of the beginning of the history of philosophy.⁸ In his view, the problem of thinking movement and transformation in their pure abstract form is the chief philosophical problem of philosophy since its Greek inception. Only "dialectic" can solve such a problem but, as the history of philosophy and contemporary philosophical endeavors clearly show, this function can be fulfilled only by a dialectic that is itself "speculative," that is, by a dialectic that is able to overcome the fixations and destructiveness of the understanding, and to gain the dimension of speculative reason.⁹ Finally, in the conclusion of the chapter, on the backdrop of this idea of a logic of transformation, I present the general strategy that the argument of this book will follow in order to explore the two interconnected ideas presented in these opening sections, namely, briefly put: how to think change and transformation and how to change and transform thinking. While the present reality of multiple crises is a challenge to our capacity of understanding and reconstructing actuality in a philosophical way, it also presents us with the inescapable necessity to change the way in which we structure our thinking of ourselves and of our natural, social, and historical world.

2. Another Crisis: Times of Change and Hegel's Dialectic

In 1781 Kant discloses the historical debt of the philosophical project expounded in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* by placing it in the "age of critique," that is, in the period of the Enlightenment (KrV Axi), thereby drawing motivational and explicative force from the act of positioning the work in its own historical present. In a relationship of mutual interdependency, the age of *Kritik* gives rise to reason's own *Kritik*, while reason's philosophical self-criticism continues and radicalizes the social and political critique that pervades its own epoch. The idea of critique gains its force and normativity from this connection. Kant's declaration in the 1781 preface is full of promise and optimism. The French Revolution is a disruptive event yet to come—even though, to repeat the common division of labor between the French and the Germans often heard at the time,¹⁰

it is 'anticipated' by the Copernican Revolution in thinking announced by Kant's *Critique*.

In 1807, in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel refers to a different present as informing and indeed requiring a new philosophical way of thinking about the current historical situation as well as about the human subject who lives and acts in this reality. The idea of dialectic is precisely such a new way of thinking. The *Phenomenology* is written in the world deeply transformed by the events begun in 1789. "It is not difficult to see," Hegel registers in the preface once the book is concluded, "that our time is a time of birth and transition (*Übergang*) to a new period. Spirit has come to a break with the previous world of its existence and representation and is about to sink this world in the past and to start the work of its own transformation (*Umgestaltung*). Indeed, spirit is never in a state of quiet," as it is caught in a constant progressive movement (TW 3, 18).¹¹ Hegel writes during the transitional period that sees Europe coming out of the turmoil of the French Revolution, prey of Napoleon's sweeping designs of conquests, stage of new social, juridical, and political experiments. In this Europe the industrial revolution has already begun. For Hegel the contemporary observer, the present is an open process full of uncertainties just as an open process is the work of the philosophical science at the beginning of its tasks of comprehension. We do not know anything of the new age about to begin except that it is new and different from the one we have lived in so far, and that it results from the complete shattering of the institutions and the certainties of the old world. A radical break has occurred, a revolutionary break the chronological beginning of which one can date back to July 14, 1789 (and the end of which may be sanctioned by Napoleon's coup of the 18 Brumaire, 1799). Passing through the events of 1794, the development out of such a beginning has eclipsed an old social and political order, erased old institutions, forms of life, and ideas, and thereby has ushered in a new epoch in world history. In the chapter "The Absolute Freedom and Terror," Hegel attempts a philosophical reconstruction of such a story as part of the phenomenological development of contemporary spirit's consciousness.

If there is, to be sure, a measure of promise and confidence in Hegel's portrait of the present age in the cited passage of the preface, there is also the awareness of the effort required to carry out its momentous change (the movement of spirit is hard "work": TW 3, 18), of the "price" that one has to pay for every step undertaken along a path that is all but certain and straightforward.¹² But more than anything else there is in Hegel's remark

a sort of puzzlement in front of the task that the present world poses to philosophy. For, Hegel's real focus is not so much to predict the possible contours of the new epoch about to begin but to comprehend the transition itself—to comprehend the *Übergang* that leads to it and produces the new, to grasp the process of deep transformation or *Umgestaltung* in which contemporary consciousness is inexorably caught.¹³ In effect, this is the true object of philosophical understanding; this is the chief challenge to it. How can the historical “transition” itself (or the “birth” of the new, for that matter) be understood? Neither the past nor the future but the changing present in its changing quality; neither the origin nor the destination of the historical process of transformation in their isolated, static occurrence but the very movement of transformation taking place between the beginning and the end, the movement in which our lives are presently immersed and engaged. How can transformation be conceptualized when all distance between the process and its apprehension (and hence the possibility of a distinct “standpoint” or a perspective of sorts) is erased, when thinking is one with the changing process that is being thought?¹⁴ To be able to tell the story, our own present teaches us, we must wait for the anniversary—the story seems to emerge only in relation to the past (and seems to be only about the past) although its chief interest lies in the present. It is at this point that we first meet our challenge. Philosophy, Hegel will declare in later years thereby drawing a sort of empowering limitation to its task, should not attempt to make predictions with regard to the future. Philosophy's job is rather the understanding of the present in situations of crisis, namely, in moments of transition and indeed conflict and contradiction between different life and thought formations, between the old that is no more and the new that is not yet. But how can the contradictory tension that separates and at the same time brings together the slow continuity of growth and the sudden unexpected hiatus of birth be brought to conceptual knowledge and thereby explained by a unity of sense? How can these opposites be part of the same story, and how should this story be narrated?

Speaking to his contemporaries, Hegel can indeed say, “it is not difficult to see” that we live in a time of transition to a new epoch—it is not difficult to see because life provides immediate evidence for this claim in lived uncontroversial facts. But he famously warns that what is known to common sense (what is *bekannt*) is still not conceptually grasped, is not yet philosophical knowledge (is not *erkannt*).¹⁵ On the contrary, what is most easily seen, felt, and lived in its immediate certainty is the hardest thing to grasp conceptually, is the real challenge to philosophy. The day-to-day

chronicle of events is quite different from the unified, allegedly meaningful story told on the anniversary—after a form of life has completed its course (and can no longer be rejuvenated, only understood). This is precisely the task to be undertaken: to give conceptual, rational form to the mere feeling, perception, or indeed “experience” of change; to tell, philosophically and reflectively but also paradoxically, the story of the present at the only proper time in which it can be told, namely, years later. In 1807, with the *Phenomenology*, Hegel provides a logic of change that takes “consciousness” as its concrete object, that is, as the place in which change occurs and becomes visible as concrete subjective experience. Accordingly, the philosophical understanding of transition is the understanding of how transition and change take place in and for consciousness, the latter being a concrete “example” or instance of the *pure* (i.e., logical) form of *Übergang*.¹⁶ The project of the *Science of Logic*, which will take transition as such to its object, in its logical form independently of consciousness, is yet to come.

But before getting to the logic, we should take a step back. Hegel's concern with the historical present and the idea that the dimension of one's fractured actuality poses to philosophy a fundamental task of comprehension—that this is indeed *the* fundamental philosophical task—can already be detected in a fragment probably written between 1799 and 1800 and belonging to the work on the *Verfassung Deutschlands*. Already at this early point, Hegel addresses a situation of deep institutional crisis and uncertain political transition—a situation in which the dangers of dissolution and self-destruction facing the German people are a felt, troubling reality. As in 1807 the starting point for philosophy is the apparent evidence of what “is not difficult to see”—the painful and opaque truth of the day-to-day chronicle. The real challenge to the disillusioned philosopher¹⁷ is the understanding of “what is.” In this period (i.e., in his last Frankfurt and early Jena years), in his theoretical writings Hegel arrives at the central thought of his dialectic.¹⁸ It has been observed that the confrontation between the *Verfassung Deutschlands* and Hegel's works on political philosophy of this and the immediately successive period (*System der Sittlichkeit*, *Naturrechtsaufsatz*) yields the impression of radically conflicting views. For, while the philosophical reflection leads Hegel to the attempt at overcoming the contradictions found in the historical world, in the *Verfassung Deutschlands* all those contradictions are left unreconciled as plain and hard facts—as facts that “should remain,” as it were, in their contradictory, unmediated character.¹⁹ This is an important observation that supports, however, the contrary view, which I propose here, namely, the thesis of the fundamental

continuity and solidarity between Hegel's occasional political writings and his dialectic-speculative philosophy. Neither could be understood without the other. As the comprehension of the present political situation leads to a contradiction that can neither be healed nor overcome, the effort of philosophy struggling for a conceptual comprehension of the dynamics of change leads precisely to the thought of a possible conciliation and to the conditions thereof. Since the real contradiction is insurmountable in the actuality of facts, the question is: What would it take to advance beyond the present predicament, to change the way things are? This is the effort of thinking; herein lies thinking's practical task and commitment.

Thus, I suggest framing the project of Hegel's logic as the project of a logic of transformative processes precisely because it arises, from early on, out of the need to learn how to live with and give a philosophic account of the fundamental contradictions and transformations of modernity—transformations that we face, in new form, in our contemporary (postmodern) world.²⁰ Hegel's idea of logic is determined from the very beginning by the intellectual and practical need to remove the limitations that prevent human life from coming to its full development. *Durch Philosophie leben lernen* is Hegel's telling claim in one of his early Jena course lectures—a claim that reflects a position to which his dialectic always remains faithful.²¹ As a logic of change, Hegel's dialectic cannot be separated from the analysis and the understanding of the present world. Yet, to expose the contradictory, unrecconciled character of the present is also, at the same time, to comprehend the ways in which contradiction develops and thereby may be overcome.

The fragment “Der immer sich vergrößernde Widerspruch . . . ,”²² placed by many editors of the *Verfassung Deutschlands* at its beginning, offers at the same time a philosophical diagnosis of the historical crisis faced by Germany at the end of the eighteenth century, and the first emergence of the fundamental tenet of Hegel's logic of change. The (abstract) problem herein is: What is change? How shall the philosopher conceptualize the moment of historical transition, the unrest that everyone feels as the prevailing dimension of the present, the necessary pull (*Trieb, Drang*) toward the unknown and the new that one must grasp and embrace in order to survive its unstoppable affirmation? Indeed, unlike the dead fixation of life in “positive” institutional forms and in their destructive, blocked contradictions, the contradiction that shapes transformative processes is a condition of survival—both individual and collective, both personal and national. For the latter contradiction bears within itself the possibility of a way out and the conditions of a new beginning.

“Der immer sich vergrößernde Widerspruch . . .” offers Hegel’s philosophical diagnosis of a period of radical change, the phenomenology of a historical crisis, and the assessment of the different directions in which such crisis may develop and resolve. Significantly, however, Hegel does not point to any guaranteed solution to the “growing contradiction.” Insecurity and the striving for the unknown remain the prevailing tone,²³ the predicament of the present age. The fragment indicates in the “growing contradiction” and the “need” for its *Aufhebung* or *Widerlegung* (GW 5, 18/TW 1, 458, 459), the (logical) structure of change (GW 5, 16f./TW 1, 457f.). Herein we already meet the fundamental terms of Hegel’s dialectic. Contradiction is a real force operating in history, is a force moved by its own inner logic, which is a logic of immanent development. Contradiction now defines for Hegel the relation between the ideal and the real, between nature and life (respectively, GW 5, 16, 17/TW 1, 458, 457), between what political and juridical institutions have to offer to their citizens and what individuals more or less consciously seek and desire but remains unfulfilled by those institutions. The tension catalyzed in contradiction is the mark of an epoch in which all certainty and security has been shattered and the only hope for survival—individual and collective—lies in the acceptance of transformation, in the capacity to face the negativity to which life has been reduced. Knowledge by itself cannot effect transformation, although it may be one of the conditions thereof. And not even a pure act of the “will” (be it individual or collective), nor a social contract or mere revolutionary “violence” can bring change about (GW 5, 16f./TW 1, 459). Rather, Hegel seems to suggest that transformation lies somehow in the nature of things, in the inner logic of the contradiction that animates the present time once the obstacles to its radicalization and free development are removed and contradiction is let grow to its extreme consequences without being fixated into a static, self-standing “absolute” (GW 5, 16/TW 1, 457). Contradiction is a force independent of human cognition and will, is the force within which all human activity is rather inscribed. Only “nature,” that is, the recognition and expression of real needs and desires, can lead to the articulation and thereby (dis)solution of “the growing contradiction.”²⁴ Change takes place as contradiction gives rise to a “need” and thereby to the movement of its own “refutation.” For, the need that contradiction be overcome—a need that arises once life has met pure negativity and has recognized that it can no longer live with it and in it—is already in itself change (GW 5, 17). Contradiction is neither a merely mental entity or operation, nor a fixed, static knot in reality; contradiction is movement and development; it is the movement of its own overcoming or *Aufhebung*.

In sum, contradiction is for Hegel the sign of historical crises; transformation and change are the manifestation and internal development of the contradiction, namely, the movement that contradiction necessarily marshals in once it is not taken as static and absolute, once it is not fixed within illusory limits (for those limits have been erased once and for all by the revolutionary turmoil) or repressed. Hegel's later *Science of Logic* will elaborate this seminal thought into the first, foundational part of the system of philosophy. In its basic terms, however, Hegel's dialectical logic of change is in place already in his early political works.

The logic of change that captures from within the features of the historical present is both descriptive and driven in its development by a normative and evaluative impulse. *We want* transformation to be progress, change to be change for the better. Change seems indeed to have a direction, and the direction it takes does make a difference to us. And yet, as we face the unknown we must acknowledge that change in itself is not necessarily progressive nor has the certitude of a guaranteed (let alone positive) end. Progress—whatever it may mean—can never be taken for granted. However, the need that accompanies change (or at least the need that refuses to take contradiction as absolute and static and refuses to take the limiting, suffocating conditions of the age as something irrevocably fixed) aims at radicalizing and thereby overcoming the further contradiction between the “worse life” of increasing human suffering and the indeterminate but forceful desire for a “better life” (GW 5, 17f./TW 1, 458—my emphasis).²⁵ On Hegel's account, such need for change, becoming an active “impulse” (*Drang*) toward a better life, is supported by all the forces of the present age: by the action of single individuals of great character, by the collective movement of entire peoples, by the depiction of poets, even by the work of metaphysics (GW 5, 17/TW 1, 458). And yet, only “nature in its actual life” can undermine the “worse life” opposing it with the force of an effective “refutation.” To leave no doubt as to the character of this *Widerlegung*, Hegel clearly states that it cannot be the “object of an intentional activity” (GW 5, 18). The advancement of the growing contradiction can be countered only by its objective, immanent resolution not by the conscious, yet merely external intervention of a subjective will. This is the thought of immanence that the *Science of Logic* will later explore in all its implications. Only in this way is the apparent change claimed by an ineffective, external “violence” (*Gewalt*) or by an arbitrary voluntarism replaced by the real and necessary transformation brought about by the inner “power” (*Macht*) of contradiction. Only in this way, may the “worse life” make room for a “better life.” In other words, what shall be taken as a “better” form of life is neither decided by an authoritarian deed

nor established by the arbitrary indication of revolutionary enthusiasts. It is instead the objective, immanent result to which the (historical) movement of contradiction may lead when brought to its extreme consequences.²⁶ This result, however, is never guaranteed. For, the result still belongs to the realm of the “unknown,” which lays beyond the process of transformation at its very conclusion. And the philosopher, as Hegel states in the preface to the *Phenomenology*, being immersed in the process, should attend only to such a process and refrain from making arbitrary predictions.

Since Hegel views transformation, transition, and contradiction as the defining features of his epoch, the crucial task of philosophy is for him the understanding of the historical present insofar as this is facing the challenge of change and transformation. Such a task requires him to address two different issues. First, how can transformation be conceptualized or taken up in thinking—how can transformation be thought in its “pure” character and structure? Second, how can thinking itself (both at the personal and collective level) change its patterns and conceptual tools, keep pace with an ever-changing reality, and control or channel changes in the world—how can thinking be transformed and ultimately transform itself, that is, change the very way it thinks? It is this problematic constellation that, in turn, guides the internal shifts in Hegel’s conception of logic from the early Jena years to the publication and republication of the volumes of the *Wissenschaft der Logik* in 1812/13, 1816, and 1831, and of the *Encyclopedia* logic in 1817, 1827, and 1830. The aim of both the bipartite “Logic and Metaphysics” of the Jena years and of the later dialectic-speculative logic replacing metaphysics is to unravel the fundamental structures of change, to think and understand change, this time, “in and for itself,” namely, to think of it not as an external event that merely happens to certain contents, subjects, consciousnesses, or substrates but rather to think of change in its logical *purity* as the inner tension and dynamic impulse defining what something *truly* is (and is not at the same time), what something is in the process of becoming or making itself what it is (and other than what it is). The exploration of this question leads Hegel to the discovery of the ways in which thinking in its purity is itself a process of transformation—neither a static “faculty” endowed with potentiality but no actuality nor an absolute selfsame entity separated from the changing content that it happens to think. Accordingly, the categories or logical forms are not modes of thinking and judging of given contents but are pure modes of transformation—both in/of thinking and reality, in/of “objective thinking,” as Hegel puts it.

In the aftermath of these early reflections, unlike so many interpretations of Hegel’s philosophy, I argue that the story that Hegel’s dialectic

supports (methodologically and epistemologically), the story to which the logic must be brought back as its theoretical foundation (and even justification), is not a story of unmatched success, progress, and conciliation, a story the conclusion of which is already predetermined at the beginning and consequently offers neither novelty nor possibility of unforeseen and unexpected transformation. We too often forget that dialectic is inspired by those lacerating contradictions, upheavals, and uncertainties pervading European history at the end of the eighteenth and at the beginning of the nineteenth centuries to which Hegel was a particularly sensitive witness. My suggestion is that this holds true not only for the young Hegel whose interests in the “lower needs of man”²⁷ inspire his early writings, but for the mature Hegel as well, whose system begins with and is grounded in a “science of logic,” not only for the Hegel of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and, on some interpretations, the *Philosophy of Right* or the philosophy of history but also, and in the first place, for the Hegel of the logic. As the logical process takes place in the formal—timeless and spaceless—dimension of pure thinking, the movement of contradiction that it narrates (and the movement that the logic itself ultimately and directly *is*) is not erased in a final moment of conciliation or in an unshakable unity, is never reduced to a past left forever behind or to a place forgotten and abandoned once and for all. That the logic unfolds with the movement of an internal and immanent necessity does not imply that the conclusion is already set and (implicitly if not explicitly) reached from the very beginning, or that the process does not know the contingency, uncertainty, ambiguity, and even the risk of alternative possibilities and alternative decisions. The logic tells us of the ever-present and resurging contradiction that constitutes every transformation as its fundamental moving force; it displays the nature of transition including the space of vagueness and uncertainty that surrounds the emergence of all new formations—in reality as well as in thinking. To this extent, however, the logic also teaches us how to relate to such transformations *philosophically*. The logic tells us that to understand our historical present is to understand—and indeed to practice—the logic of change. Perhaps, the last of Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach* can be taken to express a similar program.

3. The “Need” for a Logic of Change

If unforeseeable change, the unrest of transition, and the lacerating violence of contradiction are the prevailing dimensions of Hegel’s contemporary

world, that is, the features that constitute the actuality of his historical present and not merely contingent aspects of it, they are also the stumbling block that philosophy encounters in its attempts at a comprehension based on the traditional ways of cognition structured by formal logic, by Kant's transcendental philosophy, and by contemporary epistemologies (from Reinhold's and Fichte's reformed transcendentalism to Schelling's metaphysics to contemporary forms of skepticism). Hegel brings together all these approaches under the designation of "logic of the understanding" (*Verstandeslogik*). Thereby he indicates the logic that considers avoiding contradiction (or the principle of non-contradiction) as the first and foremost law of thinking and proceeds statically by applying fixed concepts (taken from an allegedly complete table of categories), which in their empty formality have no grip on reality. Simply put, the present world is not understandable assuming traditional logic and metaphysics as the paradigm of comprehension because this present is contradictory, has no fixed features, and being characterized by change cannot be held fast by any given concept or definition. Therefore, on Hegel's account, it is also not surprising that traditional philosophy has yielded in recent years either skepticism or various forms of irrationalism and *Schwärmerei*. Common to all these positions is the act of confessed defeat that radically disengages philosophy from the comprehension of the contemporary world and from the active participation in it. Significantly, Hegel contends that to the "logic of the understanding" corresponds the "dürre(s) Verstandesleben" commonly experienced by the German citizen of his time—an alienated form of life in which man's suffering and his servitude to things are rendered more acute than ever before (GW 5, 17/TW 1, 458). Accordingly, the need for a new method of comprehension of the real world is also, at the same time, the need for a "better life," the striving toward different conditions of life (GW 5, 17/TW 1, 458).

On Hegel's account, the fixed concepts of traditional and Kantian logic are the basis of what he calls the dead "positive."²⁸ They categorize and classify a reality that is no longer actual since the movement of life has entirely abandoned it. They present a static picture of the world that is indeed reassuring in its clear-cut boundaries and unambiguous classifications. It is, however, the representation of an order that has no relation to the ever-changing real, no bearing on the true needs of life, no possible application to human desires, hopes, and values, no regard for the lessons of history. To comprehend the world according to a table of categories declared fixed and complete once and for all (a priori, as it were) is indeed like trying to paint a scene from life using only two colors and only two dimensions.²⁹

Such procedures can yield no knowledge and no truth simply because the complexity of movement, change, and transition constituting the life of the real in its actuality are thereby dispensed with and utterly eliminated.³⁰ The logic of the understanding engages in the analysis or dissection of what lies in front of it and proceeds by isolating the moments thereby obtained in the attempt to separate truth from falsity, the positive from the negative. To such logic, however, movement and change—the transition that lies between the terms of its dichotomies and blurs its classifications—are in principle unintelligible. The story narrated by the understanding may cater to the expediency of the moment but does not reach the dimension of truth. For, its chief assumption is that truth and falsity (as well as good and evil, life and death) must be kept separated, that their contradiction must be avoided and left aside with all means possible. Contradiction, which is the seed and the essence of movement, is precisely that from which the fixed order of the understanding takes flight as the worse enemy of an alleged unmovable and unmoved truth.

It is easy to see, at this point, Hegel's need for a new logic that, proposing itself as a logic that has change as its object and takes contradiction as the root of change, allows for a philosophical comprehension of the peculiar predicament of the contemporary world. This logic is dialectic.³¹ Dialectic provides a worldview that is not based on fixed classifications but on structured transitions, that does not pursue the determination of objects, subjects, events, or (metaphysical) substrates as something given once and for all (or transcendently a priori and inescapable) but presents the movement of the process of determination "in and for itself," that is, presents the process *as process* in its independent and self-sufficient unfolding (this constitutes the "immanence" of the logical development). What kind of transformative process does the logic present? And what does the idea of dialectic as logic of change imply with regard to traditional logic and metaphysics? Hegel addresses these issues both in the preface to the *Phenomenology* and in the introductory writings to his logic—in the *Encyclopaedia* as well as in the *Science of Logic*. But before getting to these questions I shall further support the view of dialectic as logic of transformation with an argument taken from Hegel's consideration of the history of philosophy. This argument shows, from yet another perspective, the way in which Hegel's dialectic advances beyond other forms of philosophical thinking—notably, Parmenides's and Zeno's—in which the logic of the understanding is historically instantiated. At stake in this discussion is the place that the problem of movement and change occupies in philosophical thinking in its inception,

and the function of dialectic in overcoming the problems encountered by early philosophical thinking.

4. Dialectic Is Movement: Zeno's Arrow and Heraclitus's Flux

“War is common and justice strife and all things come about by way of strife and necessity,” reads a famous fragment by Heraclitus.³² On his view, constant transformation constitutes the very essence of reality, the principle to which nothing existing escapes. Change, however, is generated by strife, that is, by the clash of opposites and their coexistence. To this extent, conflict is not only necessary but is promoted to the dignity of a first metaphysical principle next to necessity itself. Opposing Pythagoras, who proposed the ideal of a peaceful and harmonious universe, and opposing Anaximander, who saw the warfare of opposites as outright injustice, Heraclitus identifies strife and its necessity with justice. Contradiction does not lead to chaos but to a just order that is the order of universal transformation. Schiller's aphorism, which Hegel takes up in his idea of world history, has after all a pre-Socratic root: *Weltgeschichte* is *Weltgericht* (R §340) because change is strife and strife is justice. Ultimately, Hegel's rejection of Kant's ideal of perpetual peace has the same metaphysical motivation as Heraclitus's polemic stance toward Pythagoras. Contradiction determines the ongoing movement of the historical process the justice of which lies in its self-regulating development.

Significantly, for Heraclitus, only thought can grasp change. It remains instead inexplicable (and even undetectable) to the senses. In a Latin rendering of Heraclitus's thought, *gutta cavat lapidem*, for the senses there is no evidence of change in the inexorable corrosion of the stone by the drop of water; the ever-changing river appears to sense perception to be always the same river. But it is not the same. Thinking grasps the reality of change by grasping its underlying unity or rather its regularity—its *metron* or measure. Thereby Heraclitus solves the paradox that paralyzed Zeno, leaving his arrow suspended in an unreal movement, truly, in an unsolvable contradiction. For Heraclitus, thinking but not the senses can master contradiction and the movement it engenders. Plato reads a different lesson into Heraclitus's verses and draws from them a different conclusion. He overturns the terms of Heraclitus's problem. Seeing the reality of change confined to the world of the senses (when Heraclitus only tells us that the senses are unable to grasp it) and claiming that knowledge and thinking are only of unmoved,

eternal forms (when Heraclitus claims that only thinking can account for the flux of change), Plato concludes that true knowledge of the sensible world is impossible because truth is foreign to it. Since all sensible things are forever flowing, thinking takes refuge in a world itself spared of change—this is the world of ideas.

Hegel's presentation of the history of philosophy in its Greek beginnings follows the development of dialectic from its merely subjective forms in the Eleatic school to the recognition of its objectivity in Heraclitus. However, the interpretation of Hegel's position in this regard generally fails to see that its crucial point consists in the essential thematic connection between dialectic and the question of movement. For Hegel, the problem of dialectic is identical with the problem of how change, movement, and the contradiction that brings it about can be grasped in and by thought. Accordingly, for Hegel, the advancement of dialectic in its history is measured by the position that thinking assumes toward transformation. The issue is whether change is placed in reality or in thinking, that is, in the object or in the subject. For, dialectic is the "movement of the concept in itself" (TW 18, 295). Significantly, Hegel's argument explains why, historically, dialectic has met the problem of change as its first and foremost issue. The reason is "that dialectic is itself this movement or that movement is itself the dialectic of all things" (TW 18, 305). Dialectic and movement are ultimately identical. To think movement is to perform movement (in thinking); it is to accept the necessity of thinking through contradictions and in contradictions. This is Hegel's rendering of the most original problem in the history of philosophy.

Ultimately, the fact that dialectic itself changes and successively assumes different forms, hence has a history—the history that Hegel repeatedly narrates in his lectures—is a corollary of the identification between dialectic and the movement of the concept. Moreover, the philosophical problem of change converges with the issue of how thinking can apprehend its own reality in concepts—a reality that is necessarily subject to change since it is fundamentally historical. As Hegel points out in the preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, despite his search for an unmoved ideality beyond Heraclitus's world of continuous flux, even Plato does not escape this general fate of philosophy. His ideal state is not the portrait of an unmoved idea set beyond reality, but the account of a historical moment of crisis and inner, epochal transformation in Greek ethical life (TW 7, 24). It is, to be sure, a paradigmatic philosophical rendering of a moment of social and political transition.

In presenting Heraclitus's philosophy in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel famously exclaims: "Here we finally see land." And he adds: "There is not a single proposition in Heraclitus that I have not taken up in my logic" (TW 18, 320). Why is Heraclitus so important in the history of philosophy in general, and for Hegel's own dialectic-speculative logic in particular? On Hegel's account, Heraclitus solves the impasse that paralyzes Zeno's thought in his efforts to deny movement or alternatively to claim that movement as such cannot be thought. What is most relevant, however, is that Hegel puts quite some effort into making an additional (and not immediately evident) point—a point that interrupts the historical sequence of the exposition to bring us unexpectedly to Hegel's own present. By suggesting that in his antinomies Kant does nothing more than what Zeno has already done with his contradictory propositions or paradoxes (TW 18, 317f.), Hegel institutes an important historical parallel: Zeno and Kant on the one hand, Heraclitus and Hegel on the other. The dynamic of dialectical reason solves the static impasse of an undialectical understanding unable to grasp change and hence stuck in a dead antinomic opposition. In dealing with this ancient phase of philosophy's history, Hegel is actually touching on one of the most urgent contemporary issues. How can change (logical, natural, historical) be comprehended in concepts? How can logic advance beyond the stalemate between being and nothing and become, as it were, logic of the real world (or logic of "objective thinking")? Heraclitus's thesis of the flux of all things is the "land" on which dialectic finally installs itself.³³ Once it is thought through, the indeterminate movement of becoming leads to the determinate beginning of dialectic with *Dasein* (TW 5, 113).

Zeno's starting point is the realization that the representation of movement implies contradiction. Movement expresses both the contradiction in the concept and the reality of contradiction; it is contradiction posited as appearance in reality (in time and space) (TW 18, 307). From this claim Zeno's attempt to a refutation of movement follows. He rightly separates thinking from sense perception. He argues that what is in movement according to the senses does not move according to thinking—in thought the flying arrow is inexorably still. And truth is only in thinking. Hence movement cannot be thought. This conclusion runs opposite to the one reached by Heraclitus (movement exists only for thinking and not for the senses) and already announces the eternal world of Platonic forms. Hegel's comment on Zeno's conclusion reveals his own solution of the problem of dialectic as the immanent movement of the concept: "It is necessary to think movement

so as Zeno thought of it,” namely, as something internally contradictory, as the reality of contradiction. And yet, he adds, “it is necessary to *further bring movement* into this position of movement (*dies Setzen der Bewegung*)” (TW 18, 311—my emphasis). It is not sufficient to (statically) posit movement. Thinking must learn how to perform movement, how to transform itself. The thought of movement must itself be moving, must embrace the dynamic of the object that it thinks.

Thereby Hegel announces the program of his own dialectic-speculative logic. The crucial transformation introduced by this logic over and against traditional *Verstandeslogik* regards the method by which the logical development is built as an immanent, self-moving thought process. The method consists in “calling to life [. . .] the dead limbs of logic through spirit” (TW 5, 48). In traditional logic, since the categories “as fixed determinations fall outside one another and are not held together in organic unity, they are dead forms that do not have in themselves the spirit which alone constitutes their living unity” (TW 5, 41). On Hegel’s critique, the categories of formal and transcendental logic are dead, unmoved forms—they have the same status as those political and juridical institutions of the ancien régime from which life has forever departed. They are dead insofar as they lack normativity over human practices: their consecrated authority is no longer authority over men’s lives or the guarantee of meaningfulness in relation to lived practices and beliefs. In their dead fixity and unmoved abstract existence, they are nothing but meaningless and useless relicts of a long gone past. Hence, in order to reclaim new meaning to logical form, contradiction and movement must be introduced in pure thinking. Contrary to the traditional view, categories should be seen as “moments” of an ongoing, fluid process in which they are bound to modify their meaning, to interact with and contradict one another, and finally to constitute the organic unity of a whole.³⁴ The “spirit” that alone is able to show the living meaningfulness, that is, the “actuality” and authority of logical thinking, is the force of contradiction, the dynamism laboring on within the process (TW 3, 460). Thus, the project of Hegel’s dialectic-speculative logic, whereby dialectic radicalizes Zeno’s and Heraclitus’s procedures of thinking movement by directly performing it, is inspired by a fundamental practical and hermeneutic need arising from the predicament of postrevolutionary modernity.

I shall end this preliminary look at Hegel’s appraisal of the history of philosophy with an account of his judgment on Aristotle on the issue at hand. To the extent that philosophy’s conceptualization of change is at stake, Hegel credits Aristotle with a “speculative” conquest. In drawing to

the center “the activity of realization (*Tätigkeit der Verwirklichung*)” (TW 19, 152) proper to the universal, Aristotle advances beyond Heraclitus’s abstract and linear understanding of movement as the mere open-ended “transition” of being and nothing into one another. But he also advances beyond Plato, achieving the comprehension of the rational as actually realized rationality. While Heraclitus has set thinking on the right path by making of “becoming” the essential determination of all there is, he has failed to recognize that what confers “universality” to such determination is its “permanence,” “identity with itself” (TW 19, 153). The dynamic conception of the universal in which activity or transformation and permanence (hence contradictory determinations) are dialectically intertwined is Aristotle’s merit. His chief metaphysical question concerning movement now regards the “mover” (*das Bewegende*): “that which the mover is.” Movement (in its essence and in all its empirical manifestations) is brought back to a moving principle and its activity. And this, in turn, is “the *logos*, the purpose.” In this way, Aristotle’s metaphysical understanding of movement leads on beyond Heraclitus and Plato. “Just as in opposition to the principle of mere change he holds on to the universal, so, by contrast, he values activity against the Pythagoreans and Plato”: Aristotle’s dynamics of activity contrasts the eternal fixity of number and the eternal forms yet maintains the mover’s identity with itself within change (TW 19, 153). *Tätigkeit* is indeed also change and transformation (*Veränderung*), but it is transformation as proper to the self-transforming and self-determining universal; it is the activity that a subject ascribes to itself insofar as it remains identical through transformation. It is such permanence within the process of change that still lacks in Heraclitus and constitutes, for Hegel, the crucial speculative step leading to the thought of “subjectivity.” Subjectivity is the agent of transformation, which, to the extent that itself suffers change and transformation also survives it, that is, it is properly *transformed* and not destroyed by it (TW 19, 153). Only with the thought of the subject is transformation properly “activity.” This constellation of ancient positions, which Hegel outlines in his account of the history of philosophy as a progression in the understanding of increasingly complex forms of transformation (from movement and change as the mere “becoming” and “transition” or *Übergehen* of being into nothing and nothing into being, to the self-transforming “activity” or *Tätigkeit* proper of subjectivity), we will encounter again in the inner development of his dialectic-speculative logic.

The foregoing look at the history of philosophy makes it clear that the “logic of the understanding” is flawed, for Hegel, on different counts all going back to its fundamental inability to grasp the movement of con-

tradition. In addition, this discussion recognizes that such logic has been operative throughout the history of philosophy—from the early Eleatic school up to Kant and his contemporaries. Finally, it indicates that Hegel's concern is to offer a conception of dialectic that being speculative can offer an account of the entire constellation of transformations that pervade the modern world, an account, that is, of objective transitions and changes as well as complex subjective and intersubjective forms of free activity, an account not only of thinking's capacity for change but also of its capacity for initiating transformation and surviving it.

At this point, two further questions must be raised. They regard, first, the way in which Hegel conceives his own speculative dialectic as overcoming the flaws of the logic of the understanding, and, second, the role that the understanding maintains for Hegel once dialectical reason has curbed its structural deficiency and instituted the immanent development of thinking. In short: In what sense is Hegel's logic of change "speculative" and "dialectical" at the same time?

5. Dialectic-Speculative Logic: Understanding and the Power of Reason

In the conclusion of the "Vorbegriff" or "preconcept" of the 1830 *Encyclopedia*, at the end of the general introduction to the logic, Hegel presents three sides of *das Logische*—form and content of the incipient discipline. These moments are "(a) the abstract or intellectual (*verständige*), (b) the dialectic or negative-rational (*negativ-vernünftige*), (c) the speculative or positive-rational (*positiv-vernünftige*)" (Enz. §79, Remark).³⁵ To prevent misinterpretations, Hegel encourages us to consider these "sides" as "moments of every logical-real formation (*jedes Logisch-Reelle[n]*), that is, of every concept and every truth," and not as three distinct "parts" of the logic. Thereby, Hegel makes two different points. First, these three sides do not belong to the logic or the logical element *alone*. Their validity is much more general and their existence much more pervasive, since they are aspects of every reality, every concept, and every truth.³⁶ Second, they are not to be considered each by itself in a linear succession as indicating different parts of the logical discipline, and as offering an anticipation of what will be justified only later. Rather, they coexist in all real formations and are distinct only when considered in the perspective of the logical "preconcept." Their status is specifically that of "moments" of a dynamic process, not of static "parts" of a given whole.

As the dominant faculty that imposes its logic on all allegedly knowable objects (in Kant's view, for example), the understanding (*der Verstand*) is responsible for blocking change and fixating abstract thought forms that are ultimately unable, in their fixation and abstraction, to grasp the dynamic of life proper to reality. Herein lies Hegel's critique of the logic of the understanding. However, once it is reduced to *das Verständige*, namely, to a limited moment of a broader process, *der Verstand* can be fully integrated within the structure and method of the logic. The "intellectual" is now a function or indeed an operative "moment" of the broader process of reason (or, more precisely, of the "rational"). What characterizes this moment is still its abstractness, its holding fast to the "fixed determinateness" and to its "distinction" (*Unterschiedenheit*) against its other. In contrast to the absolutist logic of the understanding, however, such characters of the intellectual are now viewed as a mere limited stage within the development of each logical-real form. Within this process, the intellectual is recognized as necessary. Hegel's point, however, is that although the understanding's fixation of determination is necessary, this moment, being simply a moment, is also necessarily overcome by the specifically dialectical gesture of the "transition into the opposite" that belongs to reason. There is a contradiction in the understanding's procedure whereby the intellectual abstract moment is led beyond itself consenting to its own inner *Aufhebung*. As determination is fixed and isolated from the process of reality, it becomes pure indeterminateness because it loses any real possibility of distinction against others. The procedure of fixation is self-defeating; meaning is achieved only in the "transition" to the opposite (Enz. §81). If the problem of dialectic is the problem of grasping change, this is possible only by daring to perform the transition to one's opposite, that is, by taking change upon oneself (as a form or mode of thinking and not only as a thought content). This, however, is the first, negative, or dialectic moment of reason: understanding yields to reason or becomes itself reasonable thereby recognizing how untenable its own position is. Contradiction and self-transformation are inseparable. In becoming the moment of a broader process, the understanding consents to transform itself into reason. Taken in its sovereign isolation and stubborn rejection of transformation, by contrast, the understanding, meeting its necessary limitation, yields only to the suicidal destructiveness of skepticism: negation is taken as the ultimate result; no transition to something other is accepted, that is, ultimately, nothing survives change. Both the fixity of Zeno's denial of movement and Heraclitus's generalized change display the same shortcoming if compared to Aristotle's more advanced, indeed

speculative position. As the second moment of every logical-real formation, the dialectical negativity in which the understanding meets reason thereby becoming reason(able) is presented as the “moving soul of the scientific advancement,” as the principle on which the “immanent connection and necessity of the content of science” ultimately depends (Enz. §81, Remark).³⁷ Not only does the dialectic-negative moment of reason (in contrast to the unilateral logic of the understanding) allow one to grasp the dynamic nature of all contents of thought and aspects of reality. As the “moving soul” of the scientific presentation, this moment is itself responsible for both organizing contents into a process and creating connections that immanently display their necessity. Now, this thoroughgoing connection of sense is indeed what we expect to find in the much-needed retrospective narrative of the contemporary crises from which we began.

Finally, the speculative or positive moment of rationality constitutes the unity of the opposites, the basis of which is precisely that same transition achieved in the negative moment of reason (Enz. §82). The unity that reason constitutes in its “affirmative” validity is a unity that preserves in itself that “dissolution” and “transition” from which it arises—it is, in other words, a dynamic unity that as such sets itself as the end result of the process (Enz. §82, Remark). Once we accept the task of thinking reality *as* movement, we realize that our thinking itself *becomes* movement or is set in movement, that we think in and through a process, or that thinking itself is a process. To fulfill this task, however, we must abandon the logic of the understanding and expand the understanding to reason (or *das Verständige* into *das Vernünftige*). This is the original stipulation on which Hegel’s logic rests. From this stipulation depend the way in which the pure movement of dialectic-speculative thinking is shaped as well as the way in which the interaction of the dialectic and the speculative takes place in the unfolding of the logical process. Hegel’s reflection on these issues is consigned to the heading of “method.” However, before getting to the question of method in some detail, we must raise a final point concerning that initial stipulation itself.

In Hegel’s logic, dialectic-speculative reason grasps transformation by leading the understanding to perform the transition into the opposite. The understanding, on its part, is entirely amenable to such transition. It does not remain to its untenable conceptual fixations but consents to the transition into the opposite. Understanding is from the outset defeated or alternatively persuaded by reason and reduced to a moment—*das Verständige*. But why is the understanding so easily subjugated to reason; why does it consent to become

reasonable and perform the transition to the opposite? After all, this is not what happened in Zeno's or even in Kant's case. For them, the understanding remained stubbornly isolated from reason; dialectic remained blocked in the form of antinomies. To put this point differently: what kind of *necessity* governs the articulation of the three sides of "every logical-real formation"?

The first answer to this question is systematic and carries with itself a historical implication. At this point, namely, at the threshold of the logic, the understanding has gone through the *Phenomenology*, the result of which is precisely the standpoint of pure thinking or the element of the logic (this is achieved in the figure of "Absolute Knowing").³⁸ And in pure thinking all "opposition of consciousness" has been finally eliminated (TW 5, 43, 57, also 67f.). By engaging in the phenomenological path, the understanding has exhausted all its possible objections to reason (or truth); its opposition is consequently also eliminated. Brought to its last implications or to its final "consummation," skepticism has finally been turned against itself (has famously fulfilled its task as "sich vollbringender Skeptizismus"—TW 3, 72). But the *Phenomenology* has also presented the succession of spirit's historical figures thereby leading to Hegel's own present and to its final, reflective "recollection" or *Erinnerung*—the same recollecting moment that we are living in today. This is precisely the historical standpoint that Hegel endorses in the preface to the 1807 work opening up the dimension of the postrevolutionary present as a time of change and transition to a new epoch.³⁹ Thus, the *systematic* standpoint of the logic placed beyond the phenomenological opposition of consciousness is also, at the same time, the *historical* standpoint of Hegel's present—the perspective that finally allows for a rational comprehension of the historical change brought forth by the turmoil of 1789 and felt as immediate evidence by Hegel's contemporaries (that which "is not difficult to see"). At this point in Hegel's system and at this point in history the understanding must yield to the power of reason becoming a consenting "moment" of its development. This historical vantage point has produced the need for the philosophical comprehension of historical change but has also allowed for the bold methodological gesture whereby the understanding has consented to submit to the power of reason, namely, has consented to bring change to bear on its own way of thinking or has consented to change the way it thinks. Times of historical change have brought the understanding to acknowledge the necessity for a deep change in its own logic, for a deep change in its way of thinking. Accordingly, *der Verstand* becomes *das Verständige*, and thereby consents on becoming a moment of the broader process of dialectic-speculative reason.

This latter consideration leads us to a further answer to the question of why, in the logic, the understanding yields so easily (or necessarily) to reason: historically, the power of reason—*die Macht der Vernunft*—has become too strong to be defied by the understanding's opposition. Indeed, for Zeno and even for Kant reason was still too weak and impotent (*ohnmächtig*) to sustain the force of contradiction. For them, the sovereign logic is that of the understanding, the principle of non-contradiction. Even reason's own validity and success is measured (at least theoretically) on the model offered by such a logic (so, for example, in the Transcendental Dialectic of the first *Critique*). Blocked by the antinomies, Kantian reason is for Hegel nothing more than understanding. Reason has not yet appeared as an independent, overarching force, certainly not as a force to which the understanding must yield.

According to these two arguments, the necessity that connects the three sides of every *Logisch-Reelles* is both systematic and historical necessity. It is this necessity that requires a change in the paradigm of thinking in order to make sense of the contemporary reality. Hegel, however, is the first to outline the possibility of a different scenario. While underscoring the mutual dependence of the three sides of every "logical-real formation," Hegel makes room for the possibility that "they all be placed under the first moment, *das Verständige*, and hence considered in isolation," and consequently not in their truth. This happened already in traditional logic.⁴⁰ But Hegel does not seem to limit this possibility to something that took place in the past and has been left behind once and for all. The passage suggests that it is always possible that the first moment may take the upper hand, thereby blocking the development of contradiction, the "transition" to the opposite, and the access to truth. Hegel does also recognize figures and forms of life in which the understanding has become autonomous and has refused to yield to the (not yet so strong) power of reason. Skepticism (Enz. §81 Remark), irony (R §140, TW 7, 277ff.), and the terror of the French Revolution are different examples thereof. But additional examples may be offered by our contemporary reality thereby disclosing new questions. It follows that if the development of Hegel's dialectic-speculative logic stages the process in which the three sides of all logical-real formations in their purely formal dynamism are intertwined, it also presents an itinerary that at certain stages may host the possibility or the risk for all moments to be placed under the first one. This is the risk of the resurgence of the understanding and of the absolutism of its static logic, which Hegel develops in its appropriate forms and figures in the course of the logical process.

6. Hegel's Dialectic-Speculative Logic: The Path for a Reconstruction

Let us now take stock of where we are and sum up the itinerary outlined earlier. I have argued that the predicament of our contemporary world has at least this in common with the historical context in which Hegel matures the idea of a dialectic-speculative logic from his early years to the publication and republication of the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopedia*. First, to be a time of deep historical change and transformation—of crisis, as it were—that requires to be understood and not simply lived and felt in the emotional uneasiness and actual pain that it produces at many levels, but also requires that traditional wisdom and modes of explanations be profoundly challenged so as to yield to new ones. And second, to be a time that demands a radical change in the way in which we think and live, precisely in order to survive the transformation of our times and possibly orient such transformation toward “better” forms of life. While today we are still in a vacuum with regard to the selection of intellectual resources that can help us out of the current crisis, I have turned to Hegel and claimed that his response to the demands of the time—demands at once historical and philosophical (proof is offered by the history of philosophy)—is to present a “logic of transformation” that overcoming the fixations of the “logic of the understanding” (traditional formal logic and Kant’s transcendental logic) and its flaws in grasping change, is framed from the outset as a dialectical and speculative logic in which contradiction plays a fundamental role in the pursuit of truth.

In this framework, I shall now briefly address the general methodological question that this book sets out to answer. How can we offer a reconstruction of the argument of Hegel’s logic that justifies the claims presented, namely: (i) that against the common wisdom of the “logic of the understanding” Hegel’s logic is a logic of transformation and process, which is *dialectical and speculative* in a very distinctive sense; (ii) that it is the *descriptive and normative* theory that allows us to think of change as well as to change the way in which we think; (iii) and that along with presenting the *necessity* of the development, it also contemplates the possibility and the risk that such development be halted and impeded by the resurgent claims of an isolationist and absolutist understanding. It is on the basis of these three programmatic features that I suggest Hegel’s logic be taken as the most fruitful tool for an understanding of our contemporary world. Accordingly, in offering an argument in support of such a view of

the logic, my reconstruction will also, at the same time, put this logic at work with regard to some troubling aspects specific to our twenty-first-century predicament.

In the next chapter (chapter 2), I shall take up the suggestion that I obliquely used earlier to outline the current predicament of crisis. At stake is the problem of weaving a unitary and meaningful story from an apparently chaotic manifold of details—a story that offers the development of a movement, not a static photograph of selected, fragmentary moments (or even of all moments) more or less arbitrarily juxtaposed. I contend that at issue is, first, the problem of the *beginning* (of the course of events as well as of their narrative, the beginning in the *ordo essendi* and in the *ordo cognoscendi*); second, the problem of a beginning that can immanently disclose the necessity of the *advancement* or progress to something else, different and possibly new (and not of a repetition or a pseudo-advancement that leads us back to the exact same predicament); and finally, the *end* or conclusion of the movement, which poses a problem in some aspects analogous to that of the beginning. Moreover, at stake are both the descriptive and the normative dimensions of our narrative/process. In the last chapter of the *Science of Logic*, dedicated to the “absolute idea,” which is in turn articulated as the “absolute method,” Hegel addresses precisely this issue as the chief issue proper to the philosophical method, itself the end and end result of the entire development of the logic. In the next chapter I shall give an account of the “absolute method” in this perspective. What we are dealing with at this level or at the level of what Hegel calls the logical “method” are the overarching structures of change and transformation—those structures that emerge only at the end of the movement and allow for its overall retrospective reconstruction precisely *as movement*. In this way, the conclusion of Hegel’s logic becomes the starting point of my present argument.

In chapter 3, I reconstruct the movement of the *Science of Logic*, disassembling its development into the “forms” and “figures” that punctuate the different stages of logical transformation, and in the “operations” and “actions” through which forms and figures are distinctively and successively shaped. These constitute the points of crystallization of the movement—the points in which movement and progress are measured by the permanence that such forms and figures represent.⁴¹ My chief question is: How should the logic be read in order to capture the dynamic of its process *as process*? How can movement be detected given that the standpoint in which the movement is produced is the perspective of immanence—how can one detect movement while being immersed in it? I show that movement is

captured by a synchronic disarticulation of the whole: the reappearance of a certain form within different logical spheres (its permanence) and the variation and correction that such form correspondingly presents in the new context (its transformation) are the cipher of the advance made and the transformation produced by the process.

The logical *forms* indicate the general modes in which pure thinking thinks. I take them to be the specific dialectic-speculative successor of the categories of the *Verstandeslogik*. While their transformation throughout the different logical spheres (Being, Essence, Concept) reveals the *necessity* for thinking to change the modes in which it thinks, the actual transition from one form to its variation opens up the space of possibility that thinking meets when confronted with the necessity of change. At stake is here the connection between understanding and reason (or better, *das Verstandige* and *das Vernünftige*) and its necessity. Are there alternatives open in this space, and what does this imply with regard to the logical demand that thinking change its ways? That is, can thinking refuse to transform itself (or refuse to become reasonable) thereby following the logic of the understanding and remaining stuck at one stage of the development, incapable to move on? Ultimately, such refusal to change and to adopt new ways of thinking goes hand in hand with the incapacity of understanding real change and with the failure to provide a story that can have the power to change reality or, at least, to contribute to such change. At stake at these junctures is the interaction of the intellectual and the rational “moments” proper of “every logical-real formation.” What does thinking need to give up in order to move on, and what does it gain in the space of logical “transition”?

The logical *figures* stand for the real formations captured by the logic of their immanent transformation; they are natural and spiritual forms of reality even before the distinction between nature and spirit is drawn. The forms stand to the figures of pure thinking as the shadow stands to the object that casts it. With regard to these figures, the logic displays the necessity of their genesis, their resistance to contradiction, the conditions of their *Aufhebung*, the production of their successor in the transition. The logical movement of the figures of reality is a movement toward more complex structures, more pervasive connections, and more diffuse and acute contradictions. It is a movement toward more concrete formations or toward formations that entail more possibilities (not necessarily ‘better’ ones) and in which increasingly ‘more’ is at stake: herein contradictions are, at the same time, more deadly and risky, and more productive with regard to the new that follows. To this correspond more complex intellectual strategies

for overcoming contradiction, hence forms of knowledge less hindered by obstacles and not impeded by less tenacious contradictions. In this perspective, the logical process in its entirety can also be described as a movement toward less and less unilateral connections and positions—as a movement that ultimately can be viewed, as it were, *a tutto tondo*. In this way, what this process describes and prescribes is the growth of freedom and the achievement of truth.

By reconstructing the logical process in terms of the selected forms and figures in which the act of thinking changes and the change in thinking takes place, it is my intention to circumvent (or address from a thoroughly new perspective) traditional disputes such as the one regarding the way in which the determinations of Hegel's logic can still be considered "categories" (the issue of the properly logical status of Hegel's "logic"), and the one regarding the way in which logical forms may be said abstracted from reality, hence in need of further, successive concrete application or instantiation (the issue of the relationship between the logic and the *Realphilosophie*). In other words, I intend to leave behind all the dichotomies in light of which Hegel's logic is generally read such as, first and foremost, the opposition logical-real and abstract-concrete.

On the basis of the distinction between forms and figures in the logical process and going back to the analysis of the "absolute method," the last three chapters (chapters 4–6) bring to light the structures of movement—the beginning, the advancement, and the end—indicated by the method, in which forms and figures are successively caught in their immanent transformation. Thereby I offer a synchronic reading of the entire logic. I shall examine the forms and figures assumed, respectively, by the (methodological) beginning, the advancement, and the end across the successive spheres of Being, Essence, and the Concept. In this way, it will become possible to measure, in a synchronic comparison, the *transformation* that dynamically connects them. Thus, for example, in order to measure the movement or to assess the progress made between Being and Essence, I propose to confront the different ways in which the beginning is made, respectively, within the sphere of Being and Essence. What shall arise from such a reconstruction is a lesson both in how to pursue the philosophical understanding of real transformation, and in how to effectively transform our ways of thinking in order to keep up with our own changing world.

Chapter 2

From the Beginning to the End

What Is Method?

I am not trying to tell a story [. . .]. A mind thinking. They might be islands of light— islands in the stream that I am trying to convey; life itself going on. The current of the moths flying strongly this way [. . .]. One must get the sense that this is the beginning, this the middle; that the climax—when she opens the window and the moth comes in.

—Virginia Woolf, *Diary*, 1925–1930, Tuesday, May 28, 1929

& I am imagining how it would be if we could infuse souls

—Virginia Woolf’s last *Diary* entry—Monday, March 24, 1941—
(before she dies on Friday, March 27)

Set on the backdrop of the failures of the “logic of the understanding” and making good on the lessons taught by the history of philosophy, Hegel’s new dialectic-speculative logic is a logic capable of capturing the flux and transformation animating the present age, and capable, at the same time, of showing the necessity for thinking to change the ways it thinks. The pure thinking involved in this logic is a thinking that progressively transforms itself. Hegel’s crucial point is that only a logic that itself develops in a progressive movement of transformation can fulfill a cognitive and hermeneutic aim toward reality and display a practical and normative dimension. Two are the questions that this program presents to us at this point. On the one hand, we must start characterizing both the type of movement that Hegel’s dialectic-speculative logic stages and the type of thinking involved in it. On the other hand, at issue is the internal, dynamic structure of the logical process itself. The aim of this chapter is to address these two interconnected issues taking the conclusive step of the logic, that is, the development of

the “absolute idea” to “absolute method” as the guiding text and comparing Hegel’s argument at this final stage of the logic with his introductory remarks on method. The notion of “method” in the peculiar sense that this term assumes for Hegel stands at the intersection of our two questions. After all, “method” is both the modality of thinking transformation and the modality in which transformation itself takes place.¹

Hegel addresses the first issue regarding the type of movement staged by the logic twice, once at the very beginning of the *Science of Logic*, in its introduction and prefaces, then in its conclusive chapter. The difference between these two occurrences is, in the first place, systematic. While in the introduction the considerations regarding the logical movement take place *without* the science and *before* its actual inception, hence, are not immanent but have a merely extrinsic, anticipatory validity, in the final chapter we have the direct thematization of what has occurred *within* and *throughout* the logical science itself. The perspective of the end allows Hegel to offer a final account of what the logic in its entirety has accomplished. However, since the logic is the progressive articulation of a movement, its result is not a qualitative fixed state but is itself a form of movement in which an account is given regarding the type of development that has been staged throughout—the result is the final movement in which all previous forms and figures of movement are recollected and thereby reenacted. It is precisely in this conclusive perspective that the two issues—the type of movement proper to the logic, and the mode of its dynamic articulation—eventually converge in what, for Hegel, is the structure of the “absolute method.”

In what follows, I shall offer an answer to these questions in two steps. I begin with a general account of the logical method that follows Hegel’s own introductory remarks before the beginning of the logic and still outside of it. Herein I discuss the two features of the logical process that Hegel brings to the fore under the explicit heading of “method,” namely, determinate negation and immanence. Then I take the last chapter of the logic as my central text and show the way in which those preliminary remarks appear once the entire logical development has made its course. At stake, in both steps, is the broader issue of the *connection between movement and method* in Hegel’s logic. My claim is that the method should be seen, at the same time, as the overall “action” or the “plot”—the mythos or story—that constitute the logic into a logic of transformative processes, and as the way in which all “true” action and all “true” plot should be constituted. Herein lies the hermeneutic function of the method toward reality, that is, its function with regard to true philosophical knowledge.

1. The Nature of the Process: Determinate Negation and Immanence

Hegel contends that what distinguishes dialectic-speculative logic from traditional logic as well as from Kant's transcendental logic is not so much the "content" (*Gehalt und Inhalt*) that it assumes as its theme and object but the "method," that is, the way in which the content is dealt with in the logical exposition. In particular, Hegel argues that while logic has traditionally treated its content as a "dead," unmoved material and therefore has arranged it in an arbitrary and merely external way, the task of his work is to "infuse life into the dead limbs of logic," hence to treat those "limbs" according to their own "spirit."² The organic metaphor directly captures Hegel's position here: at stake in the logic is an organism (thinking as an organism or better as an organic process), hence a peculiar arrangement of parts and wholes. Even more specifically, at stake is a *living* organism—a self-regulating and self-transforming organism. An essential sign of life is internal self-movement—a form of movement that the philosophical tradition brings back to an immanent animating living principle generally designated as "soul."³ Accordingly, what the logic must formally render is the dynamic of movement proper to a living organism. The problem of method—often designated by Hegel as itself the "soul" of the logical process—is the combined problem of how to think of a self-generating living movement and how to actually generate such a movement.⁴ This is the inner, necessary process of determination of pure thinking, which is the true content of the logic. Thereby Hegel's correction of the shortcomings of formal and transcendental logic offers, in addition, an answer to Kant's peculiar problem of reflecting judgment, that is, generally, to the problem of thinking life (in ourselves and in nature outside of ourselves). Thus, in Hegel's dialectic-speculative perspective, thinking the movement of life becomes a *logical* task. At stake is, first, the issue of thinking and presenting the dynamic of a living movement capable of transforming itself and of maintaining its identity throughout its manifold transformations (and not, for example, the task of presenting a complete static set or table of categories fixed once and for all). Second, at stake is the issue of thinking and presenting a movement whose order and determination unfolds following its own internal laws (or its own "soul" or "spirit"), and not responding to external constraints imposed by the authority of a separate thinking subject or consciousness (be it a metaphysical, transcendental, or phenomenological subject) or by a set of given presuppositions, rules, definitions, or goals.

In this regard, on the basis of the shared idea of a self-generating and self-regulating movement, the method and its content are said to be identical.⁵ To think according to a movement and not according to fixed determinations, rules, or positions is to directly present the movement of thinking itself or to present thinking itself as a movement.

Traditional logic assumes its content as historically given and ready at hand. Hegel's diagnosis is that proceeding on this assumption such logic finds the content dead and leaves it dead, that is, unable to move and unable to express the life that pulsates in this movement. The only way to infuse life into such content is to find the "method" that alone can transform logic into the movement of "pure science." Considering the present state of the discipline, Hegel observes that logic has clearly not yet found its "scientific method" (TW 5, 48). And yet the paradox already raised in the introduction to the *Phenomenology* is that method cannot be separated from that *of which*, as well as from that *for which*, it is method, hence it cannot be given beforehand and simply applied as an external instrument to a given material.⁶ Ultimately, despite Hegel's insistence that his logic does not introduce any new content, this paradox implies that to find the true scientific method (with which to treat an allegedly old material) is to deal with an utterly new content (i.e., to entirely transform that old material).⁷ On Hegel's view, logic has never before assumed the *process* of thinking *qua process* as its topic; it has only classified distinct forms and laws of thinking in their static isolation. Thus, it is the *process* of thinking in its living dynamic that constitutes the specific content and method of the dialectic-speculative logic.

The new enterprise of displaying the logic of thinking as a process opens up a twofold perspective on the relationship between the method and the content of the logic. "The exposition of what alone can be the true method of philosophical science falls within the treatment of logic itself; for the method is the consciousness of the form of the inner self-movement of the content of the logic" (TW 5, 49). In this passage, Hegel gives us an insight into the sense in which the method is identical with, but also the sense in which it is different from, the logical movement. In one respect, the true method is one with the movement of the *entire* logic itself; method is that which generates the movement—and thereby the content—of the logic (as logic of movement); it is the developing process of thinking in the unfolding length of its development. This identity is one of the meanings of the *immanence* of the method-movement of the logic. On this premise, it seems that no "treatise on method" can be formulated *in abstracto* or

that no method can be theorized outside of or before its actual practice. Nonetheless concrete “examples” of such method can still be provided. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel explains, he has offered an “example” of the true method in considering a “more concrete object, which is consciousness.”⁸ However, awareness of its being an *example*, and specifically an example of *method*, is displayed only retrospectively, only *after* the science has run its entire course.⁹ What we have in the logic is another example of method, which arises when attending to the most abstract of all objects, namely, pure thinking itself. This is also *the* paradigmatic example of philosophical method. In analogy with the case of the *Phenomenology*, however, we can expect that awareness of its being an example and, in the most general way, an (or rather *the*) example of *method* will emerge only retrospectively, at the end of the science.

In another respect, the passage quoted earlier suggests that the method is distinct from the movement that it generates and this despite not being external but still immanent to it. Offering a preliminary definition, which will be confirmed in the last chapter of the logic, Hegel recognizes a moment of “consciousness” proper to method as well as a formal character that is obtained by appealing to the form/content distinction. In Hegel’s somewhat convoluted formulation: method is “the consciousness of *the form of the inner self-movement of the content* of the logic.” The consciousness of form proper to the method is awareness of the dynamic nature of the logical content: as we have seen, content of the logic is not a thing, a substrate, or an *ens* but movement itself; it is a movement that generates awareness of being a movement, whereby “being a movement” is the *form* of the movement itself. Method is the form of the “self-movement” of the content. It is precisely *this consciousness* that distinguishes the self-movement of the content from its form. Indeed, it is consciousness that sets the movement apart and considers it as an “example” of method. To be sure, the consciousness belonging to method is not the same subjective, finite consciousness that the *Phenomenology* takes as its concrete object and follows throughout the complete series of its oppositions up to the culmination of Absolute Knowing. For the logic begins only once such finite consciousness (and the necessary opposition belonging to it) has been left behind once and for all.¹⁰ What, then, is the “pure” consciousness proper to logical method? To answer this question, we need to look more closely at Hegel’s account of method itself. For the moment, however, on the basis of the indications offered by the introduction to the *Science of Logic*, we can claim that the consciousness of method is the capacity or, better, the *proved ability* to infuse life into the

dead material found in the tradition. Thereby the consciousness of method is the ability to weave the unitary story of thinking's most proper inner development—an ability proved by what it accomplishes in the end, that is, by the story into which thinking's movement is finally transformed.

If method is the exposition of a movement *as movement*, the question of how “advancement” is achieved (or, alternatively, the question of what is the source of movement) becomes crucial.¹¹ Two are the features that Hegel considers in the preliminary concept of method—also called explicitly “dialectic” (TW 5, 50–51)—namely, (i) determinate negation and (ii) immanence or, in an alternative formulation, the consideration of things “in-and-for-themselves,” that is, without reference to metaphysical substrates, subjective representations, or a transcendental “I think.”¹²

(i) Determinate negation is presented as *das Einzige*—the one and only most necessary point—to attain the dynamic progress of the logic.¹³ This is framed, in a general way, as a process of determination, that is, as a development toward complexity in which a progressively richer determinateness and specificity of thinking and, at the same time, a more extended net of relationships is achieved. Appropriating Spinoza's famous dictum, Hegel conceives of determination in connection to negation. Negation, in turn, is always determinate—is always and necessarily negation *of something*, that is, of some determinateness and of some content—and as such becomes the chief methodological feature of the logical movement: it is the engine of this very movement. Hegel suggests that the “system of concepts” that is the logic must be built following this principle. Determinate negation implies the recognition that negativity and contradiction are always determinate and as such determining. This means, first, that they are negation of and contradiction in determinate contents: negation is successful or produces the movement of determination because it is context dependent (an absolute negation, i.e., a negation that is not referred to the specificity of a content, neither determines nor brings the process forth; it rather halts the process and reduces it to a sterile indeterminate nothing). And this means, second, that the concept resulting from negation contains in itself that which has been negated as the determinate basis on which the successive movement is built. Determinate negation is in itself double in the sense of presenting the dynamic of (at least) a two-phase movement: it displays the succession of that which is negated and that which results from that negation. Accordingly, in Hegel's dialectical method negation as a source of movement is not absolute (although “absolute negation” and “contradiction” do become thematic moments of the logical development itself).¹⁴ While determinate negation

produces the advancement of the process, an absolute negation brings it to an end. The opening of the Logic of Being offers the first “example” of the principle of determinate negation. Significantly, both its exposition in the introductory concept of method and its first exemplification in the inception of the movement of Being are distinct from the thematic account of contradiction and its principle at the level of the Logic of Essence. The latter does not belong to the methodological account that I am here pursuing (it constitutes, instead, the specific content of the *Wesenslogik*).¹⁵

(ii) The second feature of method, namely, immanence, is introduced as an indirect justification in support of the “one and only point” of determinate negation. In its formulation Hegel conveys, at the same time, the method’s perfectibility and incompleteness and the inescapable necessity of its truth. “I could not pretend that the method, which I follow in this system of logic—or rather, *which this system follows in itself (an sich)*—is not capable of greater completeness, of greater elaboration in detail” (TW 5, 50—my emphasis). Since in one respect the method is identical with the movement of thinking in the logic, it ultimately erases the author’s presence (and his arbitrary choice), becoming one with the development that the logical system follows “in and of itself.” In this way, Hegel also seems to sidestep the issue of the method *used* in the logical presentation or rather to reduce it to the modality in which logical determination proceeds *immanently*. This point requires some explanation (or, at least, some exemplification), for it sounds indeed like a shift in the burden of proof from the author to the logic itself, which thereby acquires a life of its own and a normativity of its own. Hegel’s point is that to the extent that pure thinking follows *its own* movement (or its own “soul”) whereby the logical process is produced, instead of depending on an external presupposed *deus ex machina* for its movement (an “I think,” a phenomenological “we,” an omnipotent or all-knowing subject or substance or the philosopher’s authority), and instead of being forced to fit into prearranged schemes (tables of categories, various external purposes, rules, etc.), it will eventually prove its own truth. The method whereby movement issues from thinking’s own action and is one with it, Hegel forcefully declares, is “*the only true one*,” although it can still be perfected and made more stringent in the details.¹⁶ In other words, the truth of the method is proved by the fact that by following it as its own, thinking succeeds in actually moving on, and proceeds in an immanent determination process (it does not remain stuck in paralyzing antinomies or dead ends, it does not end up in the absolute nothing of an indeterminate negation, nor is it reduced to a dead table of categories).

Since the method is one with the logical movement taken in its entirety (and with the consciousness thereof), the “truth” of the method is indeed a peculiar truth. It does not consist in its being given once and for all (the method is not a fixed scheme or instrument; rather, it can and should be perfected), but it consists rather in its being indistinguishable from its object and content, “for it is the content in itself (*in sich*), the dialectic which it possesses within itself (*an ihm selbst*), which moves it on.”¹⁷ The method is the action itself, not the separate description of the action. If we connect this passage with the previous account of method—in which Hegel brings in the distinction of form and content, suggesting that while the content is that which displays an inner self-movement (or indeed, as now claimed, is “dialectic”), the form is that of which there arises “consciousness”¹⁸—we can conclude that when the “truth” of method is at issue, at stake is the way in which form and content correspond or are adequate to each other. Method is “true” if the movement that is being immanently generated, when brought to its end, produces no other result above and beyond that movement but the consciousness of this very movement as movement.¹⁹ Hegel suggests that such adequacy is only then fully reached, when the content, as living content, in its inner dynamism gives and follows its own inner method or is ultimately one with it, that is, when the content shaped by its own internal negativity (or dialectic) is moved on through determinate negation to further determination. “It is clear that no exposition can be taken as scientifically valid, which does not pursue the course of this method [. . .] for this is the course of the subject matter itself (*Gang der Sache selbst*)” (TW 5, 50). This is Hegel’s first explanation of the method’s immanence, which is ultimately one with the proof of the method’s truth.

The two points that Hegel makes in the preliminary concept of method support each other: (i) determinate negation requires (ii) immanence, while immanence produces the advancement of the process precisely through a negation that functions as determinate negation. It is this view of method that places “dialectic”—heretofore considered, even by Kant, only as a “part” of the logic—in a thoroughly new perspective and accords it a crucial function in generating the movement of determination (TW 5, 51; Enz. §79 Remark). On Hegel’s view, dialectic is not just a part of the logic but its pervasive underlying dynamic structure. It is a necessary “moment” of every “logical-real formation.”²⁰ While the material of the logic is inherited from the tradition, its formal integration into a whole is not, so that the new problem that speculative logic (and specifically its method) is called upon to solve is a problem of dynamic “order,” namely, first, how to produce the

“inner necessary connection” of the systematic whole given that the organism of the logic is a living organism in which the movement of life must be reignited; second, how to “immanently generate the differences” that account for the discursivity and complexity of the thinking process; and finally how to achieve the “transition” among successive determinations and spheres of determination—*Übergang* being key to the movement qua movement (TW 5, 51). This constellation addresses the methodological problem of the dynamism of the logical progress as it appears in the introduction to the science, that is, before its actual beginning.

Hegel contrasts the immanence of dialectic with the procedures of “external reflection” (*äußerliche Reflexion*: TW 5, 50) at work in all traditional expositions of the discipline of logic. External reflection resorts to the procedure of “deduction” in order to justify the determinations arbitrarily anticipated in the division of the whole. This is the instrumental procedure that treats its object as a dead, unmoved material, and considers negation and contradiction as the dissolution of contents into nothingness. The necessity that deduction provides to the logical exposition is, in turn, a merely external necessity that has no connection to the nature and specificity of the content under consideration but is entirely due to an external thinking activity that organizes the exposition from without according to given presuppositions and purposes. In the static logic construed by external reflection, thinking is the mechanical application of an inert set of given rules, and the only movement is that of reflection itself, which, however, remains utterly separated from its content, unable to fully grasp it in its specific nature, unable to interact with it and change it in any way. In this case, to the dead static nature of the object corresponds the scripted mechanical activity of an external subject that can only think within the confines of given laws and categories (transgressing those laws and limits leads only to antinomies, meaninglessness, and illusion). From these expositions, the inner “soul” of the content has been forced out from the outset. Because of the rigidity that invests both sides, this logic is unable to grasp movement and unable to be itself the presentation of a movement: the content remains dead and motionless, as does the thinking that appropriates it.

On Hegel’s view, the shortcomings of external reflection ultimately stem from its inability to consider the determinations of thinking in their “purity.” This is by contrast the proper task of the dialectic-speculative logic as the science of pure thinking. For the form, when thought precisely “in its purity, contains in itself (*in sich selbst*) the capacity of determining itself” (TW 5, 61) as it contains the negativity that moves it on to

further determination. External reflection can present (and indeed deduce) thinking's own determinations only insofar as they are not taken as conceptual pure forms but are anchored in some more concrete representation (for example, on this view, "nothing" cannot be thought in its purity and becomes the more concrete, physical, or metaphysical representation of the "void")²¹ or alternatively, as Kant paradigmatically puts it, in an "I think" that as thinking "subject" must be able to accompany all our representations, thereby becoming the reference point on which the entire logic and all use of the understanding ultimately depends (KrV B131–134fn.). Traditional metaphysics offers just another version of this inability to consider the form of thinking in its purity or "in-and-for-itself."²² This time, however, thinking's determinations—which are, at the same time, determinations of being—are anchored in presupposed metaphysical "substrates" (being, for example, is *ens*, is something or a thing, *res*: TW 5, 61). In both cases, thinking and being are deprived of movement: they are not viewed as themselves capable of development and action, for only that in which thinking occurs (or that which is said to be, the "I think" or the *res cogitans*) is seen as a possible agent; determination does not occur as a development through negativity and does not produce a necessary logical order.

Summing up the results of the previous analysis, we can claim that if dialectic-speculative logic is characterized, against the logic of the understanding, by its dynamic character, such character is expressed by the peculiar method—properly, for Hegel, the "only true method"—that is utterly identical with the logical movement. To this method determinate negation and immanence belong as essential features because the movement staged by the logic is generated and constituted by them.

2. Logical Movement and Logical Action

Hegel's preliminary considerations on the method-movement of the logic—the method viewed as movement *outside* of the actual movement (or before the process begins)—leads me to the suggestion that the pure, immanent development of the logic is the "action" taking place in it. I shall now develop this claim in reference to the text in which Hegel explicitly thematizes the logical method. Already in the introductory view of method previously discussed, this is presented as the account of the logical action that employs "the mode of enactment not of narrative." Such action unfolds immanently (i.e., without being guided by external reflection, by given

presuppositions or by a presupposed goal) until, at the very end, its ongoing sequence is conclusively instituted into the overall unity of the “plot,” at which point the laws of its institution come to light. Indeed, before the end is reached there is no story to be recounted, there is only the action being performed in the ongoing movement of its successive performance. The final plot—or the action closing up into the meaningful unity of the plot—is identical with the performed action and yet displays the added formal dimension of the *consciousness* of the laws of its performance. It is retrospectively *descriptive* with regard to the different steps of the consumed action but is, in addition, *normative* in its exemplarity with regard to all true action that can possibly follow from it and according to it. This is the claim that I shall explore in the following argument. In the perspective gained at the end of the development (and only at this point), the plot or the unitary action that the logic has woven starting from the beginning emerges as the “absolute method.” This is also the only *true* method. It is the (only) action that succeeds in constituting itself into the unity of the plot. This is the method the “truth” of which has been immanently demonstrated to the extent that the method itself has been produced as the result and final consequence of the entire logical development and now proves to be the “consciousness of the form of the inner self-movement of the content.” The method is “true” because it has pragmatically succeeded in generating the logical action and in recollecting it in the unity of a story. The method, this time as the final, thematic outcome of the accomplished movement itself, is the enactment or actual performance of the logic’s entire action (not merely its narrative) that concludes it in the form of a meaningful plot. In other words, immanence is not a merely descriptive device of Hegel’s new view of logical narrative, implying the rejection of the external standpoint or reflection and of a *deus ex machina* from which the impetus of the movement would stem and, furthermore, the absence of an external preconstituted goal to which and from which the movement is driven. Immanence indicates the fundamentally *practical* (and performative) dimension of the logical movement. Logical advancement is the dynamic of the action in which thinking is involved once it accepts (or indeed “decides”) *to begin* to think purely, that is, to engage in the thinking activity itself and in this activity only (not in describing or narrating such activity, not in impeding or blocking or sidetracking its unfolding with other purposes in view). Method is instituted as the overall concluded plot of the logic only at the end. That the activity of logical thinking gains its final shape in a meaningful complex action is not a presupposition of the movement

but its (unintended) final consequence. In this way, the logic is the proof that pure thinking is the activity of *meaningful* thinking. The proof is the successful institution of the meaningful plot in the form of the “absolute method.” The “absolute idea,” declares Hegel, as final truth and “all truth” is “absolute method” (TW 6, 549).

In what follows, I show, first, that Hegel's idea of a logic of transformation leads to specifying the dynamic of the logical movement as the dynamic of the *action performed* by pure discursive thinking. Then I connect such action to Hegel's peculiar idea of *method*, arguing that the action staged by the logic is not only the action successively *performed* by pure thinking but also the action conclusively and retrospectively *re-collected* in the unitary plot that is the method. In this perspective, I offer an account of the “absolute method” discussed by Hegel in the last chapter of the logic, and a first answer to the broad problem raised in the previous chapter concerning the issue of what Hegel's logic is truly about.

Heretofore, being interested in setting Hegel's dialectic-speculative logic apart from the logic of the understanding and in bringing to light its distinctive program, I have underlined the dynamic character of the logical process by employing almost interchangeably terms such as development, movement, change, and transformation. Clearly, these terms need to be used in a more specific way and the types of dynamic processes that they respectively indicate must be carefully distinguished. This is indeed what the logic does from the beginning to the end: the process that the logic presents is not uniform but is the complex succession and coordination of different types of movement—from the indeterminateness of “becoming” (*Werden*) and the negativity of “vanishing” (*Verschwinden*) in which no directionality seems to have emerged in the Logic of Being, to the reflexivity and doubleness of the processes of the Logic of Essence, to the free activity of subjectivity and the “development” (*Entwicklung*) of the *Begriff* in the Logic of the Concept, to the final “decision” (*Entschluss*) whereby the absolute idea transitions into nature. Accordingly, to sketch out a “typology” of logical transformations will be one of the reconstructive implications of this book. For the moment, however, as the overall movement of the logic is still under discussion in its most general form, I want to recall the distinctions that emerged in Hegel's account of the main problem of dialectic (and speculation) in the history of Greek philosophy. To sum up, very briefly, this point, we have seen that the impossibility of understanding physical “movement” (*Bewegung*) was the chief issue for Zeno, whereas the great conquest of Heraclitus was to recognize in “becoming” (*Werden*) the universal omnipervasive

metaphysical principle of reality. Change and transformation were opposed to the eternity and immutability of the intelligible—of Parmenides's Being, of Pythagoras's Number, and of Plato's Ideas. Change and transformation were relegated to the material world, which is placed opposite to the intelligible world and metaphysically separated from it. The logic of change and transformation is the logic of the material, finite, imperfect natural and human world. One of the crucial issues posed by this framework is whether movement belongs to the true reality or is a mere appearance, an illusion due to finitude and to thinking's own limitations. Throughout all these positions, the dynamism of the process—be it metaphysical becoming, physical movement, historical and social change or transformation—is characterized, logically, physically, and metaphysically, by the presence of contradiction. Contradiction and negativity are the sources of the flux and instability that revokes and undermines all static truth by plunging it into the length of a process in which truth and falsity are inexorably mingled. The strategy of creating a double world free of change and contradiction and opposed to the changing imperfect world only reinforces the power of their connection. This is precisely the *dialectical* lesson that Hegel detects in the beginnings of the history of philosophy: the combination of contradiction/negativity and processuality is constitutive of truth and cannot be evaded. *Truth moves*—this is the ultimate truth about truth (even for the Socratic Plato), a truth that does not infringe upon truth's eternity.²³ For Hegel, however, the main point is that in whichever way the first principle is understood (as the static eternity of the intelligible or as the inexorable flux of becoming), philosophical thinking itself is necessarily movement because it is activity. Comprehension and understanding are movements as much as the *Sache selbst* that thinking makes to its object is also movement.²⁴ This is the key to Hegel's reconstruction of the early history of philosophical thinking—the key for its closeness to the project of the logic. The turning point in this story is Aristotle. In inquiring into the “mover” from which all different kinds of movement originate (and which, however, is itself unmoved), Aristotle introduces the idea of “activity” (*Tätigkeit*) as that which produces transformation, transforms itself, but also maintains its self-identity within the process. Activity and actuality—*Tätigkeit* and *Wirklichkeit*—are, in Hegel's reading of Aristotle, two aspects of the same dynamic reality. They are also the most formidable objection to the fixity and separation of Plato's ideas (see TW 19, 155).

These considerations are crucial for the program of Hegel's logic. If, this time, we frame the question regarding the nature of the dialectic-speculative

process of the logic not in terms of the type of movement but in terms of the type of “thinking” involved in it, it becomes clear that the logic can be a process only because it presents the *activity of discursive thinking*. With an argument that goes back to the polemic carried on in the preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel claims that science (and a “science of logic” in particular) is possible only when thinking is taken in its discursive not in its intuitive activity. Truth is the process of its own discursive acquisition and articulation. An intuitive understanding or an intellectual intuition, by contrast, would grasp the truth immediately or possess the truth from the beginning (or from eternity); they would never engage in any process, for they need not (and cannot) depart from their position of entitled possession of truth in its fullness. Properly, for intuitive thinking no immanent process of truth is possible or even thinkable. If one begins with the Absolute (as Schelling does, in the immediacy of the famous “pistol shot”) there is no process of truth; there is no movement of the Absolute and out of the Absolute, suggests Hegel in 1807. Only discursive thinking can grasp change—intuition is frozen in the instant, which does not change. And only discursive thinking can change, transform itself, and bear the movement of contradiction and negativity upon itself—intuition is always and necessarily identical to itself.

What is, then, the complex movement of discursive thinking staged by Hegel's logic? Dialectic-speculative logic is the process in which pure discursive thinking engages in the *activity* of thinking. This activity is discursive thinking's most proper action—it is, directly, what thinking itself *is*. In the unfolding of this activity, thinking undergoes a process of transformation, maintaining, however, its own identity or rather constituting such identity first throughout this process. Properly, there is no thinking—no thinking being or subject, mental faculty or disposition, *res cogitans* or ‘I think’—before and outside the action of thinking, before and outside the sequence of actions that thinking itself is. The action is here the protagonist and entirely constitutes the agent. The questions that Hegel's logic asks are, accordingly: What happens when thinking engages in the action of thinking purely? What kind of action is then successively being performed? Since thinking is discursive and not intuitive, we are dealing, minimally, with a sustained action that develops in a complex process unfolding immanently through negativity and contradiction and constituting its identity as action precisely through the unity of such a process. Hence, at stake is a movement of transformation. But what is the action of thinking (or the action that thinking itself is)? Where to does such action lead or what does it

produce when performed purely and immanently, that is, without assuming anything from without as a presupposition or goal, without appealing to an external reflection in order to advance and to keep going, but also, and most importantly, without being the thinking *of something*—both in the subjective and in the objective sense of the genitive? What is the action of thinking “in and for itself,” without an object and without a subject—what is the pure action that is identical with pure thinking, that is deprived of intentionality (or rather of the intentional object) and does not inhere in a substrate, a faculty, a separate and presupposed subject or agent? What is the action of thinking when at stake is not the intentional relation to an object but the immanent production and articulation—the performance and the enactment, as it were—of the very movement that thinking is?

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in the metaphysical deduction of the concepts of the understanding that occupies a central place in Kant’s transcendental logic, at stake is the derivation of the categories from the logical functions of judgment. Hegel criticizes the procedure of Kant’s logic insofar as it takes up, in his view with no necessity and no inner derivation, a material already given to the understanding from without (already presupposed from formal logic). The consequence is that neither the dynamic connection between thinking and its concepts nor the immanent connection between the concepts and the objects to which they allegedly refer is established. The categories remain fixed concepts, mechanically ordered in an inert “table” in wait to be applied by the thinking subject and meaningless without such application, while a cumbersome transcendental deduction is additionally needed to prove the objective validity and truth of the understanding’s concepts—their applicability, as it were. On Hegel’s view, in this logic thinking does not engage in the immanent activity within which its determinations are generated, and its reality and meaningfulness proved. Thinking, in the form of a fixed, “original” “I think,” is presupposed to the entire logic as condition of its possibility. Even granted that the transcendental subject does engage in a type of activity, this is no *pure* activity. The agent and its thinking “faculty” (or capacity) remain the seat and condition of all activity. The agent, not the action is here the protagonist, and the agent (human thinking and human reason) determines all ensuing action (although it also requires a further justification for its action in the form of a “deduction”).

What is relevant, at this point, is not to assess the correctness of Hegel’s rendering and criticism of Kant’s position, for this is indeed functional to his own program of a dialectic-speculative logic. The point is rather to discern the different structure of the two projects from which the radically

different procedures of transcendental and dialectic-speculative logic arise. In particular, at stake here is the different and indeed crucial emphasis alternatively put on the idea of thinking as an agent and thinking as an action.

And yet, Hegel's critique of Kant notwithstanding, it is significant that Kant himself, precisely in the metaphysical deduction of the understanding's concepts, draws attention to the fact that "concepts" rest on "functions," and a function is the "unity of the *activity (Handlung)* of ordering a manifold of representations under a common representation." This activity this is judgment (KrV B93/A68—my emphasis). Concepts, in other words, are brought back to and derived from the original *activity* of discursive thinking, which is judging. Kant's complete table of categories is obtained from the original activity of judging.²⁵ In other words, there is in Kant a clear awareness of the problem that will later interest Hegel. The notion of the spontaneity belonging to the understanding in its unavoidable discursivity as well as the insight that synthesis is fundamentally an action only reinforces this view. Be that as it may, on Hegel's account, this view is not brought to bear on the internal, methodological construction of Kant's transcendental logic, which ultimately hinges on the only unmovable point of the "I think"—on the transcendental subject from which alone all action depends. Thus, we can say that while transcendental logic derives the logical action (and its limitations) from the nature and the character of the presupposed (transcendental) agent, dialectic-speculative logic obtains the nature of the agent as a result of the pure action that is performed throughout its development.

So far, I loosely modeled the action staged in Hegel's logic on his rendering of Aristotle's *ενεργεια (actus, Tätigkeit)* and on his correction of Kant's notion of the understanding's activity (*Handlung*) of judgment: the logical action is the pure thinking through concepts in which activity is disengaged from both a presupposed thinking subject (metaphysical and transcendental) and a thought object. But since the action of the logic produces, in the end, the notion of the "absolute idea" that, being the unity and identity of theoretical and practical ideas, is "absolute method," a further specification needs to be made regarding the type of action capable of yielding such a result. My suggestion is now that the absolute method stands to the logical movement that precedes it and produces it as the unitary completed plot or action stands to the sequence of actions and events that constitutes it. At stake here is a type of 'action' that lies at the intersection of theory, praxis, and the performative activity whose mimesis (for Aristotle) occupies tragedy, providing a famous definition of it. Staging the activity of pure thinking in its immanent processuality, Hegel's logic is theory to the

extent that it presents thinking as a pure form of activity or praxis—and this praxis, in turn, is meaningful and has truth (and is properly “all truth,” that is, ultimately, is theoretically validated: TW 6, 549) only to the extent that it conclusively and retrospectively leads to the complex unity of sense of the plot of action staged by the entire development of the logic.²⁶ To use the metaphor that Hegel employs to counter the deadly fixations of the logic of the understanding, the plot (μῦθος) that emerges in the form of the absolute method (and as the conclusive, all-encompassing truth) is the living organism whose actions have been accounted for throughout the logical development. In the method, the plot of the tragedy of pure logical thinking is finally, and retrospectively, constituted in its recollection. Herein lies the key to the philosophical understanding of the nature and logical structure of all transformation and action.

3. Method as the Enactment of Truth: Method Is Mythos

I have insisted that the development of the logic stages a movement in which the action, not the agent, is the protagonist and in which the action is directly performed and not merely described. It is the unfolding of the action that first constitutes and shapes the agent, not the agent that commands and determines the nature and the direction of the action. The logic stages the movement or the action of pure thinking “employing the mode of enactment not of narrative” (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 6, 1449b 26). Throughout the logic, thinking is one with the action that it performs—it is nothing in addition to it or separately from it. It is such action that determines the forms and figures that appear as thinking’s successive *Bestimmungen* (it is not such determinations or categories that, being already given or even “deduced,” produce or orient the logical movement). From this it follows that along the process no reflective account of the action can be given—the action can be only performed, reflection remains necessarily external to it, and no consciousness of what is being done is properly present.²⁷ Thinking unfolds following the inner necessity of its own action. It is first the “whole” of the plot into which the logical movement is conclusively shaped that brings to light the overall construction of the action and its laws, the unitary structure of the events through which the movement has been carried through and hence produces a consciousness of what has been achieved and of the mode in which it has been achieved. It is only at this point that a narrative and reflective mode becomes, retrospectively, possible. In the end,

μυθος is method and vice versa. Method, the “absolute method,” is the first principle—the moving engine or the “soul”—of the entire logical process; it is its last and comprehensive truth.²⁸ At this point, the action, which has been staged as an ongoing movement throughout the logic, reveals its circular structure. The action successively performed is recollected into the unity of the logical plot. The end implies a reflective return to the beginning. The circle concludes the story by first generating it in the form of a story. Method is now the proved “consciousness of the form of the inner self-movement of the content” (TW 5, 49), which Hegel announced in his introductory remarks before the actual beginning of the logic. At this conclusive stage, this means that method is the capacity of (re)telling the meaningful unitary and concluded story out of the sequence of actions and events heretofore immanently performed in their dynamic sequence. We now have to see how this scenario plays out in the last chapter of the *Science of Logic*.

I have argued so far that the logic stages the movement where the action of pure thinking is immanently articulated, that this action is the protagonist of the process, and eventually constitutes the agent (does not presuppose it). Now I want to push this claim a bit further and argue that the goal or end result of the logical action-process is itself “a certain kind of action, not a qualitative state” (*Poetics*, 6, 1450a 18). The final result of the logic is the “absolute idea” that the last chapter develops into the “absolute method” (TW 6, 549f.). Two are the conclusive tasks that the connection between idea and method has to fulfill with regard to the logic as a whole (its final constitution into the “science of logic”). First, this connection must demonstrate that the logic—or the immanent movement of determination of pure thinking—has indeed reached its conclusion, that is, that no further step can be undertaken that is still an action of pure thinking or that is a move within the “element” of pure thinking. Only if this condition is fulfilled can the sequence of actions performed be instituted into the unitary plot that now emerges as the final truth of the logical action as a whole. Second, the connection between idea and method must demonstrate that the logical process is brought to conclusion in the comprehensive unity of a “system” that encompasses all possible (and actual) actions of pure thinking. These two conditions are established by Hegel’s claim that the logical development ultimately constitutes the “system of totality” (TW 6, 569). This system is the logic viewed and reconstituted retrospectively as the entire extent of the movement of pure thinking and functional from now on to each and all further enterprise and use (cognitive and practical) of philo-

sophical thinking—in the specific realms of nature and spirit. The “absolute method” that the “absolute idea” conclusively is, configures the logic into a “system of totality.” Or, to put this point in a different way, the successive action of pure thinking is constituted into the plot of the method, and this, in turn, becomes the normative, original, and paradigmatic action in relation to which the action of specific agents and the thinking of specific objects and specific subjects must be configured in order to be “true.”

If we now ask what the status of this system is with regard to the characterization of the logic as a movement on which I have insisted so far, the issue at stake is the following: Does the logic achieve in the “system of totality” a static point, a “qualitative state,” as it were; is the “end” of the logical movement itself a negation of the logical dynamism and its opposite; or is the all-encompassing system that results from the ongoing action of pure thinking nothing but the name of a “certain kind of action,” and, in this latter case, of what kind of action? In other words, is the system a static ποιότης or a dynamic προξίς? The suggestion that I shall offer in the following discussion is that the last chapter of the logic develops the connection between three terms: (i) the entire development of the logical movement or the sequence of all the actions performed by pure thinking up to the unity of theory and praxis that is the “absolute idea”; (ii) the unitary, comprehensive plot—the μῦθος—in which the foregoing action acquires its retrospective meaning as result and the laws of its immanent development come to light; (iii) the system as the characterization of the unifying action proper to the method and normative, from now on, on philosophical thinking in all its systematic implications in the thinking of concrete objects (or in its cognition of and action within the worlds of nature and spirit). In the connection between the idea and the method (i–ii) lies the key for the understanding of the way in which the story or the performance of the logic develops and is structured; in the connection between the method and the system (ii–iii) lies the key for the understanding of how all successive, specific stories should be practically structured and cognitively reconstructed. Finally, we can anticipate that herein we shall find the lesson that we can hope to learn from Hegel’s logic with regard to the problem of reconstructing and making sense of contemporary events in the form of a unitary narrative.

In the last chapter of the logic, the “absolute idea” is presented, first, as the result of the movement that has led up to it, and it is defined in terms of such movement. “In the way in which it has resulted” (TW 6, 548), Hegel contends, the absolute idea is the unity and the identity of the

theoretical and the practical ideas. Taken separately (“each for itself”; TW 6, 548) such ideas are still unilateral and one-sided as they indicate a still open-ended, unconcluded, and inconclusive movement—a movement that can have no proper and necessary end (hence still characterizes the structures of finitude).²⁹ In the endeavors of cognition toward truth and in the practical striving toward the good, the “idea” is still not properly or fully present: it remains, alternatively, “a searched for beyond” or a “goal not yet attained” (TW 6, 548f.). In both cases, further action is required to gain the correspondence between concept and reality; in both cases, the logical action has not reached its concluded sense or its “truth” but remains unconcluded and unfulfilled. Action has the form of a *Streben*; the two unilateral ideas stage the movement of a “to and fro” between theory and praxis guided by contradiction. It is first in the absolute idea that we reach the unitary plot of action that requires the identity of theory and praxis, of cognition and practical activity. It is only here that the movement can come to its end. The absolute idea, Hegel claims, is the “rational concept” or fully realized rationality. Herein no further action seems to be required in the immanent unfolding of logical events. This, however, is by no means the cessation of the logical activity as such; it rather expresses the highest stage or the highest form of rational activity. The absolute idea expresses the dynamism of “life”—hence has in itself life’s own “highest opposition.”³⁰ Activity now takes on a radically different form. In the action that has led from the separate pursuit of theory and praxis to their convergence in the absolute idea a crucial transformation has taken place in the way in which logical action is configured, structured, and enacted. First, the open-endedness of the *Streben*, which still characterized finite cognition and the pursuit of the good is overcome in a movement in which the idea in its reality connects only with itself—“nur mit sich selbst zusammengeht” (TW 6, 549). Second, the action, at this point, finally constitutes the agent. While in Kant’s transcendental logic the transcendental subject or the unity of the “I think” was the condition of the logic (of all activity of thinking of objects in general) and its necessary presupposition, in Hegel’s dialectic-speculative logic the agent is constituted only at the very end of the logical action, in the point of convergence of theory and praxis, cognition and life. Action performed is the condition of the agent. The absolute idea is not only “soul”—the living and acting principle that pervades all manifestations of life and action. It is, Hegel declares, “free subjective concept,” and even more emphatically, it is “*Persönlichkeit*.” In its universality, “personality” is the subject of free practical activity and true cognition. Third, the movement whereby the

logical action finally constitutes the agent as “personality” is the highest form of “truth,” and this is also, conclusively, “all truth” (TW 6, 549). This truth, however, is by no means a static form or object reached once and for all by logical thinking. It is, itself, a form of activity or the way in which the logical plot is now enacted by the agent that has just emerged. It is only at this point that the story of the logic can be told or narrated for the first time (and not only performed). This telling is now the task of the absolute method—this is the conclusive logical activity in which both the subject (personality) and the intentional object (the plot) of the logic are first instituted.

Once the genealogy of the absolute idea has been presented by defining the idea as the result of the movement leading up to it, the task of the last chapter of the logic is to develop the features now characterizing the logical action insofar as this is the action in which the idea does not reach out toward something other than itself but develops “in solidarity with itself,” the agent is constituted as free subject, and the dimension of an all-comprehensive truth is gained. At stake in the development of these points is the very activity of philosophizing. For, Hegel explains, “truth” so conceived is “the only object and content of philosophy” (TW 6, 549). The absolute method is accordingly from now on the method of philosophizing as such.

The “truth” that the absolute idea so conceived is, is nothing but a new way or mode of accounting for and systematizing the logical action—a mode rendered possible by the type of movement taking place in the convergence of theory and praxis. Hegel’s first task then is to clarify the relationship between the absolute idea and the foregoing movement of the logic. The absolute idea, already presented as the *result* of the logical process, is additionally posited as *identical with the entire course* of this process itself. Retrospectively, it is now possible to say that the movement of the logic is the process of self-determination *of the absolute idea*: “the logic presents the self-movement of the absolute idea” (TW 6, 550). In emerging as the subject or the agent of the process, the absolute idea lends to it a new characterization. For, at this point, the logical movement is no longer considered in the way in which it has been considered so far, namely, as the process successively enacted, step by step, in the discrete succession of events, in the position of radical immanence of pure thinking with no final end in view, with no reflective distance from the action performed, and no constituted subject separate from and presiding over the action performed. Now that the subject has emerged, and the end appears in view, the process is reframed in the form of its enactment *by the absolute idea*, as the

unitary story of the progressive self-determination of *the idea*. Indeed, Hegel presents the occurrence of the absolute idea finally coming to “expression” (*Äußerung*) as the uttering of the “original word,” thereby telling the story of its first coming to be or coming to life. The process that heretofore has been immanently enacted in the absence of a constituted subject is now finally “told” or “expressed” by the absolute idea as the process of its own self-determination. However, this is only the tentative beginning of a narrative. The absolute idea tells the story of its self-movement or its genealogy in a solitary narration in which it has no audience and interacts only with itself (TW 6, 550). In addition, its word disappears in the moment in which it is uttered (it is nothing more than a fleeting intuition with no permanence). The logic does indeed present “the self-movement of the absolute idea,” but Hegel is swift to add, “*only* as the original word, which is indeed an expression/exteriorization (*Äußerung*) but one that in its exteriority (*Äußereres*) has immediately yet again disappeared in the moment in which it is. Hence the idea is *only* in the self-determination of perceiving itself (*sich zu vernehmen*); it is in pure thought, in which difference does not yet have the consistency of the otherness (*Anderssein*); rather, the idea is and remains entirely transparent” to itself (TW 6, 550—my emphasis). Thus, the expression of the absolute idea still has to gain the discursivity proper to the process that pure thinking has endured so far. Its vanishing word must gain the permanence of a self-transforming movement in which the resistance of exteriority and otherness lends concreteness and subsistence to the process. This is precisely the task of the “absolute method”: to translate the impermanence of the original word into the discursive structure of the logical narrative. It is only in the reflective movement of the absolute method that the story of the logic or the story of the absolute idea gains the structured dimension of a really coherent and unitary story: a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. This is method: the act of telling the unitary mythos heretofore (only) performed in the ongoing succession of the different actions that constitute it.

Hegel gives an additional reason for moving on to the direct thematization of the method as the only point where the logical action can be effectively recollected into the unitary and meaningful plot of a possible narration. At this point we can say, first, that the determination of the idea and, dynamically, “the entire course of this determinateness has been the object of the logical science”; and we can say, second, that the absolute idea has immanently (or “for itself”) emerged from the entire course of this development (TW 6, 550). But here we also reach the limit of the process

articulated so far (and of what can be said in its regard). We are only at the threshold of the position from which the idea is put in the condition of considering, retrospectively, the unity of the foregoing process as its own determination process. Such process belongs *only formally* to the absolute idea (in virtue of its resulting from this process); it is only *reclaimed* by it as its own genealogy, but no proof of the legitimacy of this claim is offered yet. In fact, it is the immanent development of pure thinking's action (not directly of the absolute idea) that has constituted the logic so far. That the absolute idea results from this action is still not a sufficient proof that the absolute idea has been at work all along throughout the logic, hence can reclaim the logic as its own deed. Something more is required from the absolute idea in order to prove this point, that is, in order to rightfully reclaim as its own what has been achieved by the action of pure thinking. What is required is the actual reenactment of that entire movement *by the absolute idea itself*. This will be the final proof that the absolute idea is not only the *result* of the logical action (performed by pure thinking) but is truly its *subject*: if the absolute idea as such can really perform (or, rather, perform again) the action that it claims has led to the idea as a result, then it will be proven that the logic is indeed "the self-movement of the absolute idea" (TW 6, 550). The absolute idea must now actually do what it "only" claims to have done all along: to give its mere "word" for it—even though this is the "original word"—is not sufficient.³¹ If it is not acted upon, the original word is only a vanishing moment with no consistency; with all its transparency, it does not hold the concreteness of truth.³² New action is required at this point. In other words, we are now put through the entire logical process yet again, this time from a different perspective, namely, from the standpoint of the end (the absolute idea). What is thereby tested is the truthfulness of the absolute idea, namely, the correspondence between the claim (the word) and the deed, which grounds the possibility for the story of the logic to coalesce in the unity of a coherent and meaningful plot. Thus, the logical movement of the idea's self-determination must become the actual "content" of a reflection on this logical movement itself—a reflection that is, at the same time, a performative reenactment (the true unity of theory and praxis). This is the final test whereby the logical action is constituted into the unitary plot of the absolute idea's story. Precisely this is the "absolute method." With the initial genealogical presentation of the absolute idea we have only the claim that the logical action is completed. For, truly, it is only the conclusive reflection on the entire length of the action—the reflection that takes this action as its "content"—that actually

completes the action lending to it the unitary form of the plot. As such reflection, the absolute method is the conclusive action that recapitulates the plot of the logic. Method is *μυθος*.

The method, explains Hegel, “may initially appear” in its traditional, more restricted sense of “the mere modality (*Art und Weise*) of cognition.” And this it certainly is. However, the method comes to the fore once the absolute idea has been proved as the identity of the theoretical and the practical idea. Unlike the logic of the understanding, dialectic-speculative logic presents the method from a position that has constitutively overcome the separation of theory and praxis (as well as the separation of concept and reality). Method is not a provisional instrument for achieving the truth, dispensable once truth has allegedly been gained. Method is a position *inside* the truth hence constitutive of it; it is the form of truth's dynamic articulation, of its final recollection and reenactment. Hegel's insistence, then, is on the meaning of the “modality” (of the *Art und Weise* and *Modalität*) that the method is—modality of cognition, to be sure, but also way or mode of being (TW 6, 550–551). The modality proper of the method is the formal way in which the content, namely, the overall action of pure thinking displayed in the course of the logic as a sequence of discrete and necessarily interconnected actions, is structured so that (i) the dynamism proper to it as a whole is preserved and accounted for, (ii) the laws of its inner development come to light (which the introduction anticipates as determinate negation and immanence), and (iii) the unity of sense proper to the different actions that constitute it finally emerges as the unity of a process of transformation. Method, Hegel shows, is itself a type of action—it is, we shall discover, the dynamic nature of the process itself, the true moving principle of the action when this action ought to be concluded in the meaningful unity of the “plot.”

The method, Hegel contends, is “form.” It is form in the living, dynamic sense of being the “soul” of all objectivity (it is “immanent,” “absolute,” “infinite” form, not “external” form).³³ As “form,” it is the condition of the truth of all possible content. For, a determinate content has truth only when enacted (hence brought to life) within this form.³⁴ Aristotle defines the mythos as “the first principle (*arche*) and, as it were, the soul (*psyche*) of tragedy” (*Poetics*, 6, 1450a35–40). Method-mythos is the first immanent moving principle of the action performed; it is the principle of its formal unity and the dynamic end of the overall movement. In its formality, method-mythos is the principle of order that structures from within the succession of events constituting the action (this is one of the functions

of the soul operating within the living organism). This unifying function of method-mythos, however, emerges only at the end. The logical development has presented all the different “figures” (*Gestalten*) displayed by a given content.³⁵ However, being the overall movement of the enacted action, the logic has successively presented these figures in their “untruth” (*Unwahrheit*) and hence in their “transition” (*Übergang*) to the opposite (TW 6, 551). Essential is only the movement itself—the method-mythos—not the characters or the single figures that appear in this process (*Poetics*, 6, 1450b1–5). These have no truth in themselves; they are only functional to the process generated by their untruth, by the necessity of their being overcome in the transition into the opposite. Hence, Hegel contends that none of the determinate figures assumed by the logical content can be taken as the “foundation” of truth to which method, as a merely “external form,” should then be applied (this is instead the view upheld by traditional logic). Such an understanding of logical determination and method would halt the process before its end and ultimately render movement impossible and incomprehensible. Instead, the method as the “absolute form” in which all movement is inscribed is the only “absolute foundation and last truth”—and it displays this nature because in the entire course of the logical action *it has proved* (*erwiesen*) itself to be the absolute foundation and last truth (TW 6, 551).

In the conclusive chapter of the logic, Hegel clarifies that what should be developed as method is “only the movement of the concept.” Since, at this point, the concept as logical determination “is already known” in its nature, at issue is solely its “movement,” which is now framed as the “universal absolute activity (*Tätigkeit*)” (TW 6, 551). These two stipulations, namely, (i) that method is the *movement* of self-realization of the concept and (ii) that this movement is the *universal and absolute activity* that pervades everything as condition of its meaningfulness and truth, make the starting point of Hegel’s retrospective presentation of the method. But what does this claim of absoluteness and universality of the method-mythos mean? Method is “soul and substance,” repeats Hegel, since everything true and meaningful owes its truth and meaning—hence its very subsistence in the order of rationality³⁶—to its being part of the overall logical action. But once we get to the presentation of the absolute method, the logical action is *complete*. That all particular and determinate action is part of the comprehensive (indeed, “absolute”) plot that is the logic, is, at this point, a demonstrated fact (is indeed in the proper sense a *factum*). For, having the entire and complete course of the logic behind, of every particular action we can say that it has been performed in its determinate place and modality

within the course of the logic, and for this reason it has now become part of the logical plot—hence part of the method or of the universal “movement of the concept” (TW 6, 551). This is indeed the condition of truth and meaning for all particular discrete events (and things in the world): to be part of the broader and more comprehensive movement of objective reason or thinking. Conversely, Hegel maintains that “it is the only and highest *Trieb* [of reason] to find itself in everything” through its own action (TW 6, 551–552). This is the meaning of the method’s universality, that is, the universal validity of the story enacted in the logic by pure thinking.

Thus, Hegel’s account of method must show, first, what is the immanent dynamic structure of the omnipervasive activity of reason, and it must show, second, that the logical movement described and commanded by this structure is indeed finally recapitulated in the unitary plot of a “system of totality” (TW 6, 569). This amounts to a reenactment of the logical movement in the perspective of the end: “What here constitutes the method are the determinations *of the concept* itself and their relations. Now they must be taken in the sense of being determinations *of the method*” (TW 6, 553)—method, recall, being the “*movement* of the concept” (TW 6, 551). In its immanent successive unfolding—that is, *before* the actual end is reached—the logic has been the presentation of the “determinations of the concept and their relations,” namely, the successive enactment of events that have been brought back to the (realized) concept (or better, to the absolute idea as perfect correspondence of concept and reality) as their agent. When such unfolding of determinations has reached its last stage (in the “absolute idea”) at stake comes directly the “movement” itself, namely, the form or structure of the succession generated by the unfolding of the concept’s determinations. The complex yet unitary form of this movement is the method. This is the action’s conclusive plot. The deeds imputed to the concept (as the course of its determinations) are now framed as the successive determinations of the logical movement itself. The determinations of the action now viewed as the formal determinations of the overall plot, or of that “whole” that is the movement of the method-mythos, are the “beginning,” the “advancement” (or, in a different formulation, the “middle”), and the “end.”³⁷

4. Method: Beginning, Advancing, and Ending the Logical Action

The method first begins with the beginning.³⁸ What does it mean to raise the question of the beginning as a *methodological* question? What kind of

question is this, properly? Unlike the beginning of the logic, where at stake is the very first logical action (and the first logical content); and unlike the introductory considerations on the topic “with what must the science begin?” that occupies the logic before the beginning (and is still a question of content), we are now dealing with the problem of beginning once the logic as a whole *has already begun*—indeed, once many discrete beginnings (or all the “figures” of the “beginning” taken as a content: TW 6, 551) have successively punctuated the different stages of the logical movement. The beginning (or the action that begins) becomes a question of method (or form) once the whole of the plot has been completely enacted. But to inquire on the beginning methodologically means to enact *all* the logical beginnings yet again, this time viewing the course of the logic synoptically and synchronically—out of sequence, as it were—asking what all those beginnings *as beginnings* formally or structurally have in common. In the new enactment of the logical plot all beginnings shall be viewed together, their action being formally characterized by the same modality of movement, despite the different contents at stake in the successive stages of the process and despite the changing contexts in which such beginnings respectively occur.³⁹ This opens up to a new consideration of the logical action—a properly *methodological* consideration. It is at this level that out of the different actions presented in the course of thinking’s movement the unitary—and true—story of the logic is woven for the first time.

What does it mean for action as such—for pure thinking’s most proper action—to begin? What is the beginning “in and for itself,” as “mode” (*Art und Weise*) of movement (independently of what/who it is that begins)? How does the structure of beginning inform the process staged by the logical plot, the movement of the concept as movement? Significantly, these questions now replace metaphysical (theological and cosmological) questions of *origin*. In the difference that separates the question of origin from the issue of what is, methodologically, the action of beginning lies the difference between traditional metaphysics (and Kant’s critique thereof) and Hegel’s dialectic-speculative logic.⁴⁰

“A beginning (*arche*) is that which does not itself follow necessarily from something else, but after which a further event or process naturally occurs” (*Poetics*, 7, 1450b, 25–27). Methodologically, there is a formal beginning of the logic as a whole, and there are different intermediary beginnings along its development. *To begin* (as intransitive or absolute action) is the action characterized by being an “immediate (*Unmittelbares*)” that has the form of “abstract universality” (TW 6, 553). As moment of the method,

“the beginning has no other determinateness than this: being simple and abstract” (TW 6, 554), immediate and universal. Once the beginning has been made and the logic has developed out of it, the issue is: How should such a beginning be understood—or, more properly, *be made again*—in order for the logic to reach its conclusion? In the last chapter of the logic, immediacy and abstractness are not characters that define the content of a certain beginning. Immediacy and abstractness are rather the very *modality* with which logical thinking *begins to act as logical thinking* and *begins to know* what logical thinking as such is, that is, what it does. At the level of the method, Hegel is not concerned with *Sein* as the first beginning (or with the issue of *what* it is that constitutes the first beginning) but with the way in which (i.e., the modality in which) the beginning is made (whatever the beginning in its content determination is) in order for the logical movement, and eventually for the end of the entire movement, to immanently issue.⁴¹ Dynamically viewed, the act of beginning necessarily entails “the instance of the realization of the concept” (TW 6, 554), the *Trieb* for a further advancement (TW 6, 555).

Hegel notices that “external reflection,” while embracing the claim put forth by speculative thinking that the beginning is simple and abstract, accepts such beginning only for the sake of a promised content, which it strives to develop. Thereby, the beginning is transformed into an arbitrary assumption (or into a provisional or merely hypothetical beginning) made only in order to satisfy the *Streben* of thinking aiming at moving on away from it. In fact, the action has always already begun; we are always already in the middle of it, incapable of truly (and freely) moving on because haunted by the arbitrary assumption that makes the true beginning (the “absolute” beginning) and hence the necessity of movement utterly impossible. Moreover, “mere opinion” in its *Bewusstlosigkeit* defines the “simple” and “abstract” character of the beginning as a content that is actually given (“es gibt”: TW 6, 555)—either in reality or in thinking. On the contrary, the method, which is the “consciousness of the concept,”⁴² understands the simplicity and abstractness of the beginning as its mere formality, as the “objective, immanent form” that is “in itself” “lacking” (*mangelhaft*) and endowed with the *Trieb* to realize the concept. In other words, the illusion of *Streben* affecting the beginning (but truly affecting external reflection), which seems to make all beginning alternatively provisional, instrumental, or irrelevant, is overcome once we recognize that such *Trieb* is nothing else but the immanent form of the action of beginning, taken as moment of the method. The beginning is necessarily “lacking” because it is *only* the

beginning (of the overall movement, of an advancement), hence necessarily incomplete. To begin is necessary in order for thinking to be set in motion. Yet the beginning taken in isolation is not yet a sufficient characterization of movement but only its inception. To consider the beginning as moment of the method, then, is to gain the consciousness of the fundamental incompleteness of all beginning action as such, of its need to be followed by an advancement that completes it, but, most properly, it is to gain consciousness of the fact that the beginning itself is immanently endowed with the “impulse” (*Trieb*) to further develop and determine itself (TW 6, 555). This is the universality of the method. It is precisely in this way that the beginning leads on to the second moment of method, which is the *Fortgang* or “advancement” (TW 6, 555f.).

However, since the beginning is conceived here methodologically—that is, the problem is not how to begin, but what is the structure of the beginning action within the whole of the established plot—the beginning is not just simple and abstract but is “concrete totality” (TW 6, 555). In the beginning is contained the seed or indeed the impetus of the entire movement of the whole, and yet, since the beginning is inherently “lacking” it is also true that the development is not (analytically) contained in the beginning (only its *Trieb* is). This accounts for the presence but also, at the same time, for the absence of the absolute idea in the beginning of the logic. Every moment of the process of the method, Hegel confirms, is synthetic and analytic at the same time.⁴³

The second moment of the method considered in its formality is the action that advances or advancing—*Fortgehen*. The action of advancing is immanently developed from the first moment because the beginning, as “concrete totality,” is the action of beginning *a process and a development*, is “Anfang des Fortgehens und der Entwicklung” (TW 6, 556). And yet advancing is not a mere *Überfluß* over and above the beginning, is not a mere implication of it.⁴⁴ “A middle is that which both follows a preceding event and has further consequences.” Advancing is both a synthetic and an analytic moment of the method. The methodological question of the advancement is the following: What does it mean for action to proceed, to move on once it has begun; what is it for action to be in the middle of its performance; and how does this modality shape the structure of action itself? At stake, again, is the advancement not with regard to a particular action (taken as a content) but with regard to the overall structure of a whole of action, namely, to the overarching plot of the logic in its inner articulation and in the necessary progression of the events that constitute it.

What is it that all second moments of the logic structurally have in common—despite their specific content and the different contexts in which the content is respectively developed? The second moments are in themselves contradictions whereby advancement is made and a transition produced. Advancing is the action of dialectical contradiction.

Here as well the absolute method is opposed to the way in which finite, mere “searching knowledge” (TW 6, 566) construes its advancement, which is ultimately no real advancement but the static reiteration or repetition of the same position. The latter implies a fundamental error. It reveals thinking's *abirren*, that is, the merely random searching about with no direction and no necessity with which finite thinking tries to escape the emptiness of the beginning. The immanent development of the logic has already responded to this erroneous way of construing science. Now, however, the method thwarts the further possibility that external reflection may reconceptualize the preceding movement according to that erroneous view of the advancement, hence, may weave an erroneous plot from what has been presented by the entire movement of the logic. An example is offered by the teleological framing of the logical plot as a movement in which progress is made only because a certain result must be obtained or a certain final goal is posited. Arguing against this position, Hegel contends that in order for the advancement to be made, thinking should not aim at anything else and look for anything else besides attending to a firm consideration of the determinations “in and for themselves.”⁴⁵ For, in attending to things in how they are, their “soul,” which is movement, is brought to life. And conversely, only a self-generated movement and action bring to light what things truly are. Interestingly, *Streben* and *Trieb*, for Hegel, indicate the formal character of the beginning (and even that of the end) not the character of the advancement. In Hegel's view, progress is made by staying where one is or by persisting in carrying through the action to its final consequences, not by looking away aiming at something else. Hegel expresses this character of the method by saying that “the absolute method is analytic” (TW 6, 557). Even though the beginning as such has no determination and even though there is no proper searching in the method, the method “finds” in the universal of the beginning the new determination with which progress is made. This dialectical paradox reveals the “synthetic” nature of the method. The consideration of the logical form “in and for itself” indicates the “otherness” that necessarily resides within that very same form, it points to the fact that each determination is as such in itself a contradiction and consequently entails a necessary *Übergehen* (TW 6, 560). True otherness,

as spring of all advancement, is not an external intervention but lies at the very heart of each present moment when it is dwelled on and considered in itself. *Fortgang* is a transition accomplished without aiming at anything else but at what one already has because what one has is a contradiction. In this sense, contradiction is the soul of all movement.

Fortgehen is the dialectical, transformative moment of action. It is the way in which determinate negation, already discussed in the introduction to the *Science of Logic* as the central point of the logical method, is rendered once the “absolute method” is thematized, that is, once a formal view is offered of the entire process that has been produced by such negation. What characterizes the action’s advancement is the moment of “difference” (*Unterschied, Differenz*) and negativity, the transition to otherness with the duplicity that this implies, and the “judgment” (*Urteil*) that both draws differences and acknowledges, reflectively, that the simplicity of the beginning is revisited in the advancement as the unity of that which is in itself different (hence, contradictorily, not simple: TW 6, 556). Difference is responsible for the transformative character that the action manifests in the overall development of the plot. Thus, the second moment of the method brings to the fore its properly “dialectical” negativity. As moment of the absolute method, dialectic loses the appearance of “contingency” and exteriority that afflicts ancient dialectic, skepticism, and Kantian transcendental dialectic (TW 6, 558, 557). On Hegel’s account, dialectic is the “standpoint in which a universal first, considered in and for itself reveals itself as the other of itself” (TW 6, 561). While throughout the development of the logic the dialectic of determination has been responsible for the immanent action performed throughout the logical itinerary, at this point dialectic regards the way in which the entire previous development is reconceptualized and reenacted in order to coalesce in the structure of a unitary plot; it regards the way in which the progressive sequence of its forms is redesigned according to the logic of the beginning, the advancement, and the end as moments of the method (or the immediate, the mediated, and the mediating action: TW 6, 562). In the final perspective offered by the method, dialectic reveals that the process of the whole is both continuous (the method is analytic, difference is immanent) and fundamentally discontinuous (the method is synthetic, difference is in the gap that makes the transition to other) (TW 6, 557).

In the conclusive pages of the *Science of Logic*, the thematization of the method leads Hegel to a synoptic presentation of the logic. The task is to bring to light the formal structure of the logical action as the unity of its mythos. In this synopsis, the logical succession followed so far is erased

and reconfigured according to the different order dictated by the method's syllogism. Logical *movement* gains a different meaning than mere succession. What heretofore has been presented according to the logical sequence (Being, Essence, Concept) is now reenacted according to the order of the action that begins, the action that advances, and the action that ends. The immanent development of the logical forms grounds their necessity and partial truth (properly, their *Unwahrheit* and necessary "transition" to the opposite: TW 6, 551) with regard to their respective position within the sequence, but it does not justify the necessity of the whole itinerary—and in particular it does not justify the end of the entire development. At the beginning of the chapter, the absolute idea's attempt at a narration of such itinerary failed to embrace the whole course of the logic in a systematic way. The "original word" only began narrating its story, but the immediate "vanishing" of the pure word signaled that narration was not yet possible, that the logical process had to be reenacted (not simply recounted) in order to be systematized in the final form of the plot. And this led to the thematization of method. It is only the reconfiguration of the logic according to the syllogism of the method that eventually grounds the necessity of the whole logical science as a system. A methodological, synoptic reenactment of the logic "out of sequence" staging the actions of beginning, advancing, and ending must be performed in order to reach its conclusion in a circular system. Thus, the second, dialectical step of the method reduces the necessity of the logical progression to mere contingency and thereby negates it (another development is possible and indeed necessary than the one followed by the succession of logical actions), then replaces that progression with the different sequence dictated by the syllogism of the method, and finally sanctions the true necessity of the logical development by leading it to the conclusive form of the system.

With regard to the methodological task of constituting the unitary plot of the logical action, the negative, dialectical moment fulfills a crucial role. It is, Hegel argues, the "*turning-point* of the movement of the concept"—the *Wendungspunkt* of the action, its περιπετεία as "μεταβολή to the opposite direction of events" (TW 6, 563; *Poetics*, 11, 1452a22–27). The "metabolic" reversal achieved by the negative moment of the method allows for a radically new consideration of the development of the logical events. It is the beginning of the restructuring of the logical sequence in the circularity of a systematic whole. This is properly what advancing as such is. Moreover, such a turning point is recognized as the "inner source of all activity, of the living spiritual self-movement," as "the dialectical soul, which

everything that is true has in itself, and through which alone it is true" (TW 6, 563). The dialectical reversal is the place where the "truth" of the logical story properly emerges. In this sense, the "turning point of the method (*Wendepunkt*)" also produces a reversal in the structure of logical cognition, bringing it back to itself (TW 6, 554), thereby generating the fundamental reflective stance of the methodological appraisal of logical action.

In discussing the synoptic sequence of second moments or advancing actions, all characterized by the immanent negativity of dialectic, Hegel draws the following conclusion: "Hence, if the negative, the determinate, the relation, judgment, and all the determinations that fall under this second moment do not appear for themselves already as the contradiction and as dialectic, it is merely because of the insufficiency of thinking that does not bring together its thoughts" (TW 6, 562). Thereby Hegel formulates the further point that the method makes in addition to the immanent production of the sequence of logical forms realized up to the absolute idea. It is not sufficient to bring out the succession of logical determinations, that is, to immanently perform the logical sequence in its successive discrete determinations. It is necessary, in addition, to bring together those forms—synoptically, as it were—recognizing their belonging to the second, dialectical moment of the method. Only under these two conditions can advancement be made, as the successive action is constituted into the unitary structure of the plot wherein alone advancement can be measured. Only under these two conditions can the unitary story be told out of a multiplicity of successive events. Hegel's suggestion is that it is possible to have followed through the entire development of the logic in the necessity produced by the inner contradiction of each moment and still be unable to recognize what constitutes the dialectic (or the advancement) proper to the method, still be unable to understand what the logic as a whole has achieved and what it *means*, that is, what is the overall story that it ultimately tells.⁴⁶ Thus, in order for the logic to reach its conclusion in the form of the system, the logical progression needs to be reenacted and rethought so that its determinations are brought together according to the "syllogism" of the method (TW 6, 563). In this way, the method provides the "cognition of the result" produced by the logical development (TW 6, 566). At stake is the fundamental issue of *knowing* what the logic has done or what is the overall story that the logic has performed and told. Such dialectic-speculative knowledge is method. Hegel's claim that the method is both analytic and synthetic (the analytic and synthetic moment constituting respectively the two premises of the "syllogism": TW 6, 563, 566) means precisely that the

method does not simply analyze retrospectively the given determinations and the *Gang* that has produced them and in which they have previously been presented.⁴⁷ For, in the method, analysis yields a result that is different from the one previously obtained and that arises from the action of gathering together the preceding moments according to that which they have in common: beginning or advancing. The end of the logic is not the absolute idea but the methodological moment of the end or the action of ending. Properly, there is no result to analyze when the analysis of the result sets out to perform its task. The result arises instead from analysis revealing itself as synthesis, that is, from its moving on a step further and truly doing something different or other than what was anticipated. Recognition of the result (the overall plot of the logic) produces the actual end result (the end of the logic in the action of ending).

5. In the End Is the (Beginning of the) Story

The enactment of the method disrupts the immanent sequence of the logical action and establishes a new “relationship” (*Verhältnis*) among the logical determinations and their foundation (TW 6, 567). Simply put: What comes last is truly the first; only the method is absolute; method is the “basis” (*Grundlage*) of the entire logical development; it is that which unifies all the events of the previous action into a coherent performance and into a coherent narrative.⁴⁸ While heretofore the consideration of the method has remained on the formal level (beginning and advancement concerned the *form* of the action), at this point the *content* enters the scene.⁴⁹ The method is articulated according to its own content and this leads to the “extension” of the method “to a system” (TW 6, 567; 569: *Erweiterung*). At stake is now directly the issue of the conclusion of the logic—“the end” (*das Ende*) or the act of ending. Method is not just immanent production but also reflective cognition—the only true speculative cognition—of the result of the “syllogism” of the method. The formal syllogism is derivation and deduction (*Ableitung*) of the content (TW 6, 567). In the new relation that the method establishes among the logical forms by rearranging them in the comprehensive structure of the syllogism, the beginning is finally connected to the result of the advancement. Thereby the beginning is no longer immediate but rather determinate, is not mere form but demonstrated content, while the advancement proceeds to and from the mediated standpoint of a “new beginning.” Yet, at this point, the possibility of a disruptive,

non-dialectical reading of the results of the method surfaces again, thereby disclosing a double threat to the conclusiveness of the plot in which the logical development is now being recollected. The “begriffslose Reflexion” (TW 6, 567) is ready to encroach on the results of dialectic transforming the mediation of the beginning into the open-ended regress of an inconclusive proof and turning the conquest of a new beginning into an advancement that stretches on ad infinitum.⁵⁰ In this case no ending and no end is possible. Against this final possibility, Hegel’s absolute method construes the argument in which the logic will reach its conclusion. Only the structure of the system is able to defeat with its circularity the linear inconclusive progression of the “bad infinity” for which no end is in view and no beginning is a necessary beginning. (This is yet another consequence of the claim that sets a certain logical form as the absolute or as the foundation and reduces method to external form.) Herein the difference that separates the formal moments of beginning and advancement from the end comes to the fore. While external reflection still operates within the methodological framework of a beginning and an advancement, it can by no means provide a true end to the process. The action of the end—as the end of the overall logical action—is the uniquely speculative moment of the absolute method. As Hegel puts it concluding the *Encyclopedia* logic: the infinite progress “löst sich in das Ende [auf]” (Enz. §242). The end is the unique solution with which Hegel’s dialectic-speculative logic defeats the open-ended bad infinity of the logic of the understanding, thereby overcoming the arbitrariness of the stories woven by external reflection and conferring to its story the necessity and uniqueness of truth. The action of ending is by contrast the methodological construction of the logic to the “system of totality”—to the “circle of circles” (TW 6, 569, 571, respectively).

The opposition between absolute method and external reflection reveals how the speculative method is at work in bringing beginning and advancement to the necessary end of the logic. First, unlike external reflection, the method determines the formal indeterminateness of all beginnings⁵¹ to be their very content and indeed to be their peculiar determinateness (formal indeterminateness is precisely the content determination of the beginning).⁵² From which the contradiction arises that produces the mediation of the immediate beginning and, with it, brings the process to its necessary advancement.⁵³ Second, having the method as its permanent foundation, the advancement is no longer a linear progression (a *Fließen*) from one determination to another (the order of logical succession) but is the cumulative, concentric process through which the universal is enriched in its

particularization (the order of the system). Thereby, all second moments are synoptically rearranged with regard to their content: reality, the particular, judgment. The content becomes more and more concrete; no determination is left behind or lost—the linear progression is overcome in an organic structure that grows on itself (TW 6, 569). Considered the true basis of the logical process, the method articulates a second syllogism, which, this time, is not merely formal but content-determined. This syllogism extends the method to the further determination of “a system of totality” (TW 6, 569). In this last systematic syllogism of the method the analytic moment is the universal that “communicates” itself to all particulars, the analytic universal. The synthetic moment is instead *Bereicherung*, that is, the movement that gaining content constitutes the synthetic universal in which all particulars finally receive their meaning. The twofold movement of this syllogism is expressed by the convergence of the opposed directions of the movements of *Außersichgehen* and *Insichgehen*. The “widest extension is at the same time the highest intensity.” This is the structure of the system. Thus, the absolute method is the “absolute dialectic” (TW 6, 570) that through the two syllogisms (the formal and the content-determined one) finally establishes the systematic structure of the logical development as the end result—the overall meaningful and concrete structure of the logical story in its achieved and proved truth.

At this point, the correction of the “error” and “arbitrariness” (TW 6, 549) of external reflection unable to reach a definitive conclusion and unable to find the necessity of a first ground—hence ultimately unable to tell a coherent story out of the action performed so far—is accomplished. The method can be described as the movement in which “each step of the advancement of the further determination, by getting further away from the indeterminate beginning, is also getting back closer to it,” and in which consequently “that which at first may appear to be different, namely, the retrospective grounding of the beginning and the progressive further determining of it, coincide and are the same” (TW 6, 570). At this point, the method that “knows” what the beginning is and how the advancement is performed is said to be the “method of truth” (TW 6, 571). Such method yields knowledge of the logic as system. This is the only true conclusion of the logic—*das Ende*. The logical action structurally reenacted through the moments of the method is now a concluded mythos, a story that can be narrated and thereby known in its truth. To be sure, its narration does not take place in the medium of the purely transparent, unimpeded, yet constantly vanishing “original word” of the absolute idea (TW 6, 550). It

is, rather, a narration that cannot be disjoined from action. Expression—*Äußerung*—is the conclusive action, is the action of the logic's absolute ending, its final *Ent-Schluß*. Such action is *Ent-Äußerung*. Significantly, Hegel insists that the modality of movement expressed by the absolute action of ending with which the logic actually concludes its itinerary is neither the recollective modality of “having-been” (*Gewordensein*) nor that of the “transition” (*Übergang*). It is instead “absolute liberation”—*Befreiung* (TW 6, 573). Properly, in the “freedom” of such an action “no transition takes place” (TW 6, 572). This is the true end of the logical story. The movement of freedom is the movement of *ent-lassen*—the letting go and letting be proper of freedom. While Kant defines transcendental and practical freedom as “absolute spontaneity,” thereby capturing the character of the unconditioned *beginning* of an action, Hegel's logical freedom is the action of absolutely and unconditionally *ending*.

What does the development of the “absolute method” analyzed so far, particularly in its establishing the succession of the logical events into the unitary plot of action that is the *Science of Logic*, have to say with regard to our task of composing a meaningful narrative out of the scattered events offered daily to us on the contemporary world scene? The complexity of Hegel's presentation of the method should suffice as a warning against the temptation of finding a too easy and quick answer to this problem. The absolute method may put us on the right track in our search for an answer but certainly does not provide us with a ready-made solution of our problem—with an instrument or tool to mechanically “apply” to whatever facts may fall under consideration (which is the sense of method used by the logic of the understanding and by external reflection). But even though there is no set recipe for telling or composing a story, Hegel's logic does offer important guidelines for addressing this issue. The reconstruction of the movement of the logic culminating in the absolute method that I have proposed in this chapter shares the important insight of Vico's *degnità: verum est factum*, to which Hegel (and already Kant) fully subscribed. Presenting the development of pure thinking, the logic stages the enactment of thinking's pure activity. The truth and intelligibility of the process—Hegel's logical and Vico's historical process—is due to the central role that the action's performance plays in instituting such process. A story can be told (and indeed retold) because if action has been performed it can also be reenacted, brought to life again—and this (theoretical and practical) reenactment, the absolute method teaches, in disassembling what previously has been immanently presented, brings to light the fundamental

modalities and laws of its unitary recapitulation. The story emerges as the succession of events is interrupted, broken up, and reconfigured and then reenacted in the new configuration. Beginning, advancing, ending, when seen as the dynamic immanent structures of the performed action, constitute the methodological framework that allows for the unity of the plot, for the necessity of the transitions, even for the subjects of the action, and finally for the (immanent) reflection on the overall development to finally emerge. Moreover, with regard to its truth, the absolute method takes into account the alternative configurations offered by external reflection suggesting that the confrontation with such alternatives is integral to the path taken by the true method itself.

Chapter 3

Forms and Figures

All the world is full of inscape and chance left free to act falls into an order as well as purpose.

—Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Journal* entry, February 23, 1873

“After a story is told there are some moments of silence. Then words begin again. Because you would always like to know a little more. Not exactly more story. Not necessarily, on the other hand, an exegesis. Just something to go on with. After all, stories end but you have to proceed with the rest of the day.”¹ What happens to the story of the logic after its end? What does thinking do after the absolute act of ending has been performed, after the liberating action of *Sich-Ent-Schliessen*? If we follow the prescription of the “absolute method,” we know that a new beginning shall be expected. And if we look at the construction of Hegel’s published system of philosophy (the *Encyclopedia*), we see that the Philosophy of Nature—the first part of the so-called *Realphilosophie*—makes precisely such a beginning. This, however, is not the route that I shall take in my argument. After all, the problem with which I opened the book is still far from its solution. What we have now is indeed the story of the logic—first, its immanent progressive performance and, then, the systematic concluded method-mythos in which that movement is synchronically reenacted and narrated through the moments of beginning, advancing, and ending. But we still have given no answer to the question of how such a story relates, normatively, to the objective and historical changes undergone by the contemporary world (Hegel’s own and our own) and manifested in its crises, how it informs their rational comprehension and guides the corresponding required changes in the mode of thinking of such complex reality.

What we have reached in the conclusion of the previous chapter is the *end* of the logic, the action through which the immanent development

of pure thinking has yielded the unitary plot that the logic can be said, finally and retrospectively, to have staged. The story ends in the moment in which it emerges, precisely, as a concluded story. Such is the action of ending. This is also the peculiarity of Hegel's logic as a logic of transformative processes—to end when its plot first takes shape. And the question now arises: Of what use is the story of the logic for telling *other* stories? The logic has offered a story on the basis of the development of the “absolute method,” which has appeared as the formal reenactment of the entire course of the determination process of pure thinking. What shall we do now with this method, which, Hegel suggests, is the method of philosophizing, of all philosophical cognition and action, the structure on which all mythos is enacted and narrated, the form that all discursive truth necessarily displays (TW 6, 549)? In the conclusion of the previous chapter, I suggested that these questions cannot be answered yet. There is still a long way to go before we can plausibly attempt such an answer. But we can now start putting the absolute method to a test and see where it can lead us. This is the task of the argument of which the present chapter shall lay the foundation, and which will be developed in the next three chapters.

It is generally assumed—and the assumption is never questioned—that if the method thematized at the end of the logic has to be used or applied as a method, then it has to be used or applied *outside* of the logic, in the philosophical disciplines that systematically follow it, in the nonlogical philosophical knowledge or in the knowledge of other, ‘real’ sciences and other, real contents and objects. I propose, by contrast, to use the absolute method on or to apply it back to the immanent development of the logic itself, *within* this very movement. This, I suggest, is the first and foremost intention and value of such method. For, we do not need to leave the logic in order to encounter reality. In the previous chapter, I have discussed Hegel's idea of logical method according to two different perspectives. I have started with Hegel's introductory reflections on method—method *before* the beginning of the logic, still *outside* of it—and I have ended with its direct thematization in the conclusion of the logic—method as the last course of action presented by the logical movement. Then, in addressing the relation between the “absolute idea” and the “absolute method,” I have distinguished the immanent performance of the logical action by pure thinking throughout the succession of logical forms, from the emergence of the unitary logical plot—the method-mythos—which is the object of both a final reenactment of the logical movement and of its possible narration. Now I shall turn to a third perspective, namely, to the presence and the workings of the method

within the successive moments and stages of the logical development itself. What if, once the story has been told we turn back to the long course of its successive immanent performance? What if we start all over again *with the logic itself*? What does the achieved unity of the logical story, the gained “consciousness of the form of the immanent self-movement of the content” (TW 5, 49), that is, the method, along with the freedom of ending (or having ended) bring to our willingness to begin again with the logical movement? In order to answer these questions, however, we still need to spell out the fundamental structures of the logical action.

In discussing the problem of method so far, I have established the following points. First, the modality in which the logic stages its process is the immanent performance of the action of pure thinking. Second, it is this performance that in the end institutes the agent, which is still absent throughout the immanent unfolding of the process. Herein pure thinking is nothing but the action it performs; it is fully “determined” by it, is nothing beyond the deed; and only the “complete determination” of the action finally constitutes the agent, namely, subjectivity proper and the subject of thinking and acting as free “personality” (TW 6, 549). Before the end, pure thinking has no distance from the action it performs: it is neither consciousness nor an “I think” (transcendental, psychological, or phenomenological) nor a metaphysical substrate or *ens*. But if we take these two claims seriously, a fundamental change in the way in which the logical process is viewed—and in the way in which it is performed—occurs. Such change discloses the perspective of the “absolute method” (the “absolute idea” is “absolute method”). It is first in the perspective of the method that we can assess the extent to which Hegel’s logic should be viewed as a logic of transformative processes—both as a logic of objective transformations and as a logic of thinking’s own subjective transformation. Change emerges and can indeed first be detected, precisely as the method reenacts, retrospectively, the entire course of the logical action structuring it “out of sequence” or synoptically, as it were. It is first here that the beginning can be directly connected with the end and the advancement made can be assessed. In other words, only by assuming the methodological, “absolute” action of the beginning as a criterion can all the successive logical beginnings be confronted with each other and the transformation that distinguishes them brought to light. Only on this basis can we start understanding transformation in its dynamic character. Only in the framework of a coherent story can transformation be detected; transformation is instead elusive as long as thinking is immanently immersed in the dynamic of action, utterly identical with it. But in

what sense does such new perspective make us change the way we think? While the three chapters that follow will offer examples of such a synoptic reading of the logic and an answer to this question, the task of the present chapter is to develop the interpretive framework in which this synoptic reconstruction will take place.

At stake is the gesture that moves from the methodological question explored in the previous chapter—What does it mean for action to begin, to develop or advance, to end?—to the different question—What are the successive forms and figures that the methodological beginning (and advancement and end) assumes throughout the logic, and how should their difference be construed and the transformation leading from one to the other assessed? What are the modes of action or the dialectical operations through which the logical forms and figures are determined at the different stages of the process, the modes of action that make of those forms different stages of the logical process? While the beginning as moment of the absolute method is crucial, as we have seen, in constructing the overall story or plot of the logic, what we still have to consider is the particular story that the different, immanent logical beginnings (in Being, Essence, the Concept) do tell when considered together under their common methodological heading. It is in this synoptic perspective (whereby the beginning of Being is confronted with the beginning of Essence and with the beginning of the Concept), not in the linear dimension of the logical succession (whereby the entire sphere of Being is followed by Essence and this by the sphere of the Concept), that the progress made will emerge. For, this comparative, synoptic consideration of the different figures of the beginning will give us a measure of the immanent transformation that the action of beginning as such undergoes throughout the process. In other words, it is by confronting the beginning made by Being with the beginning made by Essence that we will be able to assess the transformation that occurs between the two logical spheres—the transformation that the action of beginning undergoes in the logical process, hence the transformation that thinking itself (which is identical with its action) undergoes as it experiments with two different ways of beginning. But we first have to lay out the interpretive framework in which such reconstruction can take place. While in my reading of the last chapter of the logic I have insisted on the centrality of the action in the process as a whole (pure thinking is one with its very action and is not distinct from it), now I shall concentrate on the “agents” or carriers of such action, namely, on the forms and figures that structure the logical development in the sequence of its partial, determinate beginnings, advancements, and ends.

The present chapter starts by proposing to view the pure forms of Hegel's dialectic-speculative logic as the "agents" that carry out the logical action.² It then develops the suggestion that such forms or agents are the logical "figures" in which thinking's pure activity gains its significance in relation to reality. The notions of *Gestalt* and *Gestaltung* are finally discussed both with regard to their general use in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and in the *Science of Logic*, and briefly with regard to two systematic places in which references to Plato and Goethe can be brought to bear on the interpretive idea that I am proposing for my reconstruction of Hegel's logic. My intention in this latter discussion is to expand the set of references in relation to which Hegel's logic is assessed precisely as a logic, and the interpretive issue of the status of its forms (generally considered, alternatively, categories, metaphysical forms, abstractions that stand for some concrete extralogical content) can be raised anew. In sum, this chapter is dedicated to presenting the protagonists of the reconstruction of the logic that I set out to offer in the next three chapters of the book, taking the development of the absolute method as my guiding thread. Crucial to the present discussion is the fact that the forms as well as the operations of Hegel's logic move, change, and undergo transformation throughout the process. But this point has, I suggest, an even stronger validity: it is only *because* they change and transform themselves (hence do not have the fixity and immutability of Platonic ideas or Kantian a priori categories but are indeed more akin to the moving statues of Daedalus) that these figures and modes of action are presented as forms and operations of Hegel's dialectic-speculative logic.³

1. Logical Action and Logical Agents

In the discussion of the absolute method I have argued that central in the development of the logic is the action of pure thinking, and that the agent *in the proper sense* (i.e., pure thinking as an independent "subject" in the speculative sense of the free "personality") emerges only at the very end, at the level of the "absolute idea" (TW 6, 549). Now, however, I want to suggest that even though not in the proper sense of speculative subjectivity, one can nonetheless speak of the "agent" of the process well before reaching the end—agents, although not subjects, being present throughout the different stages of the immanent unfolding of the logical action. The agent, in the sense that I shall henceforth propose, is the specific qualification or determination—or indeed the "figure"—that the enactment of the logical

movement receives in different spheres, contexts, or moments of the process. In other words, the agent gives the specific difference that the methodological action of beginning, advancing, and ending respectively displays at specific stages of the logical process, or, to put the point differently, the agent ties the methodological action to a specific logical content and context (whereby beginning in Being differs from beginning in Essence). Such agent is a determinate “figure” of the beginning, advancement, end. Moreover, with this term I indicate the dynamic aspect of determination within the process (or action), not subjectivity (or substantiality); with it I locate the discreteness of the logical movement (its spheres and stages) in reference to the different points in which its enactment occurs.

Agents have a “character” (ἡθος) through which they perform the action. At different stages of its development, the logical action is carried out by (or channeled in and presented through) agents, which display a specific determinateness or “character,” and it is precisely because of such character that they perform in the way they do. In this character the action crystallizes as in its determinateness, thereby assuming its specific logical “form” or “figure.” At each stage of the process, the logical action is shaped by particular contextual conditions for its enactment (the most general ones we encounter respectively in the Logic of Being, in the Logic of Essence, and in the Logic of the Concept). I consider these sets of conditions, precisely in their specific difference, as constituting the “character” of the agent. They indicate that in virtue of which the logical action is performed *in the particular way* it is performed *in a particular sphere* (how the beginning is made or immediacy/*Unmittelbarkeit* and otherness/*Anderssein* is handled, for example, in the Logic of Being, in the Logic of Essence, and in the Logic of the Concept, respectively). Viewed in the overall perspective of the logic, the indication of the agent provides the *determinateness* of the action as well as its *systematic context* or position within the plot. Thus, in the view I am proposing, a category or determination of Hegel's logic can be described as a moment of the method (beginning, advancing, ending) that is carried out under the specific conditions given by the systematic content and context of Being, Essence, the Concept as the conditions that inform the character of the action or the specific modality in which thinking actually begins, advances, ends. The character of the action performed brings out, in turn, the agent as the point of crystallization in which the dynamism of the action coalesces and can be reflectively abstracted from the overall movement as a “knot” or a point of (relative) permanence.

On the relationship that Hegel's dialectic-speculative logic establishes between the action and the agent of the process hinges its being a “logic

of transformative processes” as well as its difference from the traditional (formal and transcendental) static logic of the categories. The protagonist of the latter is the agent and its already formed character (the faculty of the understanding or finite thinking, for example), and the agent’s action (categories, judgments, syllogisms) is taken into account only to the extent that it follows from the agent’s character (in Kant’s case, categories as functions of the understanding’s activity are taken as revealing this faculty’s nature, constitution, and, eventually, limits). In Hegel’s dynamic logic, by contrast, center stage is taken by the action, while the agent, itself a product of the action, is relevant only because of the action it performs. *Verstand* as a faculty is transformed by Hegel into *das Verstandige*: into a moment or characterization of the dialectic-speculative process in which “every logical-real formation”⁴ is involved and inscribed (Enz. §79). At a given specific stage of the process, the action brings forth the agent as a specific form or “figure” of its progressive development. In the figure, the action reveals its transformative effects. While in Kant’s transcendental logic the truth of the judgments in which the categories are used depends on the faculty that employs them, that is, alternatively, on understanding or speculative reason, in Hegel’s dialectic-speculative logic truth is a function of the movement not of the agent enacting it: the latter’s truth (or the partial truth or rather untruth of every successive moment of the process) depends on the action performed; it is not the truth of the action that depends on the character of the agent. At stake, at each stage, is what a certain determination of thought performs or does for the advancement of the process, not what it is in itself, taken in isolation or how it is used by a thinking subject. In Hegel’s logic the determinations of thinking (or categories) have truth only to the extent that they deliver certain results within the logical movement (alternatively, if they are able to begin a distinctively new thinking process; to effect the transition to the opposite, thereby advancing the process; to put an end to a certain type of movement avoiding the progress ad infinitum or a mere repetition of the same).

Generally, between the character of the agent and the logical action performed by it runs a double, reciprocal relation that is analogous, *mutatis mutandis*, to the one that Aristotle sees at play between virtuous character and virtuous action. Action forms character, but virtuous character reinforces (and indeed determines) the performance of virtuous action. Within the dynamic of Hegel’s logical process, the “character” of the agent or the “figure” of action is determined or formed as a result of the preceding movement (it is the “truth” of the preceding movement); once formed, however, this character guides or determines, in turn, the specific way in

which logical action is performed at that stage. Thus, Essence is formed in the preceding sphere of Being from the *Erinnerung* of which it results, while the Concept finds its “genesis” in the movement of Essence; however, the new process-action characterizing *Wesen*—at first, for example, its reflexive structure—or, alternatively, the *Begriff* in its proper *Entwicklung*, are determined by the conditions that characterize *Wesen* or the *Begriff* as figures of the logical movement and inform all the specific determinations belonging specifically to these spheres. As we will see in the next chapters, it is precisely in this way that advancement is made in the logical process and the peculiar form of dialectic-speculative truth is established as the truth of an unfolding, transformative movement.

Thus, to sum up, I suggest that the pure forms—the “categories,” as it were—of Hegel’s logic be viewed as the carriers of the logical action, hence as the “agents” successively performing it or enacting the different partial moments of the logical plot and thereby specifying their determinateness and position within it. These agents are not subjects in the proper sense (neither in the sense of the subjectivity and personality attained at the end of the logic, nor in the sense of a metaphysical, transcendental, psychological subject of sort). They are the ways in which the logical action is carried out and specified in its immanent progress. Agents have a character, which is constituted by the determinateness and the set of context conditions, which both result from the preceding logical action and orient the further performance of logical action at a certain stage of the process. But agents also fulfill a certain demonstrative aim in the overall development of the action; they stand for thought positions that are dynamically tested and carried through to their consequences at that stage or within that context—they are indeed modes of thinking. In the “Vorbegriff” to the *Encyclopedia*, which offers the “preconcept” of the logical science before its inception, once the notion of “objective thinking” has been established as the proper topic of the logic,⁵ Hegel presents the typology of three *Stellungen des Gedankens zur Objektivität*. At stake herein are the three fundamental, irreducible modes in which thinking positions itself toward objectivity. They can be recapitulated by their historical “figures,” and described, respectively, as (A) metaphysics, (B) empiricism and Kant’s critical philosophy, and (C) immediate knowledge. What we have in this presentation, which is meant to introduce the concept of the logic or to offer its preconcept, is a first attempt at a logical (and not, importantly, phenomenological) *figuration* of the immanent development of pure thinking. Its moments are fundamental “positions” or modes of thinking, which are presented as the successive unfolding of a

process in which thinking finally achieves its dynamic grasp of objectivity in Hegel's dialectic-speculative logic.⁶

Thus, I have suggested that the agent, conceived in this functional "impersonal" nonsubjective way, is the "figure" that logical action displays at a specific stage of the logical development. This designation now needs further grounding. After all, if we consider the general use that Hegel makes of the terms *Gestalt* and *Gestaltung* in his works, it seems that one of the differences between the Logic on the one hand, and the *Phenomenology* and the Philosophy of Nature and Spirit on the other, lies precisely in the fact that we encounter figures in the latter (very generally, figures of consciousness and of spirit, organic figures in nature) but not in the former. On a first assessment it seems that figures, in contrast to categories or abstract logical forms or determination, are "real" and concrete. On which basis, then, do I advocate indicating the pure forms of thinking presented in the logic as *logical figures*?

2. Phenomenological and Logical *Gestaltung*: Logical Forms as "Figures"

The distinction between logical forms and real figures—whereby reality is withheld from the logic and figures are considered the exclusive province of the real sciences—may have some basis in a superficial consideration of Hegel's use of the term (with so many exceptions, however, as to put the generalization into question). The distinction, however, is unacceptable because predicated on a view of the logic as opposed to the alleged "real" world of the *Phenomenology* and the *Realphilosophie* that itself needs justification and already betrays a very specific interpretation of Hegel's logic and of its systematic function. By contrast, in designating the forms of Hegel's dialectic-speculative logic as "agents" and "figures" of the logical action, I propose an interpretive meaning of the notion of figure that while compatible with Hegel's own employment of the term (in the Logic as well as in the *Phenomenology* and the *Realphilosophie*) also extends it in a fundamental way. In rejecting the simplistic alignment of forms with the logic and figures with the real philosophical disciplines as well as their stark opposition to one another, my aim is to challenge the assumption of a clear-cut dualistic division of the system and furthermore to reject the implications that this assumption carries for the interpretation of the *real* validity of logical forms (within the logic itself and in relation to nature and spirit) and hence, ultimately, of the method.

I begin with a few brief considerations on the term *Gestalt* and its use by some contemporary authors and then examine its general employment in the *Phenomenology*, in which the term does indeed appear as frequently as in no other later work.⁷ This discussion is specifically aimed at the justification of my interpretive use of the term with regard to the logic and is accordingly restricted to this objective.

The concept of *Gestalt* is already employed by Kant and then by Schiller in the aesthetic sense displayed by the “human figure” as the peculiar embodiment (or sensible presentation) of the idea/ideal of beauty.⁸ It gains, however, central stage in Goethe's philosophy of nature, in particular in his “morphology,” while the *Faust III* offers an additional meaning, important for the connection that I am presently pursuing. In short, in Goethe's philosophy of nature the term *Gestalt* expresses the *dynamic* character of natural, organic structures; it is closely connected to the process of *Bildung* or formation and growth, and indicates the internal transformation of the individual understood as an organic part of the totality to which it belongs.⁹ Figure is predicated of a whole as *totum*, not as *compositum*, and expresses the way in which the whole is subject to immanent self-transformation (for example, growth). In Goethe's aftermath, in reference to the realm of organic, living nature, we can say that the figure is the “function” (*Funktion*)¹⁰ of an individual existence that indicates its formative activity within a whole or a process, and that *Gestaltung* is the movement of individualization or particularization and internal articulation of an organic, living totality. Moreover, *Gestaltung* designates, for Goethe, the process of both natural and artistic formation. In his later poetic work, in the *Faust II* in particular, the word *Gestalt* channels the difficult problem (indeed Faust's own distinctive problem) of finding the convergence between the unchanging formality of the ideal or eternal type (for example, the beauty and perfection of Helen as “die einzige Gestalt” or “die Gestalt aller Gestalten”: *Faust II*, vv. 7439 and 8907–8908, respectively) and the real, concrete action and *Streben* that with all its imperfection and contingency animates the transformation of everything that lives and operates in history and nature.

An additional semantic field opens up when we consider that the German term *Gestalt* renders the Latin *figura*, the meaning of which is connected to the eschatological interpretation of history. As Erich Auerbach has shown in his seminal work on Dante (significantly mentioning Hegel in his discussion), a “figural interpretation” of history directly refers every earthly event or phenomenon as earthly “figure” to the divine plan that eventually completes or “realizes” this figure, inscribing it within the overall providen-

tial order. Although the earthly “figure” has its meaning only beyond itself, in its heavenly “fulfillment,” it is nonetheless historically real: its reality is not lost in the abstraction of allegory or symbolism.¹¹ *Figura* has, in fact, a double reality: on the one hand, it displays the earthly reality of the finite individual events that it raises to the status (and meaningfulness) of “figure”; on the other hand, it displays the ideal reality that it owes to the divine plan that it instantiates. The reality of *figura* (in opposition to the symbol and the allegory) is underscored by Martin Luther (an important reference for Hegel), who renders Tertullian’s Latin with *gestaltt*. Luther occupies a crucial place in the history of figural interpretation. He disrupts the tradition of figural reading started with St. Paul and Augustine challenging the linear, or rather chiasmatic, relation of fulfillment that connects the Old and the New Testament, flesh and spirit, the will’s slavery and its freedom.¹² Moreover, with the term *gestaltt* Luther opposes Ulrich Zwingli’s symbolic and allegoric interpretations of the problematic notion that “Christ’s body is in *gestaltt* of bread”¹³—an interpretation that all too easily avoids the difficulties of the notion of *figura* by emptying it of all reality. For Luther, instead, the “figure” of bread indicates the real, sensible, and material presence of Christ’s body within the community evoked by the ritual. It is to this real significance that a further, figurative meaning is added. In other words, the figurative meaning is not the opposite of the real meaning but its complement and actual fulfillment. The figure is materially real and, in addition, is even more real than the material because of its added theological significance (i.e., because of its inscription in the overall divine plan).

I want to draw three implications from these sketchy considerations. First, it is clear that if the figure is indeed real, earthly, and belonging to the real world (to the world of organic, living nature and to the historical world of human activity), the ontological and epistemological status of this reality needs specification as the term figure always expresses some kind of “ideality” beyond its reality. The figure singles out the real or an aspect thereof as more than simply real—even already in the different, aesthetic sense in which it is used by Kant and Schiller in reference to the ideality contained in the human figure. Taken as figure, an aspect of reality is seen as belonging to the broader process of natural life and not simply reduced to mechanism or as historical event, the meaning of which will be fulfilled within a broader (perhaps providential) order of things. Herein the process through which the figure cuts out and encompasses a determinate realm of the real is as crucial as its referring beyond the real itself. The figure exceeds the real, although, at the same time, it encompasses and fully inhabits it.

In exceeding the real, the figure deepens and articulates precisely its *real* meaning. Importantly, however, the figure does not exceed the real in the symbolic or allegoric order.¹⁴ And yet, at the same time, while more than real, the figure carries in itself only a limited, partial, or unilateral significance and necessarily refers to a higher or broader and more complex order of things for its “fulfillment” and true “realization.” The figure is never the whole truth. But it necessarily implies a reference to the whole (and truth, Hegel famously insists, is the whole). Thereby the figure produces a sort of structural mediation between the real and the ideal. This mediation, however, is always postponed or deferred within the process in which the figure itself is surpassed and reinscribed within an always-higher order of things. The figure’s fulfillment or full realization is its “completion.” This movement, in turn, echoes the evangelical *consummatum est* (τετελεσται), which Luther translates “es ist vollbracht” and Hegel references in his notion of the phenomenological development of consciousness as “sich vollbringender Skeptizismus” (TW 3, 72; John 19:30).¹⁵ At stake here is the completion of the process in its properly figurative meaning. I shall point out, for the moment, only that the “consummation” of the whole is precisely the way in which a systematic totality is constituted insofar as in it we reach the conclusion of a dynamic process. Τετελεσται is the movement of ending a process. Figures are real in their unilateral, partial truth only as moments or stations of the movement toward their fulfillment. Once such movement has ended, they are even more real—or they are truly real for the first time—as internal parts of the divine plot.

Second, the figure generally indicates a dynamic structure caught within a larger process or involved in a broader activity (and within the process it denotes the activity itself rather than its result). In general, both in the natural and in the historical context, the figure refers to movements of change and transformation—to movements of lawful and immanent change and transformation. The movement of *Gestaltung* unifies processes as different as the growth and transformation of organic life, formation, *Bildung*, historical development, and freedom’s specific way of realization. Significantly, from its first emergence in the Latin vocabulary, figure is often accompanied by the attribute “new” (*nova figura*), thereby hinting at the inventive, creative, forward-looking, and generally nonmechanical and unforeseeable character of the processes in which it is involved.¹⁶ Figure is itself a structure of movement and transformation: it is that in which transformation occurs, and it is that which itself effects and channels transformation—indeed the emergence of the ‘new’—within broader processes. And yet, although inter-

nally changing and itself part of a process of immanent transformation, the figure (or the reality singled out and functioning as a figure) has the status of a sort of ‘ideal’ type, displaying a certain degree of permanence (from the position of which change and variation can be assessed) and drawing the limits of permanence or self-identity within change.

Third, the structure of the figure accounts for the dynamism of a process in which individuality is constituted as the function of an organic totality, and in which, conversely, the totality is fully realized, enriched, and becomes concrete (and in the case of spiritual realities becomes self-conscious and free) through its immanent articulation in individuals. This is, for example, the structure according to which Hegel develops, from early on, the reality of “ethical life” (*Sittlichkeit*).¹⁷ In this regard as well, the figure is the operative place in which the mediation between the universal and the individual occurs, whereby the “concrete universal” is instituted (i.e., the synthetic universal, which is itself individualized and enriched by the individuals, as opposed to the analytic universal, which is obtained from abstraction from the individuals). Viewed in this perspective, the figure presents conceptual similarities with the logical form that Hegel calls the speculative concept (*Begriff*).

All these references—Goethe’s morphology and the figural interpretation of history, the Latin *figura* through Luther’s translation *gestalt*—along with the general meanings that I discussed in relation to them should be kept in mind when assessing the role that the notion of *Gestalt* plays in Hegel’s writings, first and foremost in the development of the *Phenomenology*. Moreover, if we recall the interpretive framework in which, in the first chapter, I presented Hegel’s dialectic-speculative logic as “logic of transformative processes,” those features of the concept of *Gestalt* begin explaining why “figure” may indeed be a fitting designation for the forms of this logic.

In the *Phenomenology*, the term *Gestalt* generally designates the “figures of consciousness,” that is, the successive positions that consciousness assumes in its self-correcting experiential path toward truth, hence, ultimately, toward *absolute Wissen* and the beginning of the speculative science (the logic). The figures are stations in consciousness’s process of (self-)transformation. This description briefly recapitulates Hegel’s initial program for the work or the plan of its first five chapters: the itinerary from (A) Consciousness to (C) Reason through (B) Self-Consciousness. As is well known, however, the plan changed at some point, and from chapter 6, “Der Geist,” the phenomenological development departs from and greatly expands on the original demonstrative aim.¹⁸ At this crucial juncture, history enters the scene. But

as history emerges as the protagonist of spirit's vicissitudes, Hegel is forced to rethink the entire organization of the work. The use of the term *Gestalt* significantly reflects this change. The figures of consciousness yield to the figures of spirit's historical worlds. In the first pages of chapter 6, Hegel pauses to consider what has been achieved in the previous itinerary and the extent in which the emergence of history is bound to modify the successive phenomenological development. He announces that the figures of spirit that will concern the phenomenological movement from now on are no longer just *Gestalten des Bewußtseins*; they are now *Gestalten einer Welt*—figures of the manifold historical worlds in which spirit articulates its changing reality. At this point, the process of consciousness's transformation yields to the process of spirit's historical development. This is the shift at stake in the new reference Hegel gives to the notion of figure. It is the historical and collective context of such "worlds" in which individual consciousness from now on appears as necessarily rooted. The "figuration" of this context, that is, ultimately, the presentation of the dynamic structure of history, poses a new methodological challenge to the phenomenological development.

Throughout the *Phenomenology*, in the conjoined development of the figures of consciousness and the figures of spirit's historical worlds, Hegel brings together in the notion of *Gestalt* and the process of *Gestaltung* the two semantic fields that I have briefly discussed and that the end of the *Phenomenology* announces as the forms of "alienation" (*Entäußerung*) of the concept, namely, nature and history, space and time (TW 3, 586, 590). At the end of the chapter on Absolute Knowing, in spirit's final alienation in nature and history, the *Phenomenology* comes to an end and discloses the *Begriff* and the element of pure thinking as the new dimensions in which pure speculative science, that is, the logic, can finally begin.¹⁹ In absolute knowing, Hegel announces, "spirit has concluded the movement of its figuration (*die Bewegung seines Gestaltens*) insofar as this figuration (*insofern dasselbe*) is affected with a difference of consciousness that still has not been overcome" (TW 3, 588—my emphasis). Accordingly, Hegel explains that in the movement of science (i.e., in the logic), the "moments" of the process are no longer presented as "determinate figures of consciousness but rather, since its difference has been repealed in the self, as determinate concepts and as their organic [. . .] movement" (TW 3, 589). Methodologically, the phenomenological presentation or the process of consciousness's "figuration" (*Gestalten*) is characterized by the development of the successive figures of consciousness, which are determined, precisely in their succession, by the resurgence of the "opposition of consciousness (*Gegensatz des Bewußtseins*)"

(TW 5, 43, 57) or by the permanence of consciousness's unreconciled "difference." Figuration is a dynamic movement that is fueled by the difference or the opposition that still persists in consciousness between knowledge and truth, subject and object, the subject and its substance, and only insofar as such difference persists.²⁰ This movement (and with it the *Phenomenology* as a whole) ends when no more figures of consciousness (along with the figures of spirit and its historical worlds) can be generated, that is, when the system of all consciousness's figures is complete. This occurs when the opposition of and the difference within consciousness is finally overcome (*aufgehoben*), which coincides with the final completion of the system of skepticism. *Consummatum est/les ist vollbracht*: the figure of consciousness is here finally fulfilled. At this point, the movement of ending displays the same character that we have seen at the end of the logic: the end is a *consummatum est* and this is *Enttäusserung*. As the phenomenological movement ends we reach the beginning of the logic. Since in the element of pure thinking, that is, in the logic, the opposition of consciousness (or the difference between subject and object, knowledge or certainty and truth) has been left behind once and for all (TW 5, 43, 57; also TW 3, 589) and logical thinking is utterly "free" because it has been "freed" from it,²¹ the logical movement now proceeds fueled by a different principle or "soul" than the opposition of consciousness. We have seen how in the introduction to the logic and then in the chapter on the Absolute Idea, Hegel indicates this "soul" as the "method," which, I suggest, is responsible for the peculiar 'figuration' or dynamic order that the logical content assumes in the process of its determination (TW 5, 48).

On the basis of Hegel's argument at the end of Absolute Knowing, we can easily infer that unlike the *Phenomenology* the logic will *not* be the presentation of figures *of consciousness*. However, this argument does not exclude that the movement of *Gestalten* could still describe the unfolding of the logical development. The logic may very well be the dynamic presentation of a different kind of figures—the figures *of the concept* (maybe also the figures *of the method*), namely, the figuration of the structure that the last chapter of the *Phenomenology* announces as the distinctive element of the logic, itself a "free/freed figure (*befreite Gestalt*)" (TW 3, 589). Indeed the introduction to the *Science of Logic* in offering the anticipatory (hence merely external and extrinsic) "General Partition of the Logic" articulates the entire movement to come in terms of the determination of the "pure *Begriff*" (TW 5, 56f.), while its last chapter, dedicated to the method, confirms this view by looking back at the "the entire development of the logical element,"

which itself is the “movement of the *Begriff*” in which “all the figures of a given content” have been spelled out (TW 6, 551). Now, in declaring the end of the process of spirit's *Gestalten*, the passage of Absolute Knowing quoted earlier specifies that the phenomenological movement comes to an end “*insofar as* this figuration is affected with a difference of consciousness that still has not been overcome,” that is, *insofar as Gestalten* is specifically *phenomenological*, in other words, fueled by the opposition of consciousness. Which leaves open the possibility of a movement of *logical* figuration—the *nova figura* of the method. In other words, the end of the 1807 work (as well as the introduction to the *Science of Logic*) in separating the logical from the phenomenological process unequivocally removes the dimension of consciousness from the incipient logic but leaves open the possibility that its process could still have a ‘figurative’ course with regard to the concept. After all, the internal development of the *Phenomenology* has shown that *Gestalt* has a validity that is not restricted to consciousness, and that the change in the subject of the process of *Gestalten* (namely, consciousness yielding to spirit and history) or the change in the type of *Gestalten* produced (namely, “figures of a world” and not simply “figures of consciousness”) has crucial consequences for the internal development of science itself. The task, then, is to understand the conditions and the structure of the *logical figuration of the concept*, and to see what the understanding of the logic in terms of such a process implies with regard to the systematic validity of the logical forms.

In the introduction to the *Science of Logic*, underscoring the method's function in generating the processuality of the logical movement, Hegel maintains to have offered “in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* an example (*Beispiel*) of such a method in a more concrete object, namely, in consciousness,” adding in a footnote that “later on” further examples will be provided “in the other concrete objects and respectively in the other parts of philosophy.”²² In what respect or due to what, exactly, is the phenomenological presentation an “example” of the method? Hegel has just defined the method as the “consciousness of the form of the inner self-movement of the content of the logic” (TW 5, 49)—a definition that I have extensively analyzed in the previous chapter. The *Phenomenology* has produced the immanent succession of the “figures of consciousness” according to the principle of determinate negation, a principle that has worked on the basis of the negativity and opposition proper specifically to the concrete object that is consciousness. Each one of consciousness's successive figures, Hegel explains, is overcome in the movement of its “realization,” produces “its own negation as a result,” and in this way effects the transition to a “higher

figure" (TW 5, 49). This process provides an "example" of how the method works when at stake is the experience of consciousness, that is, the process in which a succession of figures of consciousness is immanently generated on the basis of consciousness's own negativity. Accordingly, I take the exemplarity of the phenomenological dialectic to consist in the reference of the general process of *Gestaltung* to consciousness and its specific opposition, not in the process of *Gestaltung* as such. Phenomenological figuration is an instance or indeed an example of the more general movement of figuration, which Hegel endorses precisely because of this generality (hence of its versatility with regard to a constellation of possible specifications), in order to account for his conception of dialectic as method. Similarly, the dialectic that is operative in the other parts of philosophy consists in the specification of the general process of *Gestaltung* with reference to "other concrete objects" (TW 5, 49), namely, successively, nature and spirit in their respective and distinctive way of displaying opposition and negativity. This claim is confirmed in the logic where, at the beginning of the Absolute Idea, the "idea" is declared the "sole object and content of philosophy," and philosophy's task is indicated as that of "recognizing the idea in its different figurations (*Gestaltungen*)" (TW 6, 549). We have, in this way, two matching perspectives on the movement of dialectical figuration that confirm what we have seen so far: on the one hand, at stake is the immanent production and successive enactment of the movement of *Gestaltung*, while on the other, at stake is the recounting of the story once the end has been achieved, the recognition that the individual events are *Gestalten* of the one idea. Method is the production of an immanent movement guided by the principle of determinate negation that unfolds as the successive "realization" or "figuration" of a specific object or content, thereby showing the inner life and necessary development of the content itself. But method is also mythos, whereby figuration hints at the broader story in which the single figures are inscribed in order to fully realize their meaning. Method is both the production of the movement of figuration and its recollection or narrative in the higher order that fulfills each of the successive discrete figures by connecting them with their realized truth. In this way, *Gestaltung* indicates the very modality in which Hegel's dialectic-speculative method stages the activity of its content as a living, immanent, organic process of development.²³ While method as such is the movement of figuration, the specificity of *Gestaltung* (or the different examples of method) is offered by the specific way in which negativity and opposition are generated in different contents—the way they coalesce in the determinate character of each

figure. Now, the most general and universal content is thinking in its purely logical activity or the purely logical activity itself. The figuration of pure thinking's action or the dynamic unfolding of all the "figures" in and by which such activity is performed is the task of Hegel's logic. This is indeed confirmed by Hegel at the end of the logic, where "the entire development of the logical element" is viewed as staging the occurrence of "all the figures of a given content" (TW 6, 551).²⁴

In the last chapter of the *Phenomenology*, at the level of Absolute Knowing, the "concept" emerges to immediately alienate itself in the two realms of nature and history, space and time. In deciding for its own "becoming" (*Werden*) or for its own alienation in nature and history, spirit finally gains its true self-conscious freedom (TW 3, 590). The notion of *Gestalt*, as I have argued on the basis of some references close to Hegel (such as Goethe and Luther), encompasses precisely the realms of nature and spirit. Throughout the phenomenological process, the structure of the figure has rooted the successive realities taken on by consciousness and spirit in the determinateness of space and time, nature and history. The figure itself, however, is neither natural nor spiritual. It rather denotes the structure of movement that traverses nature and history and, at the end of the phenomenological process, is consigned to the power of "memory" (*Erinnerung*), yet again, in form of *Gestalt*—*a nova figura*, at this point (TW 3, 590). In bringing together the natural and the historical semantic fields, *Gestalt* indicates a theoretical realm that (i) is somehow neutral with regard to both but immanent in both; (ii) is logically more original than—or rather precedes (but perhaps also follows)—both; and (iii) systematically occupies a curious 'space'—a space that extends *across* the natural and the spiritual worlds and connects them. This, I suggest, is precisely the place that the *logical* figure occupies—a figure that thereby comes the closest to the original meaning of the term.

In the last pages of the *Phenomenology*, two antithetic results obtain. They are conjoined or mediated in the structure of *Gestalt* by the dialectical relation that in the figure plays out between the reality of nature and history. On the one hand, spirit gains true freedom by alienating itself in the exteriority of space and time, nature and history: here a new process of *Gestaltung* seems to press forward. On the other hand, by contrast, with the emergence of the *Begriff*, hence of the element of pure thinking proper to the logic, the reality of time and space, nature and history is suspended or revoked (*aufgehoben*), reduced to "moment" of the new conceptual element or reduced to the virtual figure that it maintains in memory (its *Gestalt* is consigned to *Erinnerung*). It is only at the conclusion of this double movement—of

alienation and recollection, of *Ent-Äusserung* and *Er-Innerung*—that the logic can begin. And the logic begins with “pure being,” the simplest, barest, and most immediate horizon of that which is in no space and in no time but simply and immediately is. This is the first “figure” of the logical beginning, and the first figure of the methodological action of beginning.

But while the end of the *Phenomenology*, by gaining the dimension of the *Begriff*, leads us systematically forward to the new process of *Gestaltung* that is the logic (the *nova figura* of the method), it also leads us back again to the preface of 1807, to Hegel’s historical present and to the task of comprehension that the present poses to philosophy. This task, which already inspired the *Phenomenology*, cannot be set aside at the beginning of the logic (neither in 1812 nor in 1831) but represents the ongoing effort, on the part of Hegel’s philosophy, of providing all the different “examples” of the method—the phenomenological, the logical, the real-philosophical method. What we have at the beginning—at the beginning of the science of logic and at the beginning of the new, postrevolutionary era—is the “whole,” that same whole that for Hegel constitutes the “truth,” the same truth that famously ought to be expressed and exposed “not as substance but at the same time as subject” (TW 3, 23). The whole, however, belongs to the past; in the beginning, it is truly always a result: it *has become* a totality by traversing the succession of time and by populating the extension of space with its figures, and it has then sunk into itself, thereby closing an epoch of its development and consigning it to memory. Thus, what we have now, in the present, at the beginning, is not yet the *reality* of this whole—a reality made of time and space and contingent existence and events—but (only) its “simple concept”—a somehow virtual, shadowy existence, its having-been (in time and space and memory). In fact, the whole is now “present in the *Erinnerung*” (TW 3, 19), and in memory it has a merely virtual, abstract reality, the reality of a “figure.” It is mere concept. The concept is reality in the figure of its recollected having-been. On the other hand, the empirical reality that we see around us has the appearance of shattered fragments from which the unity of the whole and the sense of a unitary story seems to be utterly absent or, at least, presently lost. Hence, to constitute the “actuality” (*Wirklichkeit*) of this whole—of a whole that otherwise lives only in memory, in hope and desire, and in its objectively felt absence—is the problem of the present. Now, the task of the logical figuration is to translate this memory (and the figures of memory) into *figures of the concept*, thereby bringing the whole into its actual existence. Since the task of the logic, as a figurative and conceptual task at the same

time, is the task of (re)constituting the meaning of a shattered reality, the logic, far from being a flight away from reality, is that which leads us the closest to the reality of historical crises.

Thus, reflecting on his own time of transformation and epochal change once the *Phenomenology* is concluded and the *Science of Logic* is about to begin, Hegel explains that “the beginning of the new spirit,” despite its abrupt, revolutionary emergence, “is the product of a widespread upheaval in various forms of culture [. . .].” The beginning “is the whole which having traversed its content in time and space, has returned into itself and is the simple concept (*Begriff*) of the whole as a result. But the actuality of this simple whole consists in this, *that those figures which have become its moments will now develop and take figure afresh, this time in their new element, in their new acquired meaning.*”²⁵ If we read this passage after the movement of Absolute Knowing has produced the *Begriff* (of the whole) and we face the task of beginning the logic, it becomes clear to what the new, logical figuration of the concept refers and what kind of program the logic sets out to develop. Ultimately, to give logical figure to the beginning of the logic (and to the methodological action of beginning) and to find the first figure in the process of the concept’s *Gestalten* is the translation, in terms of the speculative science, of the task of comprehending the beginning of the new world—“Der Anfang des neuen Geistes” (TW 3, 19)—programmatically voiced in the preface to the *Phenomenology*. The phenomenological process has not fulfilled this task, but it has prepared us for it. The logical starting point—the position of the beginning—is the actuality of the present. *Wirklichkeit*, however, on the basis of the just-concluded experience of consciousness, is made of “figures” that have become “moments” of the *Begriff* (they are figures of consciousness only in memory). Now we do have a “concept” of the whole, and this makes the beginning. But we are still only at the beginning—in the development of the new world as well as in our path of philosophical comprehension, and the concept itself is not yet actual. In fact, actuality is a new process, a process of figuration that is presently only in its inception. It is the movement in which those “moments” of the concept (to which the “figures” of consciousness have led) must take on *new figures*, this time, however, “in their new element, in their new acquired meaning,” namely, in the logic. Thus, Hegel’s logic is the process of *figuration of the concept*, a process the reality of which is deeply rooted in the historical present. This reveals that there is indeed, in addition to a systematic necessity, also a historical necessity to the *logical figuration* that begins in Hegel’s dialectic-speculative logic.

3. Logical Figures: Reality in the “Realm of Shadows”

Contrasting the opposition between phenomenological figures and logical forms often found in the literature, I have suggested that both the contemporary use of the term *Gestalt* and the conclusion of the *Phenomenology* recommend a view of the logical process—the action of pure thinking—as a process of *Gestaltung* in which the successive “figures” assumed by the different “moments” of the concept are immanently produced in the element of pure thinking. This *Gestaltung* process is the logical method itself. Now I want to make a further point regarding the relation between phenomenological and logical figures, a point that brings me to a closer consideration of the specific meaning to attribute to the latter. At stake is the issue of the ‘reality’ to be recognized as proper to the logical figure. In suggesting that the logical forms should be understood as figures, I am advancing a notion of figure that while compatible with Hegel’s general use of the term takes on an additional interpretive significance. In sum, while I claim that the forms or determinations of Hegel’s logic do have reality, namely, the reality of the figure, I am also setting out the framework for the discussion of the type of reality belonging to them.

On the basis of the crossed references disclosed by the end of the *Phenomenology* (which leads, historically, to the unrest and uncertain shape of Hegel’s present and, systematically, to the beginning of the logic), on the basis, in particular, of the idea of an ongoing, systemwide process of *Gestaltung* identical with the method and specified by the different objects or contents to which the figuration refers, I suggest that the logical figure somehow ‘fulfills’ the meaning or brings out and completes the truth of the phenomenological figure. Hegel claims that just as the concept obtains from the completion of the process of consciousness’s figuration, whereby the beginning of the logic is gained, so “to each abstract moment of the concept *corresponds* a figure of spirit in its appearance.”²⁶ The notion of a “correspondence”—or *Entsprechung*—between the logic and other disciplines and parts of the system is an idea that Hegel repeatedly announces and tests in the course of his work without, however, further explaining in what sense the correspondence is to be taken and in which way it is carried through.²⁷ This has led from early on to unending, unresolved debates among the interpreters. While I do not intend to take up this discussion at this point, the core problem at stake herein is indeed my concern, namely, the issue of the systematic status of the logical forms and, in particular, their validity with regard to reality (their “objective validity,” in Kant’s terminology). If

we recall the meaning of *Gestalt* discussed earlier in relation to the figural interpretation of history, we can suggest that the figure as such always alludes or points to a different order in which the meaning and truth that the figure already carries in itself are fully realized or fulfilled. Presently, I only want to suggest that this structural feature of the notion of figure promises an interesting solution to the problem of the logic's relation to the other disciplines of Hegel's system: just as the logical figure fulfills the phenomenological, the figures of the *Realphilosophie* fulfill the whole course of the logical *Gestaltung* of the concept. Clearly, the burden of proof lies now in explaining what exactly the fulfillment of a figure is (as opposed to the Spinozistic-sounding "correspondence" of independent, parallel orders invoked by Hegel). What happens, more generally, to the notion of figural fulfillment when this idea is secularized and then even translated in purely logical terms? I shall leave the proof of this claim to the exemplification of the argument carried out in the next three chapters. Now I turn to a famous passage of the introduction of the *Science of Logic* in which Hegel offers important hints for our understanding of logical figures and the process of logical figuration.

In the logical figure, time and space, nature and history are suspended but are also, at the same time, virtually copresent. Their suspension is an implication of the way in which the dimension of pure thinking obtains from the end of the phenomenological process; their copresence is an implication of the meaning of the term *Gestalt* reflected in Hegel's own use in the 1807 work. Now I will discuss both points on the basis of two passages of the *Science of Logic*. My claim is that as logical forms are generated in a process of *Gestaltung* that is neither in time nor in space, the figure in which those forms become agents of the logical movement provides the systematic coordinates of the process and thereby the measure of its advancement: the figure indicates the logical 'place' occupied by the present action in the progress of thinking's pure determination and its position within the overall plot. This is the logical 'time' and logical 'space' proper to the forms of pure thinking. And this is, in turn, the basis for the assessment of their inner transformation throughout the process. At stake in the logical figure is the constitution of the structure of order of the logical action—the structure of its immanent advancement.

Moreover, the figure expresses the neutrality of the logical form with regard to natural or spiritual contents without losing the content determination—even the 'materiality'²⁸—that distinguishes the forms of Hegel's dialectic-speculative logic from the formality of traditional categories. "Con-

tent” of the logic is “objective thinking,” that is, Hegel warns, thinking that does not lack “matter” for real knowledge (TW 5, 43f.). This matter, however, is not specified in its reality as natural or spiritual. The reality of logical forms is the reality of the logical *figure*. In other words, *the figure is the structure that channels reality and content into Hegel’s logic*. Such reality, however, is the *reality proper to the figure itself*.²⁹ This explains, among other things, why the abstract/concrete distinction, with which many critics and interpreters (starting with Adolf Trendelenburg and Karl Marx) have attempted to understand or challenge the status of Hegel’s logical forms, does not succeed in the task. Significantly, Hegel derives the objective or real—or, as I am suggesting, the ‘real’ in the sense of the ‘figurative’—status of the logical forms from the way in which the dimension of the logic has been obtained from the truth of the phenomenological “absolute knowing.” Thus, the figure indicates what Hegel calls “absolute form,” in which content or matter and form imply each other and constitute a dynamic unity (TW 5, 44). The figure, however, more directly denotes the *reality* of the logical form—a reality that does not involve space, time, and the specific determination proper to nature and spirit but is indeed purely logical, a reality, in addition, that is fundamentally dynamic since it is the reality of a process of figuration and the activity of formation.

On this basis, Hegel declares, in a famous formulation, “the logic is to be conceived as the system of pure reason, as the realm of pure thought. This realm is the truth as it is in and for itself without veil. For this reason one can also say that *this content* is the presentation of god, of how he is in his eternal essence *before the creation of nature and of a finite spirit*” (TW 5, 44—my emphasis). Herein the correction of the program of Kant’s transcendental logic as a “critique” that does not reach the “system” of pure reason is coupled with a controversial theological image. From the way in which the logic is understood as the movement of pure thought that yields, however, a content-determined truth, Hegel obtains the definition of that “content” as the presentation of the divine essence “before the creation of nature and of a finite spirit.” The logic is the presentation of an essential reality that (systematically) precedes the distinction between nature and spirit; it is the logical figuration of such essence. The distinction between nature and spirit can intervene only after the logical figuration of the pure form of the concept has been fully displayed. This interpretation is confirmed by a passage from the introduction to the Logic of the Concept in which at stake is a similar connection between (i) Hegel’s critique of Kant’s transcendental logic (his critique of the need for a “transcendental deduction” of the

understanding's categories that aims at establishing their "objective reality"), (ii) the claim of the objective reality of the forms of dialectic-speculative logic (the *Begriff*), and (iii) the specification of the character of such reality as *preceding* the distinction between nature and spirit and as somehow neutral with regard to it. This, I suggest, is the connection that is brought to light in the structure of the logical figure and its peculiar reality.

Hegel maintains that when at stake is the different relation that the logic and the other parts of philosophy, namely, "the sciences of nature and spirit," respectively entertain with truth, one may indeed say that the logic is a "formal science" (TW 6, 264). Yet, this formality is certainly not the lack of (or abstraction from) real content, it is not the formalism of traditional logic already overcome by Kant's transcendental logic as a logic of cognition, and it is also not the formalism that, on Hegel's view, still affects transcendental logic, which needs a "transcendental deduction" to prove the objective reality and validity of its categories. Hegel maintains that the "concrete sciences" that deal with nature and spirit are concerned with "*a more real form (reelleren Form) of the idea*" than the logic (TW 6, 265—emphasis in original)—the comparative here giving an accurate sense of the relation that Hegel establishes between these sciences and the logic. The distinction is not between the concreteness of the real sciences and the abstractness/formalism of the logic but between a real and a "more real" form of the idea—it concerns, in other words, the *figure* that reality respectively displays in the different philosophical disciplines. The real form of the idea is already present in the logic—but reality is at stake herein in its logical figure not in the manifold empirical givenness of nature and spirit. In addition, Hegel maintains that the sciences of nature and spirit in order to gain their "more real" form do not simply go back to the unilateral positions of consciousness toward reality that have been overcome in the logic, that is, do not simply refer to an empirical, given reality from which abstraction would have allegedly been made in the logic and which needs only be called back into the picture after the conclusion of the logical science (see TW 6, 265). Rather, the logic is precisely the discipline that first discloses the systematic place in which the introduction—or the "creation," as it were (TW 5, 44)—of a reality specified as nature and spirit can take place. In other words, the natural and spiritual reality can be known and thought of meaningfully only on the basis of its logical figuration, that is, systematically, only on the basis of the logic (or of the real form of the idea). "The logic indicates the ascent of the idea to the level in which it becomes the creator (*die Schöpferin*) of nature, and moves on to the form of

a concrete immediacy,” and from here on to further overcome this “figure” of its concept to become “concrete spirit” (TW 6, 264f.). This passage, which complements the one from the general introduction previously discussed, interests me for the relation it establishes between the logical form as “absolute form” (TW 6, 265) and a reality that is already real in the logical form even though it has not yet been ‘created’ or indeed conceptually as well as empirically specified as nature and spirit. It is real, I suggest, in its logical *figure*, it is real with the reality of the figure (to which the “more real” forms of nature and spirit will add both conceptual and empirical specification). But the relation has an even stronger validity: the presentation of the logical form is the condition of that ‘creation,’ is the condition for reality to be the determinate reality of nature and spirit. In their logical figure, the determinations of pure thinking have a validity that “in and for itself” is neutral with regard to their further figuration in the realms of nature and spirit. Accordingly, the logical concept can be said “to constitute *as much* a level of nature *as* a level of spirit.” For, it is the “internal simple structure” supporting *both* the forms of nature *and* those of spirit (TW 6, 257—my emphasis). The latter ‘fulfill’ or realize the former.

Thus, I indicate as *logical figure* the dynamic structure that is neutral with regard to the further specification in nature and spirit (time and space) and yet is fully real and as such displays objective truth. In addition, the logical figure is the structure that entertains with those natural and spiritual specifications a peculiar dynamic relation that is a ‘figural’ relation: the logical figure “signifies” not only itself but also the natural/spiritual reality, while the latter involves or “fulfills” the former.³⁰ In the introductory passages considered so far (both the introduction to the entire *Science of Logic* and the introduction to the Logic of the Concept), Hegel expresses such relation only metaphorically as that of a “creation.” Although more will need to be said on this point later on, this may suffice for the present purposes. Now I turn to another passage in which Hegel argues for the peculiar reality proper to the logical form, a passage that further recommends the designation of logical forms as figures.

In the general introduction to the *Science of Logic*, endorsing a standpoint that is still external to the logical movement, Hegel discusses the issue of the logic’s formality and truth from the perspective of the pedagogical relationship of the individual to this science. Although at issue, this time, is the place that logic occupies within the individual’s *Bildung* and life experience, the point that Hegel makes regards, yet again, the specific type of reality proper to logical form. The claim is that the logic appears in a twofold

relationship to the individual, and this, in turn, discloses the double position that it receives in his system of philosophy as the first and last systematic discipline (the logic before and after the “creation”).³¹ In this regard, Hegel explains, the logic is similar to grammar. One may consider it according to two different perspectives. First, to the person that does not know a certain language and first approaches it coming from the study of its grammar, grammar—just as logic—appears as a random collection of dry and abstract rules and forms, as a multiplicity of fixed, isolated determinations whose connection to each other seems arbitrary and utterly incomprehensible, and the meaning of which lays only in their “immediate sense” as they do not seem to refer to anything real or meaningful beyond themselves, certainly not to anything that may fall within the individual’s immediate experience. The dialectic-speculative logic, in this perspective, appears to be just like traditional formal logic, namely, a list of abstract categories and isolated laws ordered in a table, with no real validity in themselves and implying nothing beyond themselves. In this perspective, those forms are indeed without life and without movement, like “dead limbs” severed from the living body, like a language that is not practiced in its living connections (TW 5, 48). Entirely different is the position endorsed by the person who approaches grammar coming from a good mastery and knowledge of the living language. In this case, the logic shows a completely different meaning and a validity that is part of a much broader connection. Grammar is now alive as the inner structure of the used language, which, in turn, reveals the life, the history, and the spirit of a people. Grammar is no longer a dead, meaningless scheme but the fluid and dynamic web that allows thinking, speaking, and communication to move and to connect people and experiences, traditions and histories. Similarly, the laws and forms of the dialectic-speculative logic display in this perspective a “fulfilled (*erfüllten*), living validity” (TW 5, 53). They are not isolated, empty determinations but are connected among themselves in a fluid ongoing process and are connected to all other forms of knowledge and all manifestations of spirit as their basis (see TW 5, 54). Indeed, logic is the deepest expression of the life of spirit. It is not an abstraction from reality but entails the fundamental, “fulfilled” truth of all that is real. The parallel between logic and grammar with regard to the real significance of logical form and the mastery of a living language is further extended to the relation between the logic and the other sciences. If considered in isolation from the experience of the other sciences, the logic appears yet again as a formal and abstract discipline. In this case, the “force” and the “value”—indeed the figural reality—of the logical form cannot be appreciated. But when the logic is considered in

connection with and as the result of the experience of the other sciences, then the “force” of its content, namely, truth comes to light, and the logic appears as the real foundation of all self-conscious scientific knowledge. The point of Hegel’s argument is clear. His dialectic-speculative logic deals with the dynamic process of determination of real, content-determined, living forms. This process involves the broader connection with the life of nature and spirit. However, as we have seen in the previous chapter, what characterizes the logic in this way (both in relation to traditional logic and in relation to the *Realphilosophie*) is not the specificity of a content but the “method,” namely, the perspective in which the development of those forms/contents is inscribed. Now, in a similar vein, Hegel underlines that to endorse or to recognize such a methodological perspective depends on the position that the individual assumes toward the logic. Logical thinking is a mode of thinking, it is, yet again, determined in the first place by the “position (*Stellung*) of thinking toward objectivity.” This position, as I have argued, is revealed by the method. Thinking’s capacity to become one with the dialectic-speculative movement of logical transformation depends on it.

And here we get to the point that interests me in this discussion. The question regards the type of reality proper to the logical form given that such reality is disclosed precisely by the method, namely, by the modality in which the content is logically presented and generated in the continuity of a movement. This reality, I contend, is the reality of the *figure*. It is the structure of the figure that brings or channels reality into the logic lending it the “fulfilled, living validity” (TW 5, 53) whereby it is distinguished from traditional formal logic but lending it, at the same time, a specifically *logical* validity. The figure is the function (the agent) of the method that eventually constitutes the logical action into the logical plot and articulates it in its discrete moments.³² With regard to the individual—or to the subjective thinking resulting from the logic—the method has a normative validity: it changes the way in which we think insofar as it makes us think not reality, directly, but its logical figure (i.e., the function that an aspect of reality plays in a broader process, disclosing the reference to a more complex connection and meaning, to a vaster story), not isolated rules and categories but the ongoing movement of thinking’s self-determination. It is only under this condition that we encounter truth as well as the possibility of reconstructing the manifold pieces of a shattered reality into a coherent story, thereby becoming aware of the method itself as mythos.

Hegel claims that “*the system of logic is the realm of shadows (Reich der Schatten)*, the world of the simple essences, free from all sensible concretion. The study of this science, to dwell and work in this shadowy realm

(*Schattenreich*), is the absolute *Bildung* and discipline of consciousness" (TW 5, 55—my emphasis).³³ Thinking's engagement with these logical shadows is an apparently estranging business far removed from sensible intuition, feeling, and the common representation of things. And yet, it is through the discipline learned by dwelling and working among these shadows that thinking conquers freedom and independence, gains the capacity of capturing the real in the dimension of truth, namely, the capacity of recognizing rationality at work in it, the capacity of understanding what is essential and of leaving aside what is merely extrinsic.³⁴ To put this point another way, it is only by dwelling in the realm of shadows that thinking learns how to live self-consciously—truthfully and responsibly³⁵—in the real world, how to "fill the abstract structure of the logical element with the content of all truth, to give it the value of a universal" now able to embrace all the content and confer to it the intelligibility of truth (TW 5, 55f.). This is precisely the task of the logic with regard to the issue of the intelligibility of the real. But why does Hegel portray the logic as the "realm of shadows" in order to convey the idea of its function for our cognition of truth? Why does thinking have to dwell in the shadowy realm of the logic in order to be able to capture the meaning and rationality of reality? And, in particular, what does the image of the *Schattenreich* say of the status of the logical forms—of their status as *figures*, as I am suggesting?

In a crucial episode of another, grandiose "phenomenology of spirit," in the first act of *Faust II*, in order to evoke the much-desired Helen—"Gestalt aller Gestalten" (*Faust II*, vv. 8907–8908)—Faust must descend with a magic key to the dark realm of "the Mothers"—*die Mütter*—and bring back the flaming tripod that, he is instructed by Mephistopheles, he will find at the very bottom of the abyss. In order to conquer the ideal Helen, a journey is demanded into a reality of quite the opposite kind than the ideal, that is, into the deepest and darkest abyss. The realm of the Mothers is neither in time nor in space, is a boundless world with no geographical dimensionality.³⁶ It is a dark impenetrable unexplored abyss, in which absolute solitude and emptiness reign (*Faust II*, vv. 6223–6227, 6251). The challenge presented to Faust by the dark and solitary residence of the Mothers is measured by the comparison between this empty otherworldly realm and his former practice of the social "world" with the different kind of emptiness and the contradictions of its superficial dealings (the practice that has eventually led him to the pact with the devil). Mephistopheles warns Faust that while in the human world everything, even the seemingly unlimited emptiness of the ocean is still "something,"

that is, is determinately real, the discipline required for the descent to the Mothers is the endurance of the absolute void, of the sheer absence of all reality, the endurance of the lack of all sensation and sensible intuition (*Faust II*, vv. 6239–6248). And yet, the descent into and the endurance of this extreme emptiness produce “force” and wisdom. It is a discipline from which Faust will come out empowered to meet the highest ideal, the most complete “figure.” Estrangement is necessary to conquer the ideal. In the words with which Faust addresses Mephistopheles as he enthusiastically sets out to descend to the Mothers: “In deinem Nichts hoff ich das All zu finden” (*Faust II*, v. 6256). This is precisely the challenge: to find in nothing the key to everything and the fullness of the whole, to find the highest reality in the total emptiness of the void. But who are Goethe’s Mothers?

The world of the Mothers is utterly separated from that “which has come to be” (*Faust II*, vv. 6277–6278). Its shadowy forms do not share the sensible image of things nor the conditions of space and time in which things become visible and indeed “real” for us (objects of sensible experience). So metaphysically separate is this aspatial and atemporal world from ours that Faust’s “descent” could be just as well described as an “ascent.”³⁷ It is a world as desolate and empty as the universe was before god’s spirit hovered over the waters, although its forms seem to refer more to something that no longer is than to something that will come to be (*Faust II*, v. 6278).³⁸ Neither spatial nor temporal coordinates can be appealed to in order to define this realm and find orientation in it. Here the *Gestaltung* and *Umgestaltung* of all things occurs before—or perhaps after—their sensible empirical individualization has taken place. This is how Mephistopheles anticipates to Faust the encounter with the Mothers: “[. . .] Gestaltung, Umgestaltung / des ewigen Sinnes ewige Unterhaltung, / Umschwebt von Bildern aller Kreatur, / Sie sehen dich nicht, denn Schemen sehn sie nur” (*Faust II*, vv. 6287–6290).³⁹ The Mothers do not “see” things—individual and real (hence they will not see Faust)—but only their shadows, their figures or “schemes.” They are surrounded by the nonsensible images of all creatures. They are the eternal power placed outside space and time that determines the constant figuration and transformation of all that is real and individualized. Figuration and transformation (or transfiguration), not creation, is their activity. But the images that hover like clouds around the Mothers’ heads are not archetypes that preexist all earthly phenomena—they are neither Plato’s ideas nor Goethe’s *Urphänomene*. They are neither models of utter perfection nor do they subsist in their truth independently of those real things and phenomena. Rather, they reflect as eternal dimmed

shadows “that which once was in full light and shine” (*Faust II*, v. 6431, also v. 6278).⁴⁰ They are indeed eternal images, but they do not preexist the creation of the real; they remain as shadowy traces once the real has vanished in the past. They are virtual images of an eternal memory—similar to the *Gestalten* that the end of Hegel's *Phenomenology* consigns to memory and to the logical dimension of the *Begriff*—that other “realm of shadows” outside space and time. Moreover, even though the images that surround the Mothers are “images of life [. . .] without life” (*Faust II*, v. 6430), they are still animated by a faint movement, by an inner drive (*regsam*) toward a renewed earthly existence (*Faust II*, v. 6430, v. 6432). The world of the Mothers is the poetic rendition of Goethe's ontology—is the “Museum of Being,” as one interpreter aptly defined it.⁴¹ Herein *Gestaltung* and *Umgestaltung*, replacing the idea of creation, ontologically and logically precede being.

The Mothers' first function is conservative. They are the “keepers” of all the forms of Being.⁴² As the eternal memory of the world, they maintain the shadowy images of all that has ever been—of all that has been individualized, determinately real. The realm of the Mothers does not precede the creation but conserves what has survived its destruction (in the order of time). But their second, most important function is dynamic and transformative. Even conservation is conditioned by it: the images of what has been are conserved in order to be transformed or transfigured into something yet again living and moving. Placed outside of space and time, the movement of *Gestaltung* and *Umgestaltung* that describes all the activity taking place in the world of the Mothers plays itself out in the tension that separates the eternity of the shadowy nonliving images of life, and their earthly living embodiment and individualization. A third term, however, mediates between the two and characterizes the peculiar movement of *Gestaltung*. In their dynamic formative and transformative activity—“the eternal play of the eternal mind” (*Faust II*, v. 6288)—the Mothers transform the empty “schema” by shaping it or by conferring to it the figure of an individual real person. Not, however, of a person that anyone has ever contemplated. Rather, they form the absolute image in a unique *Gestalt*: the *einzigste Gestalt*, the “eternal essence” (*Faust II*, vv. 7439ff.) that is Helen (or Paris). This figure, as shown in Faust's relationship to Helen, is indeed real and not a mere shadow. And yet it is also more and less than empirically real: it is a figure that is individual but at the same time also universal in its unique individuality. Like Helen, the figure is alive but does not live our human earthly life and does not die our human earthly death; it is rather past and present and future at the same time. *Faust II* never explains how the Moth-

ers' process of *Gestaltung* and *Umgestaltung* that leads from the "absolute image" and empty "schema" to the "unique figure" takes place. Nor does it explain how from the unique image the further transition occurs leading to the multiplicity of empirical earthly individuals, which instantiate that figure in our world. However, what is relevant to our discussion is the progressive transition leading from the shadow scheme to the figure to the empirical individual—a transition that Goethe expresses through the eternal process of *Gestaltung* and *Umgestaltung* describing the fundamental function and power of the Mothers and their otherworldly realm.

My intention in presenting this crucial locus of *Faust II* is not to claim that the "realm of shadows" of Hegel's logic is and behaves just like the shadowy world of Goethe's Mothers. For the constellation opened up by these parallels is much more rich and complicated than the assimilation of one to the other would suggest. Instead, I am interested, first, in what Goethe's poetic creation says of the relation of *Gestaltung* that connects the Mothers to the real world of nature and human action, in what this teaches us once we accept viewing Hegel's logical forms as logical "figures" and the method as a process of logical *Gestaltung* and *Umgestaltung*. And I am interested, second, in the inversion of Platonism common both to Hegel's logical realm of shadows and to the shadowy world of Goethe's Mothers and their figuration. In both cases, despite the differences, *Gestaltung* is the process that mediates two ontologically and epistemologically distinct orders and opens up a fruitful dialectical tension between the ideal and the real.

In presenting the logic as *Reich der Schatten* Hegel inverts the famous Platonic myth of the cave. Goethe does the same with his idea of the realm of the *Mütter* and their power, playing, in addition, with other Platonic references from the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus*.⁴³ In both cases, the structure of *Gestalt* and the dynamic movement of *Gestaltung* are responsible for highly complicating and ultimately overturning the Platonic dualism between the ideal and the real, the fixed intelligible, immutable world of the ideas and the changing world of visible and sensible things. At this point, the discussion is relevant to the issue of conferring to the forms of Hegel's logic a place within reality precisely as logical figures.

In book VII of the *Republic*, Plato famously uses the myth of the cave to account for the status of human knowledge with regard to the eternal ideas and true reality.⁴⁴ Although unbeknown to us, prisoners chained in a dimly lit cave with our backs to the entrance and to the bright fire that burns therein, the world of human cognition is a subaltern world of

shadows not of real things, is a world of darkness far removed from the pure light of the ideas, a world in which we use sense perception, but the pure intellectual faculty is impeded by our chains. The world of shadows is indeed the paradigm for our human condition. This is a dependent world, as shadows depend on the material objects that cast them. The pure light of truth instead is independent of its projection and is the object of pure vision or intellection. Accordingly, the latter not the former constitutes the object of pure science. On the contrary, both in Hegel's logic and in Goethe's realm of the Mothers—worlds utterly alien to the empirical world—it is the pure forms of truth and Being that are reduced to mere shadows: light belongs to the manifold, individualized natural and human world, not to the pure forms of thinking (or to the Mothers' nonsensible and nonvisual *ewiger Sinn*). However, the logical forms and the absolute images hovering around the Mothers' heads, placed outside of space and time and removed from sensible intuition, disclose the dimension of truth only to the extent that they are realized or formed in a dynamic process of *Gestaltung*, only to the extent that they are enacted in the performance of a unitary plot leading up to the threshold of the real world. Those pure shadows depend on and are one with reality as they grow and move with it, even though they do not leave their shadowy world. The reality of the shadow is a function of the movement of formation and transformation, of figuration and transfiguration in which the shadow as such is always implicated; such reality does not depend on the fixed and eternal reality of an allegedly separate ideal archetype, as for Plato. The Museum of Being guarded by the Mothers, taken in itself, in its merely conservative function has no truth, just as no truth inhabits the thought determinations arranged in the fixed tables of formal and transcendental logic, and no truth inhabits the rules of grammar isolated from their concrete practice in the living language. In these cases, all we have are dead forms—forms that were once living but are dead and meaningless when severed from the living connection with the real world of nature and human activity. These forms, however, can still be called back to life (even though they show “no life,” they are still faintly moving, *regsam*: *Faust II*, v. 6430): they have to be let act and show themselves in the movement of their figuration and immanent transformation—*Gestaltung* and *Umgestaltung*. The movement that calls the shadow to life is the movement of figuration. This is the power of the Mothers. And this is Hegel's point about the method as the “soul” of the logical content. Indeed, as Hegel claims, it is entirely a question of method:⁴⁵ at issue is not the opposition between the light of the ideal world and the darkness of earthly shadows

but the different way of conceiving true reality alternatively as a fixed world or as a world of necessary transformation.⁴⁶ Now, to conceive transformation as such, “in and for itself,” is precisely the crux of the matter. It is the problem that philosophy has faced since Parmenides.⁴⁷ Hegel’s suggestion, which Goethe’s Mothers seem to confirm, is that to conceive transformation *purely* one must step out of the world of space, time, vision, and sensible intuition and representation in general, descend into the realm of shadows, dwell in it, and attend solely to the way in which shadows progressively take “figure” and thereby transform themselves into something living and moving. This is the key to the understanding of reality and to the truth of all particular sciences. This is the *pure* activity of thinking.

Thus, in the inverted Platonism common to Goethe and Hegel, *Gestalt* (and the movement of *Gestaltung*) is the dynamic structure of mediation that connects the shadow to the object that casts it, bringing to the fore the way in which the shadow gains the consistency of reality without being identical with any of the empirical manifestations or instantiations of the idea, yet being inescapably connected with them. Moreover, the figure is the condition of the intelligibility of the real but is not separated from the real by the unbridgeable distance that Plato sets between the eternal ideas and their mutable copies. And yet, the logical discipline imposed by the realm of shadows, like Faust’s endurance in the empty abyss of the Mothers, does follow in Plato’s aftermath insofar as they requires, in a formulation in which Hegel explicitly invokes Plato, attending to “things in and for themselves,” without their “sensible substrates.”⁴⁸ All these features we find in the structure of the logical figure.

To conclude, in the argument of this chapter I have suggested reading Hegel’s dialectic-speculative logic as the process of *Gestaltung* and *Umgestaltung* of logical form. Ultimately such figuration is the logical method. While in the preceding chapter I presented the logic as the ongoing action of pure thinking, now I have indicated in the logical “figures” the “agents” that successively enact the logical plot anchoring it in the different moments of its immanent determination. The reference to the *Phenomenology* has confirmed the sense in which the notion of logical figure and figuration that I propose is compatible with Hegel’s own use of the term and with his systematic view of the beginning of the logic (the way in which the dimension or the “element” of the concept is reached at the end of Absolute Knowing). The peculiar way in which the “figure” relates to reality, discussed in reference to Goethe—to his use of *Gestalt* in the philosophy of nature and *Faust II*—has led me to recommend viewing the “realm of shadows” that is Hegel’s

logic as the realm of determination of logical figures. What interests me with regard to the general problem laid out at the outset—namely, the use of Hegel's logic for the understanding of real historical transformations—is the peculiar complex relation that the figure establishes between the formal structure and its real contents. This is a dynamic relation of mediation, and is, in addition, a relation that unifies the individual and the universal in what Hegel calls the “concrete universal.”

The complex set of relations proper to the structure of *Gestalt* will prove crucial in assessing the value of Hegel's logic in the understanding of the present world. Viewing the logical forms as logical figures will allow me, in the next three chapters, to attempt the synchronic reading of the logic prescribed by the method with a focus on the real significance and validity of the determinations of pure thinking. On the basis of the peculiar structure of the “figure” I will be able to attribute a reality to logical forms without having to resort to distinctions (such as the abstract/concrete, logical/*realphilosophisch*, etc.), which a long-standing history of Hegel interpretations has proved ultimately useless.

PART II

STRUCTURES OF ACTION

Logic and Literature

Non si comprende come dalla pianura
spunti alcunché.

Non si comprende perché dalla buona ventura
esca la mala.

Tutto era liscio lucente emulsionato
d'infinitudine

e ora c'è l'intrudente il bugno la scintilla
dall'incudine.

—Eugenio Montale, “La diacronia,” *Satura*, 1962–1970

Chapter 4

Beginnings

Vladimir: "What was I saying, we could go on from there."
Estragon: "What were you saying when?"
V: "At the very beginning."
E: "The very beginning of *what?*"
V: "This evening . . . I was saying . . . I was saying . . ."
E: "I am not a historian."

—Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, act 3

Die Gewalt versichert: so wie es ist, bleibt es.
Keine Stimme ertönt ausser der Stimme der Herrschenden.
Und auf den Märkten sagt die Ausbeutung laut:
Jetzt beginne ich erst.
Aber von den Unterdrückten sagen viele jetzt:
Was wir wollen, geht niemals.

Wer noch lebt, sage nicht: niemals!
Das Sichere ist nicht sicher.
So, wie es ist, bleibt es nicht.

—Bertolt Brecht, "Lob der Dialektik"

We now have at our disposal all the interpretive tools needed to begin a new reconstruction of the action of Hegel's *Science of Logic* and of the story of this action. This we shall henceforth pursue by 'applying' the "absolute method" retrospectively to the entire course of the logic or by beginning again, after the logic's conclusion, with its entire movement. This reconstruction will show the way in which Hegel's logic is a "logic of transformative processes"—the aptest philosophical tool for the understanding of times of real historical changes and transitions.

But first let me sum up what we have accomplished so far. I have argued that the chief issue at the center of the program of Hegel's dialectic-speculative logic is twofold. On the one hand at stake is the problem of thinking real change and transformation in its purely logical form. On the other hand, at stake is the problem of how thinking itself changes and transforms the ways it thinks. Both sides of the issue are grounded in Hegel's attempt to philosophically comprehend the present time as a moment of deep historical transformations. This is for Hegel the fundamental task of philosophy. Accordingly, I have proposed to consider his dialectic-speculative logic as a "logic of transformative processes."¹ It is precisely on this basis that Hegel's logic recommends itself to us today. The main tenet of this doctrine is the idea of staging the process of thinking's pure activity as the immanent development of the logical action. I have begun the reconstruction of the argument of the logic from its last chapter, dedicated to the "absolute method." Method, I have suggested, is the final action whereby the entire logical development is retrospectively constituted into the unity of the action's plot. The logic's method is its mythos. Such retrospective consideration of the logical action implies its reorganization according to the three moments of the method, namely, the actions of beginning, advancing, and ending. The suggestion entailed in the method chapter is that transformation—objective in reality and subjective in thinking—can be assessed only on the basis of the reconstruction of the entire logical action taken, this time, synchronically or out of sequence, as it were.² Such reconstruction will look at all the determinate beginnings, all the determinate transitions, and all the determinate ends performed by pure thinking, and then, by comparing them, will evaluate the progress made from one to the other.³ But in order to carry out such a reconstruction in detail, a further step had to be undertaken. I introduced the idea of the logical "agents," namely, the nonsubjective functions that differentially enact the plot or that perform the logical action in a distinct modality or in a specific determinateness thereby sanctioning the discrete progress of the logical movement. These agents are the forms or categories of the dialectic-speculative logic. They are the "figures" successively taken on by the logical action, while the method is the method of the logical *Gestaltung* (and *Umgestaltung*) of the action itself. The logical action is indeed a developmental process in which transformation can be assessed because the methodological action of beginning (advancing and ending) as such is spelled out according to different figures of beginning, and because these figures can be compared synchronically with each other and related to the unitary plot to which they are functional. Relevant to

the understanding of the logic that I am proposing is the peculiar relationship that the notion of “figure” as a dynamic structure of movement and as a function of the pure thinking activity entertains with reality—with the actuality of the world of nature and spirit. It is through the structure of the figure that reality is channeled into the logic and given its purely logical form.⁴

This is the overall interpretive basis on which I shall now proceed to the synchronic reconstruction of the argument of the logic—or the logical action. Following the method’s prescription, I turn back to the very beginning of the movement, considering however, at the same time, its entire length. The way in which the absolute method thematizes its three moments—beginning, advancement, and end—constitutes the basis on which I shall assess the progress made from one figure of the beginning to the next, from one figure of the advancement and end to the next. The synoptic analysis of the different figures assumed by each of the logical actions—beginning, advancing, ending as such—will bring to the fore both the logic’s increasing understanding of real movement and transformation, and the progressive transformation that thinking itself undergoes in the course of the logical action. The first issue concerns how the understanding of real beginnings changes throughout the logic as well as how thinking improves in its capacity of beginning all kinds of action. The criterion or the paradigm of what it is, methodologically, to begin is given by the development of the “absolute method.” To such beginning—the ‘absolute’ beginning, as it were—the successive determinate beginnings—or its logical figures—shall be compared. The second, connected issue is to present the real figures or examples of real figures in which the logical beginnings under discussion can be considered as ‘fulfilled’ and the advancement made from one to the other can be seen as instantiated in an exemplary way. In both respects, the reconstruction will ultimately account for the view of Hegel’s logic as a logic of transformative processes and justify the claim of its usefulness as a philosophical tool for the understanding of our own contemporary world.

Some Preliminary Remarks: The Synchronic Perspective, or Reading the Logic All Over Again

I begin with the action of beginning. The reconstruction of select moments or episodes of the logical action in its beginnings will display a nonlin-

ear consideration of the logical development. If compared with the successive development to which the linear reading of the book (from cover to cover) has accustomed us, the reading I propose will have indeed an estranging effect. Although the appearance in my reconstruction will be that the movement is constantly interrupted and fragmented—hence, all but a movement—this, I submit, is instead the perspective in which the dynamic character of Hegel's logic is truly and uniquely allowed to come to the fore. We have to disassemble the movement in order to capture its dynamic quality *as a movement*. Indeed, this is the perspective that the method proposes as the one that accounts for the development of the logic as the concluded, comprehensive movement of truth. But it is also the perspective that Hegel himself endorses in many passages throughout the logic, some of which I shall discuss in what follows. These passages do not belong to the immanent development but provide a methodological reflection on the results obtained in it, even before reaching the conclusion of the logic. When considered in the immanent succession of its determinations before reaching the end and the thematization of the method, the dialectical development seems to flow uninterrupted except for the major transitions among its spheres—*Sein*, *Wesen*, *Begriff*. Once the end is reached, by contrast, and the method turns us back to the consideration of the overall action as forming a unitary concluded plot, the development is broken into many beginnings considered together or synchronically, to which different advancements and ends follow. Significantly, it is only in the perspective of the method that we can properly speak of beginning, advancement, end. Now the beginning of Being, that of Essence, and that of the Concept are grouped together under the same methodological heading, namely, the action of beginning as such, as if nothing had happened in-between, and we are told that this is precisely the overall *movement* of the logic.⁵ In other words, the *movement* is measured by the difference that beginning in Being as opposed to beginning in Essence or the Concept makes (not by the fact that Being flows into Essence and this into the Concept). It is only by this synoptic comparison that we can detect how the action of beginning changes or is transformed throughout the logic. Thus, taking Hegel's reassurance in the method chapter seriously, even though it seems to run counter to all appearances, I contend that it is only this latter perspective that offers the possibility of assessing the logical process *as a process* and, most importantly, of using such an assessment in the philosophical understanding of real processes of transformation. In order to follow this perspective, however, the logical figure that distinguishes the beginning of Being from that of Essence and the Concept must be spelled

out in its specificity. While in the absolute method Hegel dwells on what all beginnings have in common, namely, the absolute action of beginning, our task in this chapter is to ascertain what constitutes their specific difference, and this leads us through the specific “figures” that the action of beginning assumes in each logical sphere.

Let me now briefly present the two perspectives on the movement of the logic. The first perspective on the development—the immanent perspective that unfolds step by step and is endorsed in a first linear reading of the text of the logic—is ‘blind’ to movement and its direction since it has neither a sense of where it is heading to nor a reflective view of where it is coming from. For the process gains these characters only in the final reflection on (and of) the movement that is the method. In addition, at every step of its unfolding, the development cannot be anticipated (for example, on the basis of mechanical calculations or logical inferences). Hegel clarifies these conditions right at the outset in the introduction of the *Science of Logic* both by drawing the difference between the development of the logic and that of the *Phenomenology* (no distinction between a “consciousness” making the experience and a “we” or a “for us” observing it is operative in the logic), and by framing the logical process in terms of an organic living movement (which excludes any mechanistic determinism for the process: mechanism will be rather one of the modes of action thematized within it, in the Logic of the Concept). Finally, the logical procedures of inference from which the necessary consequences obtaining from a given form could be inferred are themselves the topic of the logic and cannot be presupposed by it.⁶

Lacking the possibility of a comparative and reflective perspective due to the radical immanence of the development, the process in its unfolding cannot use recurring figures (such as the beginning, for example) as points of stability and orientation from which and in which movement as such can be assessed and thought. Herein movement can only be performed in the necessity of the ongoing flux prescribed by the inner dialectic of the action of pure thinking. But at no stage of the process is an awareness of where one stands within it at hand (not even the consciousness of being at the beginning of an unfolding action). Only the method provides such an awareness—method is indeed, as we have seen, the “consciousness of the form of the inner self-movement of the content” (TW 5, 49)⁷—because only in the method does the overall logical plot coalesce and come to light, thereby revealing, retrospectively, the inner structure and order of the action performed. Accordingly, the method first discloses in the necessary actions of beginning, advancing, and ending the recurring points of stability within

the flux of the process around which the action repeatedly organizes itself in its specific determinateness. It is precisely in these points of stability—and thanks to them—that variation and change can be detected. Such points cannot be established arbitrarily at any moment before the end. And only in the end do they emerge in their necessity, thereby making it possible to reconstruct the process as a *moving* process, the logical action as the unfolding of a unitary plot in which things ‘happen’ that change the way thinking thinks and movement is conceived, and accordingly making necessary different ways of thinking and acting—changing the way the beginning is made, for example. In other words, the dynamism of the logical process does not simply consist in the capacity that pure thinking displays of moving, on the basis of its own dialectic or inner negativity, from the sphere of determination of Being to that of Essence to that of the Concept. This common way of understanding the immanence that characterizes the logical development is certainly right but is not a description that sufficiently captures the novelty of Hegel's logic as a logic of transformation. Immanence does not by itself imply the dynamic of self-development. The crucial further point is that the logical progress is measured on thinking's capacity to *transform* the way in which it begins its action: of making a beginning in the sphere of Essence that is logically different from the beginning made in the sphere of Being and different yet from the beginning of the Concept—the measure of such transformation being established by what beginning or to begin as such is as moment of the method. Now precisely the change in the ways in which pure logical “objective thinking” begins betrays, at the same time, a change in reality and in the understanding of reality. The difference that separates the way in which thinking begins, respectively, in Being and Essence reveals both the transformation that thinking has undergone in the way it thinks, and the transformation displayed by the reality that fulfills the figure of the beginning.

The first perspective—the immanent performance of logical action ‘blind’ to movement because utterly immersed in it—does not entail the narrative account of its own development (it is the development in action, not its reflective account); this emerges only in the second perspective on the basis of the structure provided by the method, namely, in the second reading of the logic, this time as a unitary plot. It follows that the story that the interpretations (and commentaries) of Hegel's logic usually offer—the linear narrative that develops sequentially from Being to the Absolute Idea—is not really faithful to the nature of this logic: it is an account that recognizes neither the specific processuality proper to dialectic nor the fun-

damental constraints that the dynamism of logical movement imposes on the reflection upon it, in particular, the returns, repetitions, and variations of what only the method can eventually bring under a unitary heading.

In the present chapter, bringing together a sample of figures of logical beginnings, I endorse the second perspective, the perspective of the second reading of the logic. In my reconstruction, the logical development will appear in the complexity of a movement that is nonlinear, implies returns on itself and exploratory diversions, displays repetition and variation, and is fundamentally multiple in the “agents” that it calls to action and in the “figures” that it generates. The complexity of the logical movement is due to its being structured on multiple levels that occur at the same time or synchronically. I shall give examples of the synchronic reconstruction of the logical process by selecting different figures of beginnings and taking them as ‘cases’ for the assessment of the progress of the logical movement as a whole. Because of the selection of figures, the presentation may seem at first sight arbitrary. I leave it to the persuasiveness of my sample cases to dispel this suspicion. But I can add, with Hegel, that I intend to offer here an “example” of the method, after which others may follow.⁸ After all, the dialectic-speculative method lives on in the spectrum of ever-new examples that it is capable of generating.

Finally, another apparent difficulty must be preliminarily mentioned. With the only exception of the absolute beginning of the Logic of Being—*Sein, reines Sein*—all successive beginnings, due to their position within the more advanced process, are also, at the same time, something else as well besides beginnings. Hence, they can somehow be taken as cases of beginnings but also as cases of advancement—this happens, for example, in the opening of the sphere of Essence, the second sphere of the logic. My claim is that in these cases we have precisely figures that qualify the act of beginning from a different, more complex position—the beginning of the advancement or the action of “beginning-again,” as we shall see. And to understand and measure this progress is precisely the task of the present discussion. For this is the peculiar nature of “succession” (*Nachfolge*) in Hegel’s dialectic-speculative logic—a succession construed by an action in which neither time nor space plays a role but which, in turn, is responsible for constituting the structural or logical time-space in which the overall logical plot unfolds and is finally recapitulated. Ultimately, this apparent difficulty reveals the fruitfulness of the perspective endorsed in this study.

In the first part of the chapter I offer a textual examination of successive actions of beginning, namely, the beginning in the figure of being,

in the figure of essence, and finally in the figure of the concept, or the beginning as enacted by thinking as being, as essence, as concept. Thereby, on the basis of the reflective and retrospective “consciousness” provided by the method, I reconstruct from the immanent, diachronic movement of the logic⁹ a synchronic slice of its development. The claim, as stated earlier, is that precisely in this synchronic or synoptic rearrangement of figures or actions the specific dynamic cipher of the overall logical movement comes to the fore. Moreover, it will be clear that when the ‘beginning of being’ (and respectively that of essence and the concept) is at issue, the genitive should be understood as both a subjective and an objective genitive. The beginning is what *enables* thinking to do what it specifically does in the different spheres of its activity. In the sphere of Being, the action with which the beginning is made absolutely first institutes what being is, that is, first institutes the being whose movement the following development presents as constituting the logical sphere of Being. In the figure of the second beginning it is the mediated act of logical memory (the logical memory of being) that first institutes Essence, its beginning orienting and informing essence’s further movement in a decisive way. Finally, the return to immediacy mediated by the appropriation of the logical story in the form of a “genesis” first brings to light the proper action of the Concept. In other words, it is the different way of making the beginning that institutes the successive spheres in their peculiar character—as Being, Essence, the Concept.

In the second part of the chapter, I turn to some real and literary figures that fulfill or instantiate the structure of the successive logical beginnings analyzed in the first part, disclosing, at the same time, the *real* meaning of the purely logical action. I discuss a select number of cases, which I consider as ‘case studies’ confirming the validity of the reconstruction that I have proposed in the first part of the argument. It is here that the heuristic, epistemological, and practical value of Hegel’s logic as well as its normativity for the understanding of real transformations comes to the fore. Finally, through the mediation of these real figures the progress in the logical plot is discussed.

1. Logical Beginnings: The Two Perspectives

Hegel’s dialectic-speculative logic transforms the metaphysical (theological and cosmological) question of “origin” into a logical and methodological question of action—first and foremost of thinking’s pure action. As we

have seen in the first chapter, at stake in the logic is the discursive activity of “objective thinking” (Enz. §25, Remark). This is the basis for conceiving of its development as the unfolding of a discrete movement. Now, the movement’s opening action is to begin in the absolute or ‘intransitive’ sense, that is, the action of beginning independently of the subject who begins and independently of the intention and the content that give the action its determinateness and direction. On Hegel’s view, these specifications (subject, content, direction) depend rather on the structure of the action, not the action on them. The turn from the metaphysical issue of first origin to the methodological problem of the beginning is a crucial transformation in the philosophical discourse. For, it is only the dialectic-speculative question of action’s beginning, not the metaphysical question of origin, that is compatible with the reality of history and human activity (practical, poetic, social): beginnings are historical, origins are not. This point has important bearings on the further discussion of the status and validity of Hegel’s logic. But before getting to this discussion, we have to look more closely at different figures of the logical beginning.

The text of the “absolute method” analyzed in the second chapter tells us what the action of beginning as such is. As moment of the method the beginning is neither specifically the beginning *of being* nor *of essence* nor the beginning *of the concept*, and yet, in its universality, it is the action with which all these spheres—Being as well as Essence and the Concept—actually do begin. As we have seen, the action of beginning formally or methodologically considered (the content may be one of Being, of Essence, or the Concept)¹⁰ is as such immediate, indeterminate, expresses a unilateral position or gesture, is inherently deficient whereby it necessarily leads on to something else meant to complete it (namely, an advancement), and, as a discursive beginning (as thinking’s action of beginning), is endowed with the immanent dynamic “drive” to carry on (the dialectical beginning as such is no dead end—if it were one, it would not be a beginning: TW 6, 553–555).¹¹ The discursive beginning is the beginning of the advancement. Or, to put it differently, “a beginning is already a project under way.”¹² This is what all the actions of beginning in the succession of logical spheres *Sein-Wesen-Begriff* have in common. Now the question is: In what way do these multiple beginnings differ? Or, what is it that throughout the logic differentiates the methodologically unique beginning in its successive forms or figures; what is it that enacts the beginning *differently*? For, it is precisely this difference that accounts for the specificity that separates the successive logical spheres, hence for the ‘new’ movement that arises in each one of

them and ultimately for the very transformation that the logic stages across the different figures of one and the same action. It is this difference—first of all among the beginnings—that produces the turns of events in the logical action and ultimately contributes to the articulation of the discrete story staged by the logic. Thus, we must ascertain, first, what constitutes the immediacy and indeterminacy, respectively, of the beginning action of Being, of the beginning in Essence, and what characterizes the immediacy and indeterminacy of the Concept. But, furthermore, the successive beginnings must be compared precisely in their specificity, and the dynamic trajectory that connects them must be brought to the fore. This will give us the first line of the story articulated in the logic. If, for example, the beginning action, in order to be such, must be utterly immediate, namely, count only on itself and not be based on biases or presuppositions, how does the beginning of Essence differ from and improve on the absolute beginning of Being, and what accounts for the beginning of the Concept, that is, the beginning of “subjectivity,” appearing the most advanced? How is complexity generated in this succession of beginnings?

These questions can be answered only by endorsing the synchronic perspective suggested by the method and by reading this back into the immanent development of the logical action—in other words, by attempting a second reading of the logic on the basis of what is disclosed in its conclusion. I have argued earlier that in the first, immanent development of the process, the points of stability or crystallization of action that are beginning, advancing, and ending cannot be indicated as such. This is the task of the synchronic reading that I will presently offer. Hegel himself guides us in this retroactive reading of the logic by signaling the places on which we should dwell with crucial passages that do not indeed belong to the immanent unfolding of the process but betray the methodological perspective of the end, a perspective that Hegel himself does *de facto* endorse. These passages are indeed written from this standpoint. Here is an example relevant to the discussion that I shall thereby begin:

In the sphere of Being, in front of being *as immediate* non-being *arises* equally *as immediate*, and their truth is becoming. In the sphere of Essence, it is first essence and the inessential, then essence and the *Schein* that face each other—the inessential and the *Schein* as residue of being. But both of them, along with the difference that essence has from them, consist in nothing else

than this, that essence initially is taken as an immediate, not as it is in itself, namely, as the immediacy that immediacy is as pure mediation or absolute negativity. (TW 6, 23)

This passage offers Hegel's methodological reflection on the just-accomplished beginning of essence. Herein we have a first comparative or synoptic account of the two beginnings of Being and Essence with regard to the different conclusions yielded by those two different actions performed by pure thinking. At stake, in particular, are the different results to which the *immediacy* that qualifies the general action of beginning leads respectively in Being and Essence. The immediacy of being, Hegel tells us once the action of its beginning is consummated (hence its results have become apparent), is twofold. First, it is the immediacy of the movement with which something apparently other than being arises, which is "non-being"—this immediate movement is *Entstehen* (non-being "arises" in front of being). But the immediacy of being's beginning is also the immediacy with which the two terms confront each other (*gegenüber*). The "truth" of all this or the figure in which these aspects of being's immediacy are expressed and enacted is "becoming." Quite obviously, this is not the immanent description of the famous action with which the logic does begin.¹³ It is instead the first beginning reconsidered or retrospectively described from the standpoint of the 'beginning-again' of essence. Or, it is the account of what the action of beginning "was" (*ge-wesen*: in the logical past with no time in which Hegel's logic progresses). It is precisely this account that leads to the beginning of the sphere of Essence. Here again, the immediacy belongs to structures that face each other (*gegenüber*). This, however, implies a more complex triangulation that describes the movement of the incipient essence—essence that begins by finding itself in its looking back to being. And the movement is double: first essence facing the *Unwesentliche*, then essence facing *Schein*. What essence immediately confronts in this movement backward is the inessential, which immediately mutes into *Schein*, in which essence finally seems to reach its incipient true being. It is with *Schein* that *essence* specifically begins or rather has begun. It begins insofar as it produces or makes a "difference" from being—essence is a new, different beginning or a beginning-again (a beginning from another 'place' and another 'time'—clearly in no real space and time, yet constituting the logical space-time of the logical action proper to essence, the space-time in which the story of the logic is articulated). What is this difference then? It is a difference in

the way in which the immediacy that characterizes the beginning action is “taken” (*genommen wird*): not as what immediacy is “in itself,” namely, in its absolute negativity, which entails mediation, but as the simple immediacy of the beginning action as such. This is precisely the problem that the beginning of essence faces: how to differentiate itself from being, maintaining (and properly first defining) its own immediacy.

I shall now work my way backward from this passage—in which it is Hegel himself who frames the problem of the different figures of the beginning in Being and Essence—to the very opening of Being and then come back to Essence again. This passage confirms an important point about the development of Hegel's logic. The advancement of the process is never a linear movement forward but is the interactive work in which different levels of movement are co-implicated and thereby necessarily transformed. The beginning action of essence is a *transformation* of the beginning taking place in being—it is a *new* beginning that arises from the immanent revisitation and appropriation of the preceding way of making the beginning and from the attempt to draw a necessary difference from it. This is the way in which essence constitutes the figures of its beginning. While the immanent movement (what I previously called the first perspective on the logic) draws attention to the linear succession being-essence, the second methodological perspective that I am now endorsing (and find confirmed by Hegel's himself) draws attention to the transformation of the action of beginning that takes place in the movement from being to essence. This is how essence begins: by showing that the action of beginning has always already taken place—hence that all beginning is a beginning-again. Such is the “figure” of the beginning in essence.

1.1. Enacting the Absolute Beginning: The Figure of Beginning in Being

In the overview that Hegel offers of the development of being presenting *Sein* as the figure in which the very first beginning of the logic takes shape, the comparative and synoptic relation to essence is proposed right at the outset—even though only to be negated. Thus, the opening of the Logic of Being is construed in parallel with the passage just analyzed from the Logic of Essence. Thereby Hegel signals the methodological importance of this passage. With regard to the action of beginning, being and essence are adjacent to each other and synchronic, not successive. The first thing that Hegel says of being as the “indeterminate immediate (*das unbestimmte Unmittelbare*)” is that it is “free from the determinateness against essence”

(TW 5, 82).¹⁴ This is indeed a difference from the beginning of essence, which by contrast does not enjoy that ‘freedom’—essence has always to position itself in relation to being. But this is also a difference that has meaning only for essence, only after the first beginning of being has been made. In the action of beginning there is no essence—indeed there is nothing. For, in the position of radical indeterminateness and immediacy in which thinking begins to think, its action simply and immediately is (there is no question yet of *what* it is, which would give determinateness to such a beginning). Hence it is here, with this lack of any difference and determinateness, with this utter immediacy, that thinking begins. Being is the absolute inception of thinking’s pure activity, that is, it is the action with which thinking first draws the horizon of all possible signification and places itself within it. But this is also the action whereby thinking begins to be thinking. Being is nothing more than this action (anything more than this is not a beginning action). However, due to the utter immediacy and indeterminateness of this action, *Sein* merges here with *Nichts* (and vice versa). The action of beginning is a back and forth between being and nothing, an indistinct merging and disappearing of one into the other in a whirlwind that has no direction and no distinct meaning.¹⁵ Being transitions or has immediately transitioned into nothing and vice versa¹⁶ in a movement so elusive as to defy the linguistic characterization through verbs that necessarily have to choose a tense. It is action that simply and immediately happens: it is and is not at the same time. This indistinct flux of “immediate vanishing” (*unmittelbares Verschwinden*: TW 5, 83) describes—or better, directly *is*—the action of the first beginning. The horizon of possible signification that herein begins is no clear-cut line; it is only the beginning of the possibility of meaning, no determinate meaning at all, only a tentative, unstable muddle from which meaning begins to take shape only as the movement of “becoming” (*Werden*). *Werden* is the “truth” of the first logical beginning—neither of being nor of nothing alone but of the vanishing, unstable action that encompasses them both. “Their truth is this *movement* (*Bewegung*) of the immediate vanishing of the one into the other: becoming; a movement in which both are distinguished (*unterschieden*), but through a difference (*Unterschied*) that has dissolved itself in the same immediate way” (TW 5, 83).¹⁷ In the movement of becoming the vanishing movement of being into nothing and vice versa is reinforced by the vanishing of their difference. This is how difference first appears: just to be dissolved in the very moment in which it arises. Such is the absolute freedom of thinking, its beginning out of itself—out of nothing, as it were, because thinking itself is nothing

but this very action of beginning. In this sense, the freedom of thinking is the beginning that immediately is, the action that is thanks to nothing but itself—but that is really nothing until it develops, until it advances, until it performs a determinate action and makes itself into something determinate, until it produces a difference that somehow remains. The freedom of the absolute beginning action is vanishing—it is a vanishing freedom, as it were. The freedom of the beginning is the absolute lack of all presuppositions, the freedom that arises when there is no essence (and no determinate being) against which thinking defines and positions itself—which ultimately is the freedom (or the vertigo) of the “void” (TW 5, 82f.).¹⁸ This is one of the meanings of the term “absolute”: *absolutus* from any possible relation and connection.¹⁹ Not much value should be placed in such freedom—only the value of the absolute and absolutely necessary action of beginning, the unconditioned first condition of all development. Kant’s praise of thinking’s “spontaneity” (which transcendently moves from characterizing the understanding’s cognitive activity to designating reason’s practical freedom, and from the psychological and cosmological realms to the practical) as the capacity to “begin a state of affairs out of itself” is certainly justified.²⁰ But it is only the praise of a mere beginning. It is by no means an accomplishment and has no value in itself, only in relation to the process that such action begins. In this respect, the beginning action is indeed an “intention,” the very first intention (and a ‘mere’ intention). But it is an empty intention, or better, paradoxically, it is pure intentionality lacking all definite intention and content, only the bare form or the gesture of ‘intending,’ so to speak, an intending projected toward the void of nothing or suspended over it on the force of its intangible immediate being, an intending unable to give thinking any determinateness and certainly no identity, an intending dangerously hinting at nothing, daring to be the intention of nothing. And yet, in its indeterminacy it displays the broadest inclusiveness possible within which all meaning further develops. This is pure being-nothing as logical figure of the beginning action, the figure that the action of beginning presents in the Logic of Being.

What we have in the opening of the logic is the absolute beginning as such: the initial action that inaugurates the entire logic in general as well as, more particularly, the beginning action of Being, the first figure of the beginning. It is an “absolute” beginning because it brings to the fore in the most exemplary way what the action of beginning is. It is an “intransitive beginning,” pure intentionality devoid of intention and devoid of meaning, for it is the action that first produces and establishes the development of all meaning. Henceforth the logical process unfolds as a determination process

out of the radical indeterminateness of the first beginning, out of the lack of meaning that characterizes the logical space of all meaning—“Sein, reines Sein” that is “Nichts, das reine Nichts” (TW 5, 82, 83, respectively). In the figure of being, the action of beginning is the beginning of a determination that is itself utterly indeterminate and immediate, is the beginning of a difference that because of its immediacy is an immediately vanishing difference—a difference that is (and makes) no difference. Significantly, being is not for Hegel, as it was for the metaphysical tradition, the utterly “determinable” (*bestimmbar*: the pure passivity of a substrate) but the beginning of the action of progressively determining (*Bestimmen*).

Thus, the movement of vanishing between being and nothing is the figure that characterizes the very first, most immediate, and indeterminate activity. In its immediacy, the first beginning entails the intuitive moment of discursive thinking. The flux of being and nothing with which thinking begins is the point in which all thinking activity (discursive thinking and intuiting) is one and the same—or better: is reduced to nothing, for no difference is yet drawn. As discursive thinking begins, its activity has the immediacy of intuiting but is properly qualified neither as a thinking nor as an intuiting—and yet it is the inception of a process; it is indeed the beginning in the most proper sense. “There is nothing in it to intuit, granted that one could speak here of intuiting; or it is only this pure, empty intuiting itself” (TW 5, 82). This is the convergence of being and nothing as the activity of pure thinking. It is no ontological categorization of the beginning (as an origin would be). It is the account of the action that takes place and of how it takes place. For this is the action that begins the entire logical process. Being (and nothing) is neither a metaphysical *ens* nor an object of thought or representation, neither an intended content nor something posited by thought. It is, directly and immediately, the action of beginning absolutely—thinking’s very first action that makes thinking into the activity that it is. This explains Hegel’s need to append a series of remarks to the opening of the logic in which the difference is discussed that separates such opening from traditional ontological and theological issues such as god’s creation from nothing and the metaphysics of being and existence. What we have here is something much simpler (hence much more difficult to accept and grasp): at stake is the form of the very first action of beginning—the pure form and the first figure of such action. And absolutely nothing more than this.

Just as the action of beginning in its utter immediacy and indeterminacy is not distinctively discursive (but is rather the point of indeterminate convergence of intuition and discursivity) although it is the beginning of

discursive, objective thinking, it is also non-propositional although it is the beginning of logical discourse that is articulated in propositional language. The language of the beginning action in its immediacy is neither descriptive nor propositional; it is immediately identical with the action itself (not distinct from it as a particular action). "Sein, reines Sein" that is "Nichts, das reine Nichts" is the broken, stuttering language of immediacy (TW 5, 82, 83, respectively). It becomes a proposition only through the movement that the action itself entails, leading on to the two parallel claims, "being [. . .] is in fact nothing" and "nothing [. . .] is the same as being" (TW 5, 82, 83, respectively). Both propositions lead to the claim of becoming, "pure being and pure nothing are the same" (TW 5, 83).²¹ This language, in the moment in which it lets a vanishing difference separate it from the action (as it is with becoming), seems unable to keep pace with what thinking does: "[Sein-Nichts] nicht übergeht, sondern übergegangen ist" (TW 5, 83). The first figure of the beginning is definitely a beginning in the performative mode of action not in the mode of narration. Also in this respect, we can ascertain the crucial transformation that Hegel operates with regard to the tradition. The metaphysical-theological position "in the beginning was the word" is transformed into the radical immediacy of the action of beginning in which no discursive or propositional distinction is yet drawn. The question does no longer regard *what* is placed as the *origin* (of all) but rather what is the structure of the action that absolutely begins (and in order to begin absolutely). From the latter the articulation of logical language depends. Indeed, Goethe's *Faust* already shows that "Im Anfang war das Wort" leads nowhere as it is really no beginning of a process but a dead end: "Hier stock ich schon! Wer hilft mir weiter fort?" (*Faust I*, v. 1224–1225). For *Faust*, as for Hegel's dialectic-speculative logic, the word has no metaphysical preeminence or originality. Yet Hegel significantly modifies *Faust*'s "translation" of the evangelical beginning as well. For even though "Im Anfang war die Tat" (*Faust I*, v. 1237) may be accepted as a true statement, the metaphysical question, which Hegel rejects, remains herein unaltered. Moreover, for action to be placed *im Anfang* is hardly a sign of distinction: it is not its position that makes the action a first but its unique structure as a *beginning* action. And crucially: action does not stop short at the beginning. For Hegel the real issue regards the very structure of the *beginning action* as the beginning of an *immanent process*. How does action begin absolutely? The question of origin disappears here entirely.

As I often remarked, in Hegel's logic the beginning (as well as the advancement and the end) is devoid of temporal connotation. It is neither

a beginning in the order of time (just as for Kant practical reason's spontaneity is not in time), nor is it the beginning of a process as the first term of a temporal succession. What is at stake is the logical structure of the action that begins as the necessary condition for an ensuing process—the beginning, underscores Hegel in presenting the structure of the “absolute method,” is “the beginning of the advancement and development.” (TW 6, 556).

1.2. The Memory of the Beginning or Beginning-Again: The Figure of Beginning in Essence

The beginning of essence is the action of beginning-again—of beginning anew after the conclusion of the entire sphere of Being but also, in particular, after the absolute beginning that is made in and with being. To this extent, the beginning of essence does not enjoy the ‘freedom’ that made of the very first inception of thinking an unconditioned, presuppositionless action. In order to begin-again thinking must take position with regard to what has happened and has been performed—what is *ge-wesen*—in being. And in particular, it must differentiate itself from it. For, the beginning-again of essence is also a more advanced beginning or, better, is the beginning of a different advancement, is a new beginning. On the other hand, the beginning of essence is the action of beginning while in the middle of the overall logical action. Stepping back from the immanent unfolding of the movement, Hegel notices: “Essence is placed between Being and the Concept and constitutes the middle between the two; and its movement is the *transition* (*Übergang*) from Being into the Concept” (TW 6, 15f.—my emphasis). The beginning of essence is inscribed in this intermediary and mediating position, which this entire sphere occupies in the overall plot of the logic. While the modality of movement proper to being and first established by the figure of its beginning is the instability and immediacy of *Verschwinden*, the modality of movement proper to essence and established by the figure of its beginning is the intermediacy of *Übergang*. These are the general features that characterize the figure of the beginning action in Essence—to be the action of beginning-again or beginning-anew and to be the action of beginning-while-in-the-middle. We have now to see how these characters inform the dynamic structure of this new beginning. How does essence or ‘essential thinking’ begin?

Essence “begins from something other, namely, being” in order to find itself, hence to be able to properly begin (acting) as essence (TW 6, 13).

This is the initial mediation embedded in essence. To be sure, its beginning is mediated by a tortuous “path” with which essence has to find itself, that is, has to find the specific figure or form of its beginning. Thus, essence begins by going back to being, or by going back from whence it came. Being is now *gewesen*—this is the *Erinnerung* through which essence first comes to be, the action that constitutes essence or thinking that acts as essence (TW 6, 13). Things and events acquire a meaning only after they no longer are—as memory recalls them in the figure of their having-been (or as memory lends them the figure of having-been). Thus, the beginning of essence takes place, at first, in the figure of logical memory. This memory, however, reveals itself an illusion (*Schein*), the production of the empty immediacy of *Schein*.²² For one thing, the return to being is not properly essence’s action but being’s own action: “indeterminate essence” is truly the result of the movement of being’s “complete return in itself” (TW 6, 14f.). This is how being concludes its movement: that thereby essence also begins is certainly true, but it is not essence’s but being’s truth (it is being’s end not essence’s beginning). For another thing, in order to begin on its own, essence must distance itself from being. Thus, essence is presented as “das aufgehobene Sein,” the “negation of the sphere of Being in general” (TW 6, 18). Yet, *Aufheben* is a tricky operation: as much as it negates (and represses) the immediacy of being, it also preserves it in essence (such immediacy is *aufbewahrt und behalten*). Thereby the immediacy of being’s action is, at least, a distant memory. The logical memory of essence destroys as much as it preserves. It does first furnish a standpoint on which essence starts building a possible beginning (being as *ge-wesen*); yet this turns out to be, dialectically, only the attempt to push being back to its sphere, negating it. This double, conflicted relationship with being—recollecting, distancing, negating—defines precisely how essence *is* or behaves in its action from the very outset. Although it immediately gives the being of essence, it also expresses essence’s claim to be utterly “other” than being (TW 6, 18: “als Andere überhaupt”). All this has to be proven in action, that is, by the action of beginning.

The action of beginning is immediate action. As much as it tries to shake off the memory of being by distinguishing itself from it, essence is still bound to it. But immediacy is no longer, directly, the very action that beginning is in being: entirely indeterminate, free with the freedom of the absolute void, totally daring in its coming from nothing and vanishing into nothing, a mere point of convergence between thinking’s intuition and discursivity. Now immediacy is essence’s position in “relation” (*Beziehung*) to

being. For all its initial immediacy, to begin in essence (to begin after being) is a more circumspect kind of action. Unmistakably discursive and confrontational, it implies taking position, distinguishing the “essential” from the “inessential.”²³ Indeed, although the two sides—being and essence—face each other “indifferently,” displaying the “same value,”²⁴ essence raises a higher claim, assigning to itself the side of the essential while the “overcome being” is reduced to the inessential. To begin-again is to draw this preliminary distinction, in fact an arbitrary one in its immediacy, thereby cutting out the space of an alleged ‘essential’ action in which such beginning is seen as necessarily inscribed. The beginning of essence is a beginning in itself double, is an action in itself split: in it, being and essence dialectically or negatively relate to each other, the essential is separated from the inessential. While the first absolute beginning has no true direction but in its utter indeterminacy fluctuates between being and nothing, the beginning of essence is two-faced, looking backward and forward at the same time, yet with an asymmetrical (and arbitrary) privilege for the essential, for the direction away from being. Such doubleness reflects essence’s middle position between *Sein* and *Begriff*. This figure of the beginning impresses a crucial character on the entire movement of essence that follows (on its advancement, as it were).

However, if the task is to gain the specific figure of the action of essence as a new beginning, that is, as the beginning of a new process, we must recognize that as much as the distinction between the essential and the inessential allows essence to stand out as other against being, it is not sufficient to characterize its first action as a truly new beginning. Rather, essence is thereby thrown back to the sphere of Being—specifically, to the “sphere of *Dasein*” (TW 6, 18). Essence cannot declare itself more essential than being without falling back into the movement of being. For nothing has been accomplished yet to substantiate such a claim put forth by essence. Essence has not yet begun its action. It has only positioned itself so as to be able to do so (a gesture that being did not need to perform). Consequently, such a distinction is merely “external”; it “falls in a third term,” in an external tribunal whose decision can only be arbitrary and abstract because no deed has been accomplished yet. There is nothing, really, on the side of essence on which to pass judgment: essence is but has not yet acted. Thus, “[i]t remains here indeterminate what belongs to the essential and what to the inessential” (TW 6, 18f.). To be sure, the distinction between the essential and the inessential is not thereby repealed; it is rather declared in need of further specification in order to effectively characterize the beginning of

essence. Another way to put this point is to say that by simply advocating to itself the part of the essential, declaring being merely the inessential, essence is still not bold enough in its action: it is not radical enough in its distancing itself from being. In fact, in order to make a *new* beginning, the action of essence must be characterized by a far more radical (or "absolute") negation of being. Accordingly, being is declared "the immediate that is nothing in and for itself," that is "nur ein Unwesen, der Schein" (TW 6, 19). This stronger negation of immediacy (of being) is the proper beginning action of essence. And this is, at the same time, the production of *Schein*, of a "reflected immediacy" (TW 6, 20). The logical memory of being turns out to be the necessity of its radical elimination, the reduction of being to its absolute *Nichtigkeit*. This is the act of 'freedom' displayed by the beginning of essence. Yet, in turn, this liberation from the memory of being is an illusion, is (only) the beginning of essence. This is the "lack" that, as the absolute method makes clear, leads the beginning necessarily on to the advancement of the process (TW 6, 555).

Schein is the radical "nullity" (*Nichtigkeit*) of being. No aspect of being is spared from this condemnation. "*Schein* is the entire residue (*der ganze Rest*) that still remains from the sphere of Being" (TW 6, 19). Yet, essence's *Schein* is not being's *Nichts*. As radical as the negation of being allegedly is, which essence commits in its beginning action, the production of *Schein* perpetuates the virtual presence of being within essence, a presence independent of essence and still immediate.²⁵ Logical memory cannot be utterly and definitively erased: once appeal to it is made, it cannot be retracted; the inner duplicity of the figure of the beginning will characterize the entire movement of essence. But since memory is itself a practice of erasure, it can be used to appropriate and thereby transform and make its contents new again. Although the immediacy of being cannot be eliminated (neither by declaring it inessential, nor by reducing it to *Unwesen* or non-essence, nor by making *Nichtigkeit* out of it), it can be transformed into "reflected immediacy" (TW 6, 20). Now this transformation becomes the distinctive initial action of essence. *Schein* is what remains of being in the immediate first action of radical negation committed by essence: of being "it remains only the pure determination of the immediate; it is as *reflected* immediacy, i.e., immediacy which is only *by means* (*vermittelt*) of its negation" (TW 6, 20). In this way, essence's immediate beginning is truly a first act of mediation. What we have is the immediate beginning that is itself mediation and radical negation at the same time. This is the production of *Schein*, of immediacy *reflected*. The beginning of essence, which immediately

reduces all worldly content (all concrete being) to illusion, is the skeptic beginning. It is, Hegel observes, “the phenomenon of skepticism.” I shall return to this claim at the end of the chapter, when the issue will be to show the type of ‘reality’ proper to the logical figures successively developed.

The unfolding of the structure of *Schein* radicalizes the immediacy of essence’s initial action. If the beginning as such must be immediate, as the absolute method claims, the beginning of essence is not yet immediate enough. Essence is still holding back, is still investing only being with the negativity proper to reflected immediacy, is still unable to accept immediacy as the beginning—as *its own* beginning. But the immediacy of *Schein* is the immediacy of *essence itself* (not just the negativity of being). *Schein* is not separate from essence (it is not simply being, only, this time, in essence); it is, immediately, essence itself—the very “determinateness (*Bestimmtheit*) of essence” (TW 6, 21). The immediacy that seems to separate *Schein* from essence “is the immediacy proper to essence itself” (TW 6, 22). Thus, the beginning of essence produces essence itself as the negativity and reflected immediacy of the illusion: *Schein* as such (even the *Schein* that being now is) is essence (TW 6, 23). But in this way, the action of essence—immediate, negative, and yet reflected—is properly the movement of “Scheinen seiner in sich selbst” (TW 6, 23). The reflected immediacy, which is *Schein*, becomes immediate reflection. Thus, the figure of essence’s beginning is “das Scheinen seiner in sich selbst.” Now this “alienated (*entfremfeten*) *Schein*”—the illusion that has penetrated everything—is the activity of *Reflexion* (TW 6, 24). This is properly the beginning of *the advancement* of essence—the “becoming in essence,” which Hegel presents, in a famous formulation, as the “reflected movement [. . .] from nothing to nothing and through nothing back to itself” (TW 6, 24).²⁶

Let me now sum up these considerations. The figure of the beginning action in essence is internally dual, which reflects the intermediary and mediating position of this sphere in the development of the logical action as a whole. The action of beginning is, methodologically, utterly immediate. Yet essence hesitates to perform a radically immediate beginning and relegates immediacy and its negativity first to being as the “inessential,” then to being as *Schein*, but finally has to accept that its own action is nothing but the production of illusion—*Scheinen*, *Reflexion* in their immediacy and negativity. The second figure of the beginning is the action that produces *essence itself* as mere illusion (and self-illusion). Moreover, the action of essence is framed by its memory of being; dialectically, however, this memory must be radically negated for the action of essence to begin—to

begin 'freely.' Ultimately, the beginning of essence is the movement in which logical memory yields to reflection. This polarity defines the figure of the beginning in Essence.

1.3. The Beginning of Freedom: The Figure of Beginning in the Concept

Immediacy and indeterminateness in their uncompromised absoluteness and abstractness are the cipher of the figure of beginning in Being. They qualify the 'freedom' of the incipient action of this sphere as a lack of anything with which being ought to confront itself or measure up to—be it a presupposition, a rule or law, a criterion or a precedent. The freedom of being is the thoughtlessness that belongs to the action that initiates something radically new and incomparable. This, however, is also its limitation, the abstraction and "lack" that force the beginning to advance and to prove itself something more consistent and permanent than that ephemeral, vanishing thoughtlessness. The freedom disclosed by the figure of essence's beginning is more laboriously obtained and derives from uncovering the illusory character of being's freedom. Freedom is always constrained and always constrains. Mediation, in the unavoidable confrontational relation with being and in the duality that this implies, is the character of this figure. This is always the freedom of one at the expense of the other, the freedom that knows in the other its limit; it is still arbitrary freedom, in search of its own rule.

The third figure of the beginning emerges in the initial action that introduces the concept. The beginning of the advancement, which is made in essence, yields to the beginning of the end, to the conclusive beginning of the logic. While the former is characterized by the duality proper to essence's intermediary position (the middle between being and the concept), the latter develops the structure of "unity" proper to the concluding mediation that is the concept. But here we are still only at the beginning of such a development. Accordingly, immediacy is present again but is embodied in a more advanced figure of immediate action. "The concept reveals itself [. . .] as the unity (*Einheit*) of being and essence" (TW 6, 269). This is the unity of the action on which the logical movement ultimately rests. It is the unity of the action that both produces a *Grundlage* and shows what it means to be the foundation—neither the metaphysical foundation (substance, god, the absolute), nor the transcendental foundation (Kant's unity of apperception), but the very movement or action of laying the foundation that is itself the basis of the dialectic-speculative process of pure thinking. How, then, does thinking's grounding action begin? The answer to such a

question is offered by the beginning of the concept—by the beginning that posits what the concept initially is (“der Begriff im Anfang”: TW 6, 272) and thereby determines what the concept is bound to accomplish in this last logical sphere. While the figure of the beginning in being is absolutely presuppositionless (which makes for the distinctive immediacy of its action), the beginning of essence is informed by the reflective memory of its coming from being—a memory that negatively weighs on essence’s beginning as a foreign presupposition from which it needs to liberate itself. The beginning of the concept, by contrast, is the action that shows how the concept *is* itself the underlying, subjective as well as objective “presupposition” of all thinking activity as such (TW 6, 245). To this extent, the concept provides the ‘true’ figure of the logical beginning and is itself the true beginning of thinking. And yet, the concept is also the “result” of the logical movement that has led up to it—a movement that is now retrospectively construed as the concept’s “immediate genesis” or “genetic exposition” (TW 6, 246, 245, respectively).²⁷ While the beginning of essence constitutes essence by looking back to being with the two-faced act of logical memory (two-faced because it relates to being as much as it suppresses it), the third beginning constitutes the concept by reconstructing the mediated, fully discursive path of its genesis. It is its ‘logical history’ or genesis that fully justifies the concept’s grounding action (providing the *quid juris* that Kant sought in his transcendental deduction). Thus, the sphere of the Concept opens by positioning this beginning as both the *foundation* of the preceding logical movement and as its *result*. These two standpoints—*Grundlage* and *Genesis*—are dialectically connected in the action that makes the *Begriff* into the final beginning of the logical movement.

Hegel argues that although the concept “must be seen as the *absolute foundation* (*absolute Grundlage*), it cannot be seen as such except insofar as the concept *makes itself* into the foundation” (TW 6, 245—emphasis in original). To be the foundation is the concept’s own first and foremost action—it is its beginning or grounding action. Here again, Hegel transforms the metaphysical issue of a fixed foundational origin into the dynamic of a movement in which action constitutes the agent and is imputed to it, in which what happens is brought back to its responsible source. To be the concept is the action of making oneself into the foundation of a dynamic process of self-constitution—into the logical basis that confers unitary meaning to the action of both being and essence, the very action that has produced the concept as its result. This is the sense of their incipient unity. But this is also the meaning of the true freedom and independence

that belongs to the concept. Hegel recapitulates the succession of the three logical figures of the beginning (and of the three successive logical spheres that thereby begin) as follows. "The abstract immediate is indeed a first"—the first, abstract beginning of being. "[A]s such an abstraction, however, it is something mediated"—the second, mediated beginning of essence. But if such a *Vermitteltes* "must be grasped in its truth, then its foundation" must be brought to light. "Hence, such foundation must indeed be an immediate but such one that it *has made itself into* an immediate by overcoming the mediation" (TW 6, 245—my emphasis). This is the general figure of the beginning action of the concept as the "third to being and essence" and their "*Grundlage und Wahrheit*" (TW 6, 245). It is the action whereby the concept "makes itself into" an immediate through the *Aufhebung* of the mediation of essence and thereby becomes the very basis of the entire process—the process that leads to the concept as a result and a new beginning. The concept's immediacy is neither the inconsistent abstractness of being's action nor the illusory immediacy of essence's action but the consciously produced immediacy that sustains both and gives meaning to the unfolding of their succession (indeed, their succession is maintained in the concept's action and therein finds its truth: TW 6, 269) but is also an immediacy that develops and realizes itself in entirely new directions.

"Freedom" qualifies the action of the concept from the outset (TW 6, 246). This is, first, the modality according to which thinking organizes the relationship between being and essence that is the concept—what merely happens and has happened is now imputed to the concept finding in it its generative center, its basis and truth. This is, second, the freedom and self-assurance of a fully justified beginning, of a beginning that recognizes its root in a 'logical history' (a "genesis," as it were) of which the concept that therein begins is, in turn, the legitimate and true 'subject.' The truly free beginning is the beginning that looks back, yet again, to its own "genesis" (TW 6, 274)—not in a distancing recollection that disavows its provenance in the moment in which it evokes it (as essence does) but in a responsible act of self-ascription. The result is truly the foundation from which the result itself issues. Herein lies Hegel's reformulation of both Spinoza's *causa sui* and Kant's idea of autonomy. The concept is the act of making oneself into what one is (in the sense of being and essence but also in a further sense that exceeds them both: the concept's new immediacy).²⁸ The beginning is now the circular beginning that grants the concept's true independence and freedom. Neither the abruptness of being's beginning nor the one-sided arbitrary self-positioning of essence with regard to being

are truly independent and free actions. Only the freedom that characterizes the beginning action of the concept is the independence that comes from a grounded, justified, self-ascribed beginning, from the consciousness that the action has its ground only in itself and, in its realization, remains with the concept itself (Enz. §158). Significantly, with regard to the third figure of the beginning Hegel does indeed say that the concept is the “original being” (*ursprüngliche[s] Sein*: TW 6, 274). The ‘originality’ of the concept’s beginning is precisely its coming third and last: original is the beginning that displays a recognized history (and is, at the same time, the basis of such history) not the beginning that lacks one or represses it.

This is also the “truth” displayed by the concept as true beginning. The figure of the concept’s beginning—the truth and freedom that characterize it—tells us that to look for the *conceptual* beginning of a state of affairs (the present crisis in its many manifestations) is not the same as to look for its beginning in the figures of being or essence—is neither a merely natural, immediate, intuitive beginning nor a merely historical and indeed arbitrary beginning in the sense of *Historie*, a beginning mediated by appearances and scattered representations of what “happens” (TW 6, 260). These are indeed indispensable conditions for all that develops: all that occurs has indeed a natural as well as a causal, phenomenal, and phenomenological beginning. However, these beginnings do not contain the truth, which comes only from the recognition of a circular beginning—from the self-ascribed free action whereby reality is brought back to its grounded “genesis,” whereby the way in which reality (in the sense of *Wirklichkeit*) is, is given by that which has made it be the way it is.

The third, most advanced figure of the beginning action constitutes the concept as the identity that immanently differentiates itself. This is “der Begriff *im Anfang*” (TW 6, 272—my emphasis). Such self-constituted plural identity now develops by taking up within itself the general modality of being and essence—*Anundfürsichsein* and *Gesetzsein* (TW 6, 251, 270). The constitution of the concept’s “absolute identity with itself” is neither vanishing, indistinct selfsameness nor position of substantial identity but is the beginning of the identity of thinking. In the beginning, such self-differentiating identity is only “immediate,” hence “formal.” It is the figure of “*subjective* thinking,” the merely “*formal* concept” (TW 6, 274). The concept begins by instituting the logical space of thinking’s formal, self-differentiating identity. In its initial immediacy this is *subjective, formal* thinking (and is also the thinking proper of the understanding and its logic).²⁹ In the immediate unity of the concept, the action of differentiating or the positing of differences is

only a semblance (*Schein*). Not, however, in the sense that such differences are not real differences, but in the sense that they are themselves nothing but the very unity and totality of the concept: they are the “concept as such” (TW 6, 272). Different determinations, as produced by the concept and proper to its very identity, are equal among themselves and equal to the concept itself. This is the egalitarian universality of the concept's beginning action, a merely formal universality that posits both identity and differences as what they are (*Gesetzsein* and *Anundfürsichsein*), namely, universal in the unity of their concept. Such an action introduces to the logical scene the “universal concept” (TW 6, 273), that is, the concept “in the beginning” (TW 6, 272). Unlike the indistinct vanishing that characterizes the first figure of the beginning in the to and fro between being and nothing, and unlike the tense duality that informs the negative relation to being in the second figure, the beginning of the concept is the unitary action of self-differentiation, the complexity of which is given by its “three moments: universality, particularity, and individuality.” The beginning action of *Unterscheiden* is here the production of determinations that are equal not because they are indistinct and indeterminate in their vanishing (as in being) or because they are all negatively opposed to one another (as in essence). The moments that are posited (*Gesetzsein*) as moments of the concept are equal because they are, “each of them, the *entire concept* as well as the *determinate concept* as well as a *determination* of the concept” (TW 6, 273). This is the action that from the outset knows of no indeterminacy, is always already inscribed in a context, and informs with the awareness of such a context each and every action that it recognizes as its own. This is the structure of the speculative concept, the structure of thinking's *properly discursive* activity.

Thus, the “pure concept” begins as a “universal concept”; its action is in the determination of universality, which, however, does not exclude but implies particularity. While being's beginning action is lawless in its absolute lack of presuppositions and essence's is biased in its proclaimed “essentiality” against the inessential being, the concept's initial action in its universality is “the determining and differentiating” that has in itself its own “criterion,” and this is what confers to the concept the formal, yet “absolute identity with itself.”³⁰ But as the concept, in its totality, embraces in itself the differences that are its moments, its determination is “*only* to be the *universal* set against the differentiation of the moments” (TW 6, 274). In fact, the egalitarian universalism of the concept's initial action is also its limit, the “lack” that pushes the beginning on to the advancement of the movement. For, as determinate as the beginning action claims to be, it is also immedi-

ate so that, if it is to preserve its egalitarian universalism, its determination must remain a very poor one—it cannot be more than mere formal universality in front of the difference that divides its moments. Although the concept, owing to its very “genesis,” is entitled to and perfectly justified in its action, although it acts freely following the justified criterion that it bears within itself, it still cannot take a determinate position with regard to its moments without betraying itself. It must maintain a delicate balance “in front of the distinctness (*Unterschiedenheit*)” that divides its moments and can be “*only the universal*” (TW 6, 274—emphasis in original) in front of them (no hierarchy or ranking or preference is allowed). This is the uneasy predicament of the concept’s action “in the beginning,” the precariousness of its initial—immediate and abstract—universality. This is, in fact, the beginning *of the advancement* of the concept’s movement. Herein we find the peculiar indeterminateness that characterizes the figure of the beginning in the concept. It is the neutrality of universalism, its impartiality with regard to all particular causes that requires its not being committed to any cause (not even to the cause of universalism). This is the all-embracing and all-pervasive impartiality of absolute toleration.³¹

We have seen how the pure concept begins by looking back to its own “genesis” (TW 6, 274). Methodologically, universality in its simplicity is the character of all beginning action as such.³² Defying all “explanation,” the simplicity of the universal is the self-contained action that suffices to itself but is also the action carried out by its inner negativity (TW 6, 275). The simplicity of being is given by its *immediacy*. This expresses a mere opinion or belief (it is a *Gemeintes*). Its reasons cannot be articulated for what they are; there are most likely no reasons, for nothing matters as a reason. Thinking’s discursivity has not yet emerged in its fundamental difference from intuition. Action itself is properly an inconsistent vanishing that is and is not at the same time. This is now the very “concept” of the beginning action of being, that is, the way in which the beginning of being constitutes the ‘logical history’ and thereby informs the very beginning of the concept in its formal universality. However, as the beginning of the concept, the universal is the action that is “the *simple* which is at the same time the *richest in itself*.” The immediacy of opinion yields to the grounded discursivity of reason. On the other hand, the mediation that the concept inherits from essence is the pure “activity of mediating,” not a “being mediated.”³³ The concept’s very “identity” is to be the mediation among its immanent moments—and nothing but this mediating activity. To this extent, the concept’s activity displays a negative character: it is “negation

of negation" (TW 6, 275). The universal activity of the concept negates the determinateness (which is, itself, negation or limitation of indeterminacy) of its differences. The richness of the concept's universality is now in the form of such double negation. Empirical differences are not simply left aside or ignored. They are leveled within the conceptual universal and maintained in the common form of their negation.

To sum up, with the third figure of the beginning—the beginning that introduces the concept and the conceptual activity of thinking in its inception—we reach the freedom of an action that in its beginning is both the recognition and appropriation of its own genesis (in being and essence) and the conscious making-itself into the basis of such genetic development. Conceptual beginnings imply returns and repetitions—the concept goes back to being and essence, appropriates them and fundamentally transforms them. What we have reached is the self-produced origin of thinking itself. This is the universal activity of the concept in the beginning—the egalitarian position of an identity achieved through the contemplation of equal differences.

2. Violence in the Beginning: Melville's *Billy Budd*

"Asked by the officer [. . .] as it chanced among other questions, his place of birth, he replied, 'Please, Sir, I don't know.' Struck by the straightforward simplicity of these replies, the officer next asked, 'Do you know anything about your beginning?'—'No, Sir. But I have heard that I was *found* [. . .].' 'Found say you? [. . .].'"³⁴ This exchange stands out almost by chance among other, unmentioned questions in Billy Budd's first interview onboard the man-of-war *Bellipotent*. The matter-of-fact exchange dissipates all the "mysteriousness" (or makes it at least "less mysterious") surrounding Billy's *origin*, on which Herman Melville speculates in the first two chapters of his last novella, *Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative)*.³⁵ Indeed, with this dialogue the unfathomable issue of the origin of the Handsome Sailor yields to the factual beginning of Billy Budd's story—to the beginning of the action that introduces the protagonist Billy Budd. The issue of origin is indeed mysterious and conjectural: Apollo's beauty and the strong virility of Hercules, sculpted by some ancient Greek artist, project the character back to some mythical time, while the impossibility of grasping the individuality of a trait—be it a moral connotation or the inclination of his wisdom—suggests the proximity to "a sort of upright barbarian, much such perhaps as Adam

presumably might have been ere the urbane Serpent wriggled himself into his company” (chap. 2, 301)—a pre-human, pre-historical, pre-moral origin. But these conjectures surrounding the origin—mythological and Biblical at the same time—are not the true beginning of the action. The action begins with the issue of the beginning—human, biographical, localized in time and space. Properly, the action begins with the utter indeterminateness surrounding Billy Budd’s beginning: nothing is known of his birthplace, nothing of his father and family, nothing of the time and circumstances. The action begins with the immediacy, innocence, and indeterminateness of Billy Budd’s simple, pure *being*. From these conditions the action departs—both the story’s action and Melville’s reflection on the structure of human action and agency.

The young sailor is characterized from the outset by the immediacy of his mere presence—*Sein, reines Sein*, a prediscursive being that is, we soon find out, immediately one with his action.³⁶ His beauty is a vague halo surrounding his very being, and this is indeed no more than a presence. If he brings peace aboard the ship among his quarrelsome mates (he is the “peacemaker”: chap. 1, 296; chap. 11, 323), it is not through intentional efforts, particular deeds, or pointed speeches. “Not that he preached to them or said or did anything in particular; but a virtue went out of him, sugaring the sour ones” (chap. 1, 295). Beauty and peace simply and immediately emanate from his being wherever and with whomever he finds himself. They are intangible qualities that accompany the indeterminateness of his presence and set him apart from all others. They are not, however, properly attributes of an individual, real character yet. Billy Budd is not yet an individual human agent; he is only a vague and vaguely beautiful presence or being. Even his beauty is striking for its indeterminateness. Although “masculine” it has something feminine in the complexion, something of the “beautiful woman in one of Hawthorne’s minor tales” (chap. 2, 299 and 302). Moreover, Billy is also like an animal. Like the animals he is a “fatalist” (chap. 1, 298):³⁷ he does not anxiously anticipate the future, nor are his moods affected by remembering a past family life (for he has none, “his entire family was practically invested in himself”: chap. 1, 298). His life—his being—is entirely in the present. Unaware of good and evil, with no knowledge of things, no self-consciousness, unable to read, he knows how to sing—his way of expression is closer to the musical language of the nightingale than to the discursive articulation of human language so capable of double meanings, insinuations, and intrigue.³⁸ And here we meet the first individual trait of this indeterminate being, a cross between the animal, the

mythological god, and a biblical character, namely, the “vocal defect” that makes him stutter when in distress or “under sudden provocation of strong heart-feeling.” This is, most properly, the mark of Billy Budd’s humanity (chap. 2, 302).

The turbulent history of a time of revolt, war, and crisis for the British Empire—the Nore Mutiny, also known as the Great Mutiny—in the aftermath of the French Revolution during the Napoleonic Wars frames the narrative of the novella, which bears the precise date of “the summer of 1797” (chap. 3, 303).³⁹ Melville’s oblique meditation on the method and significance of historical narrative, in particular in times of war and political emergency, as well as on the possibility of historical analogy, stands between the sequence of historical events with their implications for law and life aboard the man-of-war *Bellipotent* and Billy Budd’s “inside narrative.” Furthermore, both are reflected in the juxtaposition that seals the narrative of the baffling “authorized” account allegedly taken from a contemporary naval report of the time and the touching poetic ballad “Billy in the Darbies” composed by one of Billy’s companion foretopmen and expressing the feeling of the entire crew.⁴⁰ If Melville is no historian of war, in the end he becomes its poet. The inside narrative, however, is explicitly presented not as “pure fiction” or “fable” but as “fact”—even as “[t]ruth uncompromisingly told” (chap. 28, 381). The underlying questions are close to the one that interest us here: What is the best entry point for an understanding of times of transition, crisis, war, and unrest? How can we understand the people that live through such times and are shaped by them? How shall we judge their deeds? For, “men are as the time is”⁴¹—war and its law have the power of compromising the humanity in ourselves. To what extent is it possible to understand the very events in the flux of which we find ourselves acting as protagonists? And what is the use of historical analogy for the comprehension of the present, in particular of a present of war? Melville suggests that the events of 1797 aboard the *Bellipotent* may indeed be read in light of the events of 1842 on the US brig-of-war *Somers*.⁴² The unrest of the age frames the immanent unfolding of Billy’s action but does not determine it directly: this is self-contained (or presuppositionless) also with regard to the historical context. Such history, however, does influence all the other figures of the story and deeply shapes its development.⁴³ The story begins with the “abrupt transition” (chap. 1, 297) that divides the *Rights-of-Man* from the *Bellipotent*, peace and commerce from war, natural law from martial law, and the Rights of Man from the Mutiny Act. Drafted almost by chance by Lieutenant Ratcliff, who contents himself “with his

first spontaneous choice” among the crew of the merchant ship *Rights-of-Man*, without demurring but in “uncomplaining acquiescence,” Billy leaves the *Rights-of-Man* and boards the warship *Bellipotent*. The action is from now on proclaimed outside of the social, juridical, and moral space of the ‘rights of man,’ outside of the intellectual tradition that bears the memory of Thomas Paine, the Enlightenment, and the Revolution: in Billy’s words, “good-bye to you too, old *Rights-of-Man*.”⁴⁴

Unlike Billy, all the other characters of the story are introduced by a biographical background. They do not begin abruptly in the action of the story (nor do they begin such action). They are not pure, immediate, and indeterminate being, with no beginning outside of the narrative. Instead, they are preceded either by a biographical sketch or by more or less founded rumors, the function of which is to root the characters in a specific social and historical milieu. The former is the case of Captain Vere, the commander of the *Bellipotent*, and of the “old Dansker,” Billy’s experienced and oracular confidant; the latter is the case of Billy’s opponent, the master-at-arms John Claggart.⁴⁵ Significantly, Melville makes a point of bringing Claggart’s figure close to the indeterminateness of Billy’s beginnings, thereby positioning the two men one in front of the other from the outset. “Nothing was known of his former life,” Melville declares; “[a]bout as much was really known [. . .] of the Master-at-arms’ career before entering the service as an astronomer knows about a comet’s travels prior to its first observable appearance in the sky,” and Claggart himself “never made allusion to his previous life ashore” (chap. 8: respectively, 314, 316). However, while in Billy’s case absolutely nothing precedes the immediacy of his utterly indeterminate presence on the narrative scene, Claggart is introduced by speculations and rumors that are not conjectures regarding a mythical or Biblical origin but concrete possibilities concerning his very human and indeed very common beginnings. The vagueness that surrounds Claggart is the result of his own deceitful hiding, of his scheming and not showing himself for who he is—it issues from the negativity of his being. Yet, his speech betrays him: “It might be that he was an Englishman; and yet there lurked a bit of accent in his speech suggesting that possibly he was not such by birth but through naturalization in early childhood” (chap. 8, 314), and his physique and even his phrenological traits give out information regarding possible education and previous social and professional functions. And there are, in addition, facts (not just “gossip”) that explain Claggart’s position as master-at-arms (chap. 8, 316f.).

The action takes place aboard the self-contained world of the warship *Bellipotent*. This is the not too grand “stage” on which the action plays

out, exploring the separated world of the sailors' peculiar humanity and the juridical framework and conduct that regulates their lives in times of war (chap. 14; chap. 17). In this world the phenomenology and the rules of common human action (i.e., landsmen's humanity and the law valid in times of peace) are suspended. Action is the catalyst for the characters on this stage; it is that which makes them into the individual agents they are. Melville's art does not aim primarily at showing who they are but at presenting what they do in the different modalities in which they do it. The novella stages a central, unique action that begins and ends in its absolute immediacy. This, I suggest, is the literary fulfillment of the logical figure of the absolutely immediate and indeterminate beginning of pure being in Hegel's *Science of Logic*. Intertwined with pure being's action—in its punctual and instantaneous beginning—is the oblique and reflected, negative and deceitful action of essence, on the one hand, and the problematic mediating action of the concept, on the other, that with its claim of universality and neutrality aims at unifying the conflict of being and essence, upholds the universality of the law, and passes over to judgment.

Although nothing truly precedes the novella's unique central action in its instantaneous, unforeseeable punctuality, Melville weaves around it the atmosphere that prepares its execution, on the one hand, and its consequence and aftermath, on the other. A gap, however, divides the central action from its preparation and aftermath: the preparation is not its logical or moral ground; the aftermath is not its intended consequence or necessary outcome. Melville introduces the central action by first creating the mysterious, enigmatic, utterly indeterminate framework in which it will display its peculiar nature of absolute beginning. In the narrative, the features of the action about to be staged precede its very happening as if to habituate us to grasping an event that defies usual constructions of human agency. In fact, at stake is an act that is unintentional, not purposive, impossible to reconstruct and explain through certain, imputable causes, rationally incomprehensible (but rational nonetheless). It is action caught in the abruptness of absolute immediacy; it is the display of the indeterminateness and immediacy of pure being's beginning that plays out in the dynamic tension connecting and confounding Being and Not-Being. This, we will see, is Violence—Violence caught in its most original form and in the dynamic of its inner logic, violence as a real figure of the beginning action that produces change. Innocence, pure innocence, is what makes absolute immediacy possible in its lack of intentionality, predetermination, or ground of any kind. The central action is prepared by significant signs, which convey no precise meaning but only

the utter mystery—the groundless void, as it were—surrounding what is to follow. First, the “spilled soup” episode—a trivial event rife with presentiments in which aftermath the negativity of Claggart’s character is disclosed; second, Billy’s incident with the afterguardsman—the enigmatic event that reveals Billy’s absolute innocence.⁴⁶ These two scenes prepare the opposition between Being and Not-Being staged in the central action of the story.

Claggart’s comment in the spilled-soup episode underscores the fundamental premise that identifies being with action, what one is with what one does. Billy Budd’s being is immediately (and ironically) one with his action: “Handsomely done, my lad! And handsome is as handsome did it too!” (chap. 10, 322). Claggart’s mysterious reaction (the ironic comment further amplified by his bizarre behavior toward an immediate accidental encounter) leads to the introduction of his character as the real antagonist to Billy Budd. Such presentation, however, brings out the negative indeterminateness of this figure rather than his positive features. Claggart’s “hidden nature” (chap. 11, 326) is, Melville comments, “Natural Depravity,” a depravity that being so absolute and pervasive does not allow for many “examples” or “notable instances.” In fact, more than an example of depravity, Claggart is such depravity (literarily) personified.⁴⁷ His being is an utterly negative being; not negative in some respect or determination (in his intention, motive, aim, passions, or the like). He is rather the negative as such: Natural Depravity, “whatever [the] aim may be,” for the “aim is never declared” (chap. 11, 325f.), invests Claggart’s whole being. Melville makes it clear from the outset that if the action taking place between Billy Budd and Claggart (starting with the forewarning episode of the spilled soup and the subtle persecution of Billy that arises from it up to the main action to come), between Pure Innocence and Natural Depravity, Being and Not-Being, involves “a question of moral responsibility,” such a question must be construed in a peculiar way. We can neither look for antecedent determinations as reasons (personal circumstances or events in the master-at-arms’ career, for example) nor for univocal causes necessarily informing the course of events (neither facts nor even evil intentions).⁴⁸ At stake is the issue of moral responsibility in actions that begin absolutely with no previous intention, aim, or ground. Although these actions necessarily bear consequences (the beginning is, as such, the beginning of an advancement), the consequences do not themselves determine the beginning and are not analytically contained in it. This is the moral problem of Melville’s last novella: it is the moral problem of the figure of being’s absolute beginning—the moral problem of Violence.

Although the two characters are presented through a “marked contrast” of opposites, they are opposites that merge and attract each other. Rather than a clear-cut Manicheism, a complex dialectical relation connects the figures of the story.⁴⁹ Claggart’s “envy and antipathy” for Billy Budd’s beauty and innocence (beauty being but the immediate outer manifestation of innocence) is no common envy (it “struck deeper”: chap. 12, 327). Indeed, with the exception of Captain Vere, Claggart is declared “perhaps the only man in the ship intellectually capable of appreciating the moral phenomenon presented in Billy Budd.” His “cynic disdain” and the destructiveness of his irony arise from the intellectual comprehension of and aesthetic attraction to Billy Budd’s “moral phenomenon.” Moreover, Claggart’s susceptibility to the aesthetic “charm” of Billy’s innocence is an attraction that may even blur the distinction between love and hate.⁵⁰ Billy’s innocence, by contrast, is so complete and untouched even by the suspicion of evil as to make him blind to all that happens around him and closely involves him. Indeed, “innocence was his blinder” (chap. 17, 338). This becomes clear in the early incident with the afterguardsman, who approaches him at night, setting him up with an enigmatic, seditious proposal (chap. 14). The “entirely new experience” (chap. 15, 333)⁵¹ that this encounter represents for Billy (without really teaching or revealing anything) highlights the implications of his innocence for his action. For one thing, Melville notices that when provocatively approached in the dark by the unrecognizable conspirator Billy immediately (and mechanically) follows him, incapable of “saying *no*.” Even though he does not understand anything of the situation he is in, “he had not the phlegm tacitly to negative any proposition by unresponsive inaction” (chap. 14, 331; yet, he is prompt enough to abruptly end the interview). The point is that Billy’s thoroughly affirmative and immediate being is pure action from which neither inaction—even a simple ‘no’—nor reflection can issue. His action, however, in its utter immediacy, will reveal itself indistinguishable from the negative, destructive action of nothing. Herein lies the dialectical twist of Billy’s predicament, and the heart of the moral problem that Melville thereby presents us with. For another thing, the aftermath of this incident brings to light the uncompromised nature of Billy’s innocence. It is Innocence as absolute as Claggart’s Natural Depravity. Yet, unlike Claggart who intellectually understands (and therefore envies) Billy’s innocence, Billy lacks “that intuitive knowledge of the bad which in natures not good or incompletely so foreruns experience” (chap. 16, 336); his nature is “hardly compatible with that sort of sensitive spiritual organization which in some cases instinctively conveys to ignorant innocence

an admonition of the proximity of the malign" (chap. 17, 338). Blindness follows from the absolute indeterminateness of Billy's innocence, an innocence that has neither presentiment, nor intuition, nor cognition of its other but is entirely "free from the determination" against its other (TW 5, 82). This is the asymmetry between being and nothing, whereby the action that absolutely begins necessarily lays on being's side (the beginning is being's action not nothing's action).

The scene that now introduces the central event of the story turns to the mediation of Captain Vere so as to reveal that the negativity that Claggart represents is truly not the indeterminate and immediate (hence innocent) negativity of Nothing but the reflected negativity of *Schein*—it is essence's negative stance toward being. Claggart's false testimony and charge against Billy Budd, whereby he reports to Captain Vere his suspicions that Billy has been plotting mutiny aboard the *Bellipotent*, is the action with which essence invests pure being with the negativity of *Schein*. In Claggart's confrontation with Captain Vere, which is significantly narrated from Vere's standpoint (as seen through his eye, his feelings, and his grasp of the situation), we follow the initial movement of essence. The negativity of *Schein*, with which essence intends to invest being, ultimately becomes the action that thoroughly defines essence itself. Vere's true presentiment or intuition is that negativity and falsity—*Schein*—lies not in Billy Budd but in Claggart, is not the action of being but the grounding, defining action of essence. He suspects that the negative, incriminating action stems from the accuser not from the accused, arguably betraying the former as a "false witness" (chap. 18, 347). The action of essence—immediate, negative, and yet reflected—is properly the movement of "Scheinen seiner in sich selbst" (TW 6, 23). The incriminating accusation against Billy Budd backfires (is 'reflected,' as it were) thereby revealing to Vere's moral intuition Claggart's own negative, conspiring nature—his absolute depravity. At this point, the scene shifts: from the openness of the broad quarterdeck it moves "to a place less exposed to observation" (chap. 18, 347), to Captain Vere's private cabin. In fact, the scene has already shifted: from the sphere of Being we have moved behind being to the sphere of Essence. This has proved to be the realm of *Schein*—the space of an action that is negative, double, indirect, and ultimately self-destructive. Such is the action that Melville summarized in the figure of Claggart.

However, the movement in which the narrative is caught is double—or rather circular.⁵² While being was invested by essence's deceitful action, essence's action requires unmasking the truth of being. Now the

self-consuming, all-pervasive negativity of *Schein*⁵³ refers essence back to the beginning of being. Accordingly, Billy Budd, indirectly identified and openly named by Claggart as the accused, is brought to the scene, summoned in the commander's cabin for a direct confrontation with his accuser. The action that betrays essence as *Schein* leads back to the truth of being. This time, however, not to being as *Schein* (to being as essence construes it) but to being itself in its immediate, utterly indeterminate purity—to being as it is insofar as it acts, to being in its very beginning, to the pure immediate action that simply begins. Claggart's false testimony brings us for the first (and only) time to Billy Budd, to who he is insofar as he acts (not just to his aborted reactions and interactions, and not to the impressions that others have of him). We have now reached the center of the novella. After the instantaneous action therein staged, only the issue of the advancement can be raised: What can and should be done after the absolute beginning, which cannot be undone, from which there is no going back but only a way forward, after which the immediacy of pure being is compromised once and for all, consigned as it is to the determinateness of its consequences and to the finality of judgment?⁵⁴ Truly, however, after Billy Budd's action the narrative is in pursuit only of the end.

Through Captain Vere's mediation, the direct confrontation between Claggart and the summoned Billy Budd ensues. Pressed with the master-at-arms' false accusations, Billy is baffled, paralyzed, "transfixed." Captain Vere addresses him directly to elicit from him an answer, "Speak, man! [. . .] Speak! Defend yourself" (chap. 19, 349). However, neither this forceful appeal nor the more fatherly, softer one that follows is able to get Billy to react, to shake him out the mental and physical state of "paralysis" that the accusations have brought upon him. It is his very nature—channeled through his vocal impediment—that now renders him utterly unable to react. Being, pure being, in its absolute immediacy and innocence, cannot react because there is nothing to react to: nothing precedes it and nothing can determine it. It can only act with an action that is an absolute, ungrounded, not-determined, instantaneous beginning—a beginning out-of-nothing, as it were. Billy Budd cannot speak in his own defense. He cannot even think of what is happening to him. He is transfixed, the "paralysis" giving his face an "expression which was as a crucifixion to behold." It is from this unmoved point that movement begins, that being purely and immediately and simply is: "The next instant, quick as the flame from a discharged cannon at night, his right arm shot out, and Claggart dropped to the deck" (chap. 19, 350). This is being that is insofar as it immedi-

ately passes over into nothing; this is innocence's immediate contact with death, life's abrupt transition into death, freedom with no ground. Being, pure being is Violence. The action that absolutely and immediately begins is Violence.⁵⁵ What is presented here is indeed action that takes place not only without previous determination ground or intention, not only without an aim, but also without an agent. It is not Billy himself who acts here but his right arm that shoots out and mortally hits Claggart. The hand of Innocence turns the vicious "serpent" attempting to corrupt the innocence of man into a "dead snake" (chap. 19, 350). Indeed, as Billy states later on during his interrogation in front of the drumhead court: "I am sorry he is dead. I did not mean to kill him. Could I have used my tongue I would not have struck him" (chap. 21, 357). In a curious substitution of body parts, had action been channeled through the tongue and not through the right arm, the consequence would have been different. And perhaps the nature of the action would have been different as well.⁵⁶ To be sure, Melville had anticipated this action already in the opening of the novella, where the best introduction of Billy Budd is through the action that defines him for the captain of the *Rights-of-Man*. As the latter recounts, facing Red Whiskers, who viciously and insultingly "gave him a dig under the ribs," "[Q]uick as lightning Billy let fly his arm, I dare say he never meant to do quite as much as he did, but anyhow he gave the burly fool a terrible drubbing" (chap. 1, 295).⁵⁷ Even in this occurrence Billy Budd's action is no reaction but original, instantaneous, immediate action that is not premeditated and not even intentional. It is action that simply and immediately is. Such is the logic and the dynamic of pure Violence.

After the beginning is made, we are left with the problem of the advancement, and with the end of the novella. The consequences of Billy Budd's action must stand judgment (chaps. 20–21). And the first, immediate consequence of such action is Claggart's death. The second consequence will be Billy's own death. What we have now, however, is a new beginning, the beginning of the concept. After indeterminateness has been consumed by being's immediate action, at issue can only be determinateness and difference. But, "Who in the rainbow can draw the line where the violet tint ends and the orange tint begins? Distinctly we see the difference of the colors, but where exactly does the one first blindingly enter into the other?" (chap. 21, 353). Action shifts at this point to Captain Vere. What is the truth—or indeed the "concept"—of being's beginning action? Being is not the deceitful *Schein* that essence wanted it to be. *Schein* is essence itself and this is now *ge-wesen*, consummated by the abruptness of being's action. The

concept of being's beginning is rather "to be the simple that immediately vanishes in its opposite" (TW 6, 275). Being is that which being has done. To this extent, however, being is no longer immediate, pure being. Being is as past as essence is—Billy will soon be dead just as Claggart is. Yet, although Billy Budd has lost the immediacy and indeterminateness of his innocence, he is still, to the end, the childlike man that he was with no fear of death and no feelings for it.⁵⁸ Along with essence, being is now taken up in the unity of the concept. Innocence confronts the world of war and its law. Captain Vere's first task is to decide, with rigor and prudence but also with a sense of urgency, what to do in front of what has been done. Herein lies the difficult predicament of the concept—the place in which the alternative between Power and Violence resides. The concept must *only begin* its action without carrying judgment through: it must unify or reconcile being and essence before (and without) judging. For judgment is not in the beginning; it is already the advancement. But this Vere proves unable to do. The surgeon, called in to confirm Claggart's death, provides us at this point with the alternative course of action—with the alternative to violence. And it is significant that, unlike being and essence, the concept does have an alternative to violence in beginning its action. The surgeon construes the situation differently than Captain Vere does, negatively reacting to his intention to call a drumhead court. Judgment should be deferred: "The thing to do, he thought, was to place Billy Budd in confinement and in a way dictated by usage, and postpone further action in so extraordinary a case to such time as they should rejoin the squadron, and then refer to the Admiral." Considering the captain's decision, the surgeon even suspects that he may be unhinged, "not quite unaffected in his intellect." Yet action is not up to him: "To argue his order to him would be insolence. To resist him would be mutiny" (chap. 20, 352f.).

Captain Vere appoints a drumhead court. Billy Budd is arraigned and is now a convict who awaits judgment from the improvised court. Opposite to him (in a separate cabin in the quarterdeck) is Claggart's lifeless body, the 'fact' that attests to the consequence of his deed. As the sole witness to the case, Captain Vere begins the trial by recounting the "genesis" or giving the "genetic exposition" of the incident. "Concisely he narrated all that had led up to the catastrophe, omitting nothing in Claggart's accusation and deposing as to the manner in which the prisoner had received it" (chap. 21, 356).⁵⁹ This is the beginning of the concept: being and essence are its immanent genesis. Billy Budd confirms Captain Vere's testimony as "the truth," and when during the interrogation he does not quite understand

the questions posed to him or their implications he turns, trustful, to Vere as to the truth. Indeed, the concept is “the foundation and truth” of both being and essence—it is their unity, that which gives sense, retrospectively, to their action.⁶⁰ Vere’s task is to accomplish the mediation between being and essence, thereby setting the balance right between the deed and its consequence. Herein the problem to be decided is truly a “mystery,” “a mystery of iniquity” (chap. 21, 359), Vere suggests, appealing to a scriptural expression. As such, however, it escapes both Captain Vere’s and the drumhead court’s competence. While this should be a sign that judgment cannot be pronounced yet, Vere disregards it. Herein lies the violence of his action.⁶¹ Hence, to solve the problem (and dissolve the mystery) he construes it in the different form of a “moral dilemma” (chap. 21, 356) where at stake is not the intention but the consequence of the deed—the bare fact of the mortal blow. The tragic dilemma plays itself out in the irreconcilable tension between “military duty” and “moral scruple—scruple vitalized by compassion,” the military code and “natural justice,” the King and Nature, the masculine observance of duty and the “feminine” sensitivity of “private conscience” and the heart (chap. 21, 361). At this juncture, Captain Vere articulates to the drumhead court the necessity that lies at the heart of their action: “We must do; and one of two things must we do—condemn or let go” (chap. 21, 363). The beginning of such action, however, Vere’s defining action, is the speech to the court, the speech that indirectly determines the outcome of the process.⁶² Decision and judgment become the concept’s own action. The court is only its instrument. This is its violence. The beginning of such action, however, is in the alleged neutrality of the witness-judge who upholds the universal of the law in front of its differences—differences that, in turn, are deemed equal in their standing to the universal. And this is indeed the substance of Captain Vere’s speech to the members of the drumhead court—the speech that is intended to be neutral but turns out to implicitly influence the final decision. The deceitful negativity of *Schein*—the illusion advanced by essence but truly proper of War—insinuates itself in the concept’s alleged neutrality as a subtle doubt. Is the Law—Martial Law, the Mutiny Act—Justice? “War looks but to the frontage, the appearance. And the Mutiny Act, War’s child, takes after the father. Budd’s intent or non-intent is nothing to the purpose” (chap. 21, 363). Is the action that discloses the concept as the truth of being and essence really universal action, neutral and equal to its differences? Can the concept really maintain the position of being “*only the universal*” in relation to the particulars that it embraces (TW 6, 274—emphasis in original)? How

does Captain Vere reconcile in himself “an exterior stoical and indifferent” with the possibility of a “primeval” fatherly emotion that connects him to Billy (chap. 22, 367)? This is indeed the difficult balance that animates the concept's pure universality—the limit of the concept “in the beginning” (TW 6, 272). Failure to maintain such balance, slipping rashly into judgment, is violence. Melville masterfully leaves these troubling questions problematically suspended in bringing the novella to its conclusion.⁶³

After Billy Budd's momentous action, Melville's narrative is in pursuit of the end. Claggart's end comes immediately, immediately one with Billy's mortal blow. Billy's end is Captain Vere's own doing—it follows the sentence pronounced by the court but truly (pre)determined by the commander's speech (chaps. 25–27). Billy's end is the alleged ‘truth’ of his action once this action is taken up in the sphere of the Concept; it is his reckoning with the consequences under the necessity of martial law or the law of war. Herein lies the problematic character of this truth, the limit of the concept in its mere inception. The concept has usurped the right of judgment. Vere's drumhead court has rashly (under fear and threat of the emergency of war) taken upon itself what belongs to the development of the concept: judgment should have been deferred to the admiral upon rejoining the squadron (chaps. 20–21). This relation is underscored by Billy's touching pronouncement at the very end: “God bless Captain Vere!”—the extreme manifestation of his pure innocence, this time, however, delivered by fluent speech (or more precisely, “in the clear melody of a singing bird on the point of launching from the twig”) and even echoed by the unison of the entire ship's crew (chap. 25, 375). The fact that the sentence is accepted and recognized (and blessed) as the truth makes it only more problematic. Separated by narrative and emotional distance from Billy's end is Captain Vere's death. With a remarkable circularity Melville reports Vere's last words (significantly pronounced under the influence of a drug): “Billy Budd, Billy Budd” (chap. 28, 382). The end goes back to the beginning—just as the beginning leads to the end.

2.1. The Logic of Violence: The Violence of Pure Immediacy—Being

In the preceding discussion I have offered a reading of Melville's last novella in the light of my analysis of the three figures of the beginning action presented in Hegel's logic. The general point of this reading was to show the import of Hegel's logical figures for an understanding of concrete, individualized human action. I have suggested that Melville's poetic figures—Billy Budd, Claggart, and Captain Vere—*fulfill* Hegel's logical figures of

the beginning action respectively in being, essence, and the concept. They show how different logical ways to articulate the structure of the action that begins (the logical figures successively assumed by the methodological beginning) concretely translate into different human, social, poetic situations and developments, producing different literary characters and allowing us to grasp different aspects and implications of a broader, often only latent, historical and social background. Just as the logical figures of the beginning bring to light different ways in which thinking structures action at the moment of its inception, so the poetic real figures of Melville's novella instantiate and illustrate different ways in which the beginning can be made in concrete human circumstances. Moreover, although these figures coexist in the unfolding of Melville's narrative, their difference can be assessed in terms of a progress measured by moral, pragmatic, juridical values.

The more particular point of my reading of Melville's *Billy Budd* in light of Hegel's dialectic-speculative logic was to argue that the action that begins is (the action of) Violence.⁶⁴ Violence is one of the real figures assumed by the action that begins processes of change. Unlike so many interpretations of this work that see a Manichean opposition between good and evil, peace and war at play between Billy and Claggart (and remain ambiguous toward Captain Vere), I have insisted on the deeply dialectical relation that connects them. The dynamic that Melville develops among these characters articulates the concept of violence in its different manifestations: the original violence of innocent action, pre-social and pre-historical (Billy) is opposed to the scheming, deceitful, reflected, and ultimately self-destructive violence of individuals supported by institutions (Claggart); both forms of violence, in turn, come to terms with their logic in the action of the higher universal power, in which the violence of judgment exploited in times of war is exposed: the violence of Martial Law. Now, while Melville's text allows us to distinguish in the characters of the novella these three particular forms of violence, the inner logic of these figures' action suggests the possibility of returning to Hegel's text, spelling out in its development the logical structure of violence as well as the logic of other concrete forms of beginning action. In the preceding section I have shown through Melville's novella that violence is one of the real implications of the logical figure of the beginning, and that violence assumes different forms in relation to different modalities in which the action of beginning is performed, whereby the corresponding agents also display different characters.⁶⁵ Now I shall turn again to Hegel's logic and examine the structure of violence as it emerges in the figures of the beginning in Being, Essence, and the Concept. I will

argue, however, that violence is only one of the possible implications of the logical figure of the beginning, and I will show that the text of the logic hints at other real fulfillments as well. My task now is to assess the progress made in the overall transformation process staged by Hegel's logic. I take violence—its concrete figures and its inner logic—as my guiding thread and show what kind of transformation connects the three figures at stake in this discussion—Melville's three literary figures, the three logical figures of the beginning, and the respective three manifestations of violence.

I have argued extensively that Billy Budd's action in the utter immediacy and indeterminateness of his pure and absolute innocence is the action with which "being, pure being," simply and immediately begins precisely as being. I have suggested that such action is Violence, the most original and 'pure' form of violence. It is the violence of Billy's right arm's blow that unannounced instantaneously kills Claggart. Logically, *immediacy* implies violence. Immediacy is the logical cipher of violence. The absolute immediacy and indeterminateness of being's beginning characterize a violence that is utterly blind because it is innocent, a violence that proceeds neither out of an intention (to harm, to defend oneself, etc.), nor out of a given cause or antecedent determination, nor is cognizant of the consequences. Indeed, this is absolutely indeterminate violence, indeterminate not only with regard to its cause but also with regard to its target and effects—it is violence not instrumental to any goal. Its indeterminateness invests the direction in which it strikes: it is violence done as much as violence suffered—the to and fro in which being and nothing merge or "vanish" into each other. It is 'original' insofar as it does not depend on a context but first institutes the context in which all following action takes place: the violence of the beginning *becomes* the tragedy of innocence in the world, the tragedy of immediacy in mediation. Innocence though blind cannot avoid being responsible. Thus, the violence that immediately constitutes Billy's character—the innocence of pure being—is the action that brings innocence to martial trial. And yet, this is not gratuitous, random, or merely 'irrational' violence. Its necessity (and rationality, yet neither its justification nor legitimization)⁶⁶ is in being, in the beginning of being—in the necessity for being to begin. Such violence is being in the purity of its very beginning. Innocent violence is the defining action of Billy Budd's character, is that which defines him as an agent and as the protagonist of Melville's novella. Billy is nobody before that action, nobody independently of it. His action is spontaneous and not reactive, devoid of intentionality and thereby closer to nature's violence. This is the violence that Kant recognizes as capable of arousing in us the feel-

ing of the sublime (in natural occurrences that do indeed violence to the imagination) thereby revealing the presence of the moral law in ourselves, and that Melville sees connected to the beauty of the Handsome Sailor that accompanies and defines his “moral phenomenon.”⁶⁷

In her essay “On Violence,” Hannah Arendt reads Melville’s novella as a “classic example” of the violence that “acting without argument or speech and without counting the consequences is the only way to set the scales of justice right again.” The notion of violence to which Arendt herein appeals, however, although declared “antipolitical,”⁶⁸ implies a much more complex and advanced logic than the one that guides Billy Budd’s action. For one thing, his violence is still entirely outside of the instrumental logic of means-ends relations (which rather characterizes essence and its reflection or, on a more advanced level, the concept and its teleology) and does not refer to the mediating category of “implements.”⁶⁹ For another, as previously suggested, the problem of justice is not Billy’s problem but Captain Vere’s—is an issue that violence raises at the level of the concept’s action not of being’s action. Arendt correctly refers to the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror as the historical moment in which violence becomes the chief means to fight bourgeois hypocrisy (even before fighting injustice). Violence is the means “to tear the mask of hypocrisy from the face of the enemy, to unmask him and the devious machinations and manipulations that permit him to rule without using violent means, that is, to provoke action even at the risk of annihilation so that the truth may come out.”⁷⁰ This, however, is not an immanent account of the violence of Billy Budd’s immediate action against Claggart, that is, of being’s absolute and immediate beginning. It may be taken, however, as an accurate rendition of the confrontation between Billy Budd and Claggart from Captain Vere’s considered standpoint immediately after such confrontation has ensued (hence before institutional pressure obfuscates Vere’s moral conscience).⁷¹ Arendt’s characterization is a good reconstruction of the action of being in relation to essence’s *Schein* or hypocrisy from the perspective of the concept’s achieved unity of being and essence—a perspective that is highly mediated as well as ‘genetic.’ For it is only at this level that the violence of innocence can be viewed as the means to unmask the hypocrisy that has denounced it at the price of its own annihilation. In other words, what Arendt offers is a reflection on revolutionary violence *a parte post*, in a perspective that is historically much more advanced but that, precisely for this reason, does not acknowledge the utter *immediacy* and lack of intentionality of the action that begins, hence the distinct nature of the violence that brings about revolutionary change.

There is, however, one important aspect in which the Terror of the later phase of the French Revolution does indeed follow the logic of being's immediate and violent beginning—it is, as it were, its very historical present. We need compare Hegel's own rendition of the events of the 1790s in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* with the beginning of the Logic of Being.⁷² The action whereby being begins, indistinguishable from nothing in its immediacy, leads to the first “truth” of the logic, namely, to the movement of becoming. This is the action in which being and nothing “are not-separate and inseparable, and each immediately disappears in its opposite” (TW 5, 83).⁷³ Becoming is the “movement of immediate disappearing” (*unmittelbares Verschwinden*) of being and nothing into each other, and this is the “truth” of the beginning action of the logic. Indeed, the movement of *Verschwinden*—of disappearing and vanishing—characterizes the dynamic of this entire logical sphere. But what is *Verschwinden*? The movement of disappearing is immediate and utterly indeterminate destruction, that is, is destruction nonmediated, blind destruction that indiscriminately invests everything that is—being vanishing into nothing. But it is also, at the exact same time, nothing disappearing into being—destruction, this time, of nothing, which is swallowed up into the indeterminateness and immediacy of being. Logically, however, such destruction-vanishing is neither the intentional activity of a subject nor something that extrinsically ‘happens’ to things or substrates. It is the very activity that belongs to being and nothing as such: vanishing, immediate destruction, and impermanence is that which being/nothing immediately is. Within the dynamic of such movement, being is nothing and nothing is being. To this extent, there is an ‘innocence’ and a fundamental fragility built into this movement. *Verschwinden* does not discriminate. And this, I suggested, is the logical figure that describes Billy Budd's ‘innocent violence.’ But this is also, on Hegel's own account, the logical structure that describes the extreme implication of what he calls “absolute freedom,” namely, the peculiar destruction brought forth by the Terror of the French Revolution. In the *Phenomenology* chapter “Absolute Freedom and Terror,” in his philosophical account of the transition from the National Assembly of 1789 to the Jacobin dictatorship of 1793, Hegel brings to light the extreme contradiction of Rousseau's general will, namely, the contradiction of a will that cannot bear any determination but must remain entirely indeterminate, hence, ultimately ineffectual. Its reality and substance—the reality of its action—is just being, simple, indeterminate being that truly is nothing. As such it accomplishes no “positive work” (*Werk*), neither the work of language nor laws nor determinate institutions

(TW 3, 434). Ultimately, the ineffectual indeterminateness of being is the price that “absolute freedom” has to pay for its absoluteness. Under this condition, however, all that absolute freedom can accomplish is the “negative action” and the indiscriminate destruction of *Verschwinden*—an action in which all individual volition and particular aims are erased. Being immediately disappears into nothing. Such freedom is indeed the only action possible to immediate, indeterminate being: it is “*Die Furie des Verschwindens*” (TW 3, 435–436—my emphasis).⁷⁴ Absolute freedom is both vanishing freedom and the freedom of absolute destruction. This is Hegel’s rendering of the nature of revolutionary violence in the very moment in which such violence happens. “The sole work and deed of universal freedom is *death*” (TW 3, 436). Thereby Hegel captures not only the negativity of revolutionary violence but also its suddenness and impermanence: nothing prepares it, nothing is saved from it, and nothing remains. While Billy Budd’s action displays the violence of absolute innocence, the revolutionary Terror is the theater of the violence of absolute freedom. In both cases, violence displays a dynamic that is logically accounted for by the figure of being’s immediate and indeterminate action, namely, by structures that do not appeal to intentions, means-ends relations, or higher purposes (political, religious, etc.).

The general point of this analysis is to insist on the need to *logically* qualify the type of violence at play in historical events and in human agency.⁷⁵ Hegel’s logic provides an excellent tool to accomplish this. The lesson that we draw from the construction of these two episodes—literary and historical—in light of Hegel’s Logic of Being is, briefly, the following one. In Billy Budd’s case, my conclusion was that violence is not excluded from his innocent action (hence is not relegated only to Claggart’s and perhaps to Vere’s action) but ultimately defines the very nature of Billy’s absolute innocence. Violence is not alien to peace and is not the sole province of war. I stressed, however, that the violence implicit in Billy’s action is logically distinct and radically different from the violence that characterizes the other figures of Melville’s story. Accordingly, it should also be judged and evaluated differently. The crucial point is to acknowledge that violence is here the beginning of deep processes of change. The case of the French Revolution during the Terror confirms that violence is all but alien to the ideal of Rousseauian direct democracy. Now, construing the violence of “absolute freedom” specifically in terms of the *Verschwinden* of pure being/ nothing implies that its action is viewed as the action of a radically new historical beginning, which creates a radical historical discontinuity, and suggests that the way out of it rests on the task of determining the space

of that freedom. If it wants to achieve results more permanent than mere *Verschwinden*, freedom cannot remain indeterminate and cannot raise its claims through immediate action. This is indeed the sense of Hegel's historical-philosophical narrative in 1807.

The fundamental logical difference that separates the respective forms of violence enacted by the characters of Melville's novella is now important if we look yet again at Arendt's reading of Melville's text. Arendt considers the novella as an allegory of the failure of the politics of the French Revolution, whereby natural goodness (Billy Budd) is equally capable of violence (or is capable of the same violence) as is pure evil (Claggart). Whereas Arendt's reading holds the opposite than the Manichean separation between good and evil, it is utterly undialectical in its identification of the two positions. My claim, by contrast, is that Billy's violence is *logically different* from Claggart's—it is another violence that yields different results and should be evaluated differently. The former is the violence of pure being's initial action; the latter is the violence that pushing away being posits essence as *Schein*. The violence of the revolutionary Terror is close to the violence of Billy's action. Between Billy and Claggart, instead, a logical transformation has taken place, which regards the way in which the beginning is made. To recognize this difference is to devise different categories for the reconstruction of historical events but also for understanding the difference between agents in their respective actions. Thus, I now turn to the beginning of essence.

2.2. The Logic of Violence: Violence Reflected

In the sphere of Essence, the action that begins is mediated through being. Although being is a constant presence in the background of essence's action, this, as the beginning action, also displays its own immediacy. For it is the beginning of a new development. It is the action of beginning-again. The violence of essence is lodged in the ambivalent—indeed properly dialectical—relation that essence entertains with being. Whatever Claggart's biographical story entails before his becoming the master-at-arms on the *Bellipotent*, what he does in Melville's narrative—hence who he is—is defined by his relationship with Billy Budd, that is, by the way in which he construes such relationship and himself in and through this relationship. Herein lies his beginning on the narrative scene (as well as his end). His action, however, is informed by the 'mediated,' institutional function assigned to him aboard the warship. The violence of essence is the violence

of institutions (and of individuals within institutions) against that which lies before and outside of them. It is the violence implicit in Claggart's dialectical stance toward Billy's innocence and beauty. "Envy and antipathy, passions irreconcilable in reason" (chap. 12, 327), create the dialectical tension from which Claggart's action begins. It is the same tension that emerges in essence's logical memory of being. Just as in envy and antipathy, in which the relation to the other is as appropriative as it is negatively distancing, there is a fundamental violence embedded in the activity of memory. Such violence is formalized in Hegel's logic at the beginning of essence. In calling back what being has been—*ge-wesen*—logical memory fundamentally changes and manipulates it: being is now (transformed into) essence. To this extent, memory maintains as much as suppresses the relation to being on the basis of which essence's own action properly begins (*Wesen* is being as *ge-wesen*). Such is the violence of memory. In essence being is no longer what it is but what it was. And this is *another* beginning, the beginning-again of essence. Revenge can be seen as yet another concrete instance of the initial violence of essence: it implies memory—it is truly slave of and obsessed by memory; it is retrospective and reflective insofar as it inflicts suffering to the other as much as to oneself.

As we have seen, essence first reduces being to the "inessential," then to pure *Schein*. This is essence's immediate negation of being. The violence of this action, however, does not lie in negativity as such but in the reflected, indirect, circumventing way in which the negation of being is carried out and made instrumental to what essence itself is. For it is the violent action toward being that first institutes what essence properly is. *Schein* is reflected immediacy—reflected violence. As such, however, the action of essence, its reduction of being to falsity and illusion, strikes back and becomes the defining character of essence itself. This is clear to Captain Vere at the end of his interview with Claggart. The master-at-arms' denunciation of Billy is ultimately self-accusing. By charging Billy of plotting mutiny he achieves the opposite of what he plans. Innocence remains what it is, untouched (and ends as such), but Claggart has become to Vere a false witness. Presenting being as *Schein*, thereby distancing itself from immediacy, essence shows that *Schein* is its own nature because it is its own doing; *Schein* is a "posited," a construction. Unlike the violence of pure being's action, which is innocent violence, unqualified and pre-human, the reflected violence of envy, memory, and revenge is *human* violence. Reflected violence is, more generally, the beginning of *human* action (or how human action begins): it is the violence present in every act of beginning-again or in every

beginning mediation, which in order to find its own way to be and to act must reject the givenness of being while still remaining inescapably bound to it. Although the beginning of human self-production still depends on (natural) being, it must fundamentally transform it—indeed do violence to it—in order to begin being what it (essentially) is, namely, *human* action. This, however, is neither intentional nor instrumental violence yet. Reflected violence is in itself double: it must deflect the trajectory of the initial action to eventually find its own course.⁷⁶

In presenting the structure of *Schein* as essence's ambivalent way of relating to being, Hegel maintains that "*Schein* is the phenomenon of skepticism" (TW 6, 20).⁷⁷ It is the skeptical action of beginning. Herein we have an action that shares the same logical structure with the devious indictment of pure being that is Claggart's action, yet seems to proceed from the opposite attitude, namely, from utter "immediacy or indifference" (TW 6, 21) toward it. The immediacy of the skeptical position—hence the reflected violence implicit therein—consists in its not allowing any being (any thing or content of cognition, any practical rule or value) to be valid independently of the subject or, simply, to be. Such self-centered position, however, is neutralized by the seeming indifference maintained toward all content. In relation to the subject, nothing displays objective value: everything is invested with the illusory character of *Schein* and is, in this regard, utterly indifferent. Although the skeptic never allows herself to say, "It is," the line between noncommittal, indifferent attitude and deceitful manipulation is a thin one. While she claims neutrality, indifferent to all contents (*isostheneia* with its practical pendant, *adiaphoria*), she does assume particular contents. Such content is even "the entire manifold richness of the world." Yet, what allegedly saves such content from 'being' (and from implying a commitment to objectivity, truth, or determinate values) is only the fact that it is taken up in its mere *givenness* and *immediacy* (TW 6, 20). Ultimately the skeptic's strategy is circular and fundamentally hypocritical. The claim is that nothing has objective validity, but then this very claim makes it impossible to discriminate, among the manifold givenness, a possibly valid content. The negative immediacy with which the skeptic relates to being—to the manifold worldly content that it takes as merely *given* and indifferent (TW 6, 20f.)—has a negative import both with regard to the content (which is reduced to illusion with no objectivity and value) and with regard to itself (the skeptic's position is self-defeating since she cannot uphold what she claims, or since her claim can have no validity because nothing has one). The skeptical strategy of investing everything with the negativity of *Schein*

reveals that *Schein* is the illusory action of the skeptic herself.⁷⁸ *Isostheneia* and *adiaphoria* are unsustainable, illusory positions, that is, they are *only the beginning* of action.

Although the skeptical position appears, subjectively, to be an invincible one, it truly amounts to the “paralysis” of truth if one holds on to it and does not follow the movement imposed by the logic of *Schein*, the transition to reflection (TW 19, 358–359). While in the sphere of Being “becoming” is characterized by the movement of *Verschwinden*, in the sphere of Essence the movement that the beginning initiates is “die Bewegung von Nichts zu Nichts und dadurch zu sich selbst zurück” (TW 6, 24). This is the action of reflection: beginning-again is the beginning of mediation. The movement does not take place as an indistinct to and fro between being and nothing/not-being but as a movement “from nothing to nothing” (significantly, the relation “from nothing to nothing” is indeed a movement—it is not a remaining where one is, namely, to nothing): the identity of essence is determined by the capacity to withstand the movement through nothing, by the capacity to eventually come back to itself—or to first institute itself or its own being through the negation of the nothingness of *Schein* (TW 6, 25). To this extent, skepticism as well as all the figures that fulfill the logical structure of the beginning of essence, is, for Hegel, a fundamental moment of philosophical thinking as such. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is Hegel’s own attempt to incorporate the strategy of skepticism right at the beginning—or in the very genesis—of the dialectic-speculative thinking of the Logic.

In the *Philosophy of Right*, in the third and last section of the first division, Abstract Right, dealing with *Unrecht*, Hegel offers yet another concrete case that fulfills the logical structure of *Schein* as the initial action of essence. In the development of this logic at the level of objective spirit, the juridical wrong assumes three forms, “non-malicious wrong or civil offence,” “fraud,” and “crime” (R §82). Right is “posited,” first, in the contract. This “manifestation of right,” in which the principle of right and “its essential form of existence, i.e., the particular will *immediately*, i.e., contingently correspond,” turns into the “*Schein*” of *Unrecht*—the injustice of wrong (R §82—my emphasis). Herein we have the “opposition” (*Entgegensetzung*) between what is right in itself and the particular will that upholds a “particular right.” While right is first “posited” with the contract (or is “in itself”), it becomes really valid and effectual (*Wirkliches und Geltendes*) only once it meets its *Schein*, clashes with its opposite, and is mediated in the process of such opposition. It is with *Unrecht* that *Recht* properly *begins* to be valid and

effectual right. “The truth of this *Schein* [. . .] is that this *Schein* is nothing, and that right reasserts itself by negating this negation of itself—through which process of mediation, returning to itself from its negation, right is determined as effectual and valid while it initially was only in itself and something immediate” (R §82). This is essence’s movement “von Nichts zu Nichts und dadurch zu sich selbst zurück.” Right begins as immediate, and it is precisely such immediacy that plunges the principle of right into the *Schein* of the juridical wrong. But it is only from this immediate beginning that right proves itself as something that has objective and effectual validity. Once again, the skeptical stance—or the reflected violence of essence—is needed in order to accomplish exactly the opposite than what it sets out to achieve. The beginning of right—not of its immediate being or in-itself concept but the beginning of the *action* through which right asserts itself in its real validity (“*das Sich-gelten-Machen* des Rechts an sich”: R §82, handwritten remark, R §82Z)⁷⁹—is its *Schein*, the juridical wrong action. Just as essence’s first action is the relation to the sphere of Being that declares being “inessential,” so the principle of right receives its “essential” determination in relation to the “inessential,” which is the particular will.⁸⁰ This relation is deepened further with that *Schein* that is the wrong. *Schein* is the action that reveals the discrepancy between being and essence, the existence of right and the principle of right. To this extent, wrong is the *Unwahre*. Unsurprisingly, the movement that characterizes the *Schein* of wrong is *Verschwinden*. In asserting itself, the wrong action *shows itself* as wrong, whereby the wrong disappears and the principle of right asserts itself as the “power” over the negativity of wrong (as “*Macht des Scheins*”). Right affirms itself in the act of dismantling the wrong—of canceling or making wrong disappear.⁸¹ If, as I have claimed, reflected violence is embedded in the structure of *Schein*, the movement that through the juridical wrong affirms the efficacy and the *Macht* of right shows that ultimately violence is connected to power. *Gewalt* is connected to *Macht* not only in the sense that it proceeds from it but also in the sense that its logical necessity is the necessity of being overcome by it.

This may indeed provide further elements for a reflection on the case offered by Melville’s narrative—except that at stake here is the affirmation of Martial Law and its recognized exceptionalism within a much more advanced social context than the one presented in Hegel’s Abstract Right. Captain Vere, one may argue, could have considered Billy Budd’s mortal blow as the way in which right is affirmed and made valid and effectual against Claggart’s wrongful accusation—against the *Schein* created by him.

This seems to be Arendt's line of argument. Yet the emergency of war and the strictures of martial law block this development, and what is ultimately affirmed is the reality of the wrong.

2.3. The Logic of Violence: The Violence of Power and the Power of Love

I have insisted that in both logical figures of the beginning—in being and essence—the violence of the beginning action (the violence of innocence and that of reflection) is neither intentional nor causally determined or determining, nor does it involve the means-ends relation but is simply implied by the immediacy that characterizes such action. In fact, the causal structure intervenes in the further development of the Logic of Essence, while the means-ends relation appears later on in the Logic of the Concept. Violence emerges as qualifying the action of causality at the end of the development of the sphere of Essence, within the “Absolute Relation,” the second moment of which is the “Causal Relation.” This establishes an important moment in the “genesis” of the concept. The process that Hegel herein outlines is the move from the asymmetry of the causal relation to the reciprocity of reciprocal action in the conclusion of which the transition to the *Begriff* takes place. At stake is the role that violence plays in the development of an action that is utterly necessitated. The intervention of violence in the internal dialectic of the causal relation and in its connection with “power” exposes the flaws of causal necessitation and the need for it to be overcome in the structure of free action. Herein lies, I suggest, Hegel's logical “critique” of violence. This is the realm of the concept, the point in which the concept begins its properly free action. Thus, responding to the concept's request that its very “genesis” be brought to light, I shall briefly dwell on this concluding passage of the Logic of Essence.

The causal relation arises out of the relation of substance in which substance has proved itself *Macht*. Substance is now “power in itself reflected” and in itself doubled as cause and effect. It is here that the “original” (*das Ursprüngliche*), and the infinite regress that the idea of origin (or first cause) implies, comes to light.⁸² “The cause is the original against the effect.” In this relation, “the substance as power (*Macht*) is *das Scheinen*.” The power of substance consists in the action of *Scheinen* whereby both the originality of the cause and its “accidentality” (*Akzidentalität*) with regard to the effect become manifest. The power of substance is its original causality, yet the action of *Scheinen* in the effect betrays its ‘having’ an accidental character.

In relation to the cause, the effect is merely accidental, and yet, precisely in its determination as “posited” *Schein*, it is also essential to the cause (it becomes essential in its *Verschwinden* as *Schein*: TW 6, 223). Eventually, the causal relation develops into the reciprocity of the structure of “Action and Reaction.”⁸³ Herein the power of substance splits into a passive and an active substance—the former immediate and self-identical (“pure being or the essence that is only in this determination of the abstract identity with itself”), the latter active in its efficacy and in its negative relation to itself (TW 6, 233f.). The development of this relation will show that both, however, are causes. The active substance as cause appears as the site of power; it negates itself but immediately reinstates or reaffirms itself in the passive substance as in its other. The latter appears instead as “powerless,” a mere “posited” by the active substance (TW 6, 234, 247). Thereby substance as cause reaches the full mediation with itself. Substance is causality, is the very action of the cause and nothing but this action; causality no longer needs to presuppose a substrate in which causality inheres and is no longer mere form-determination against the identity with substance. In this last development the causal relation shows that its dialectic is yet another, more advanced form of the dialectic of identity and difference. While the action of the acting cause depends on the passive substance as its presupposition and its other, in passing over into the passive substance all difference between them is erased and the two substances become truly one (a doubled one or “ein Gedoppeltes,” as it were: TW 6, 234) in the mediation brought forth by the causal action. Now, however, the always-resurgent effort to preserve a difference (a duality) in the causal structure opens up the space for violence. The vanishing distinction between power and powerlessness is resisted by an exteriority that becomes manifest as violence. Where power becomes powerless, violence emerges as power’s last claim. Violence is proper of the causal relation between two terms that start on a level of parity (active and passive substance are both substances and are distinct only for their role within the relation itself), are identified despite their difference precisely in the mediation of the causal action and yet resist such identification insofar as one still preserves an exteriority over and above the other, an exteriority allegedly not reduced to the causal relation itself. Violence is the power that grows from the excess of one term against the other, thereby manifesting the resistance to and ultimately the radicalization of the result of the dialectic of causality. “Violence (*Gewalt*) is the appearance of power (*Macht*) or power as external” (TW 6, 235). Violence is the power that appears as external as it seemingly exceeds the immanent power immediately expressed in the

causal relation between two substances that are ultimately one. Violence is the effort to maintain the imbalance of the power structure against the result of the dialectic of causality, which shows its necessary *Aufhebung*. Ultimately, however, violence only delays such *Aufhebung* and thereby makes it even more radical. Violence is itself power: it takes place only because the agent (or the active cause) somehow puts itself in the position of allowing and facing the exteriority of a distinct effect (the active cause “is presupposing” the passive substance). “The action of violence is the action of power.” Violence is proper to the causal relation to the extent that such relation is an act of power. Violence emphasizes and radicalizes the power exercised in the causal relation. What acts is a “violent cause,” as it were (TW 6, 235). The relation of violence and power transforms the codependency of passive and active substance in the following way: “To that which suffers violence is not only possible to do violence, but it *must* be done violence; that which can do violence to the other can do it because it is the power over this other, the power that in the act of violence *manifests* itself and the other.” This is the inexorable causal logic of power relations—take, for example, gender or race relations.⁸⁴ The gender or race that is considered ‘passive’ or ‘inferior’ not only may be subject to violence but *must* suffer violence to confirm or prove that it is indeed passive or inferior (the presupposition must be posited, this is the task of the “violent cause”); the active substance, on its part, can do violence because it defines itself and its very activity as the power over the other gender or race. Ultimately, both sides of the relation are trapped in the necessity that governs the causal action by which they are themselves defined. What violence does to the passive substance is “what is right for it.” Because, if the causal relation, whereby active and passive substances are eventually identified, must keep, instead, the passive substance separate from the active in its declared passivity (so that the active can manifest its action on it), then the cause must be able to show its power *as violence* over its other. If the passive substance is indeed *fremd*, then it deserves only violence. The problem is that the other is alien only because it is ‘presupposed’ and then ‘posited’ as alien. But because of the very causal nature of its action, violence also mediates the immediacy of the passive substance, dispels the *Schein* of passivity that surrounds it, and overcomes “its alien substantiality,” integrating it into a reciprocal relation of power. The determination that the substance displays—namely, that of being the passive substance—is now a self-produced determination, is not an effect of the active substance’s power manifested as external violence over it, but is a determination traced back to its own “originality,” to that which put the substance in the position of

passivity in the first place (TW 6, 235f.). The passive substance is itself cause—and first of all, it is cause of its own determination. The process that Hegel thereby outlines is the move from the asymmetry of causal relations to the reciprocity of reciprocal action in which the notion of self-determination starts to emerge. At the end of this movement, substance yields to the concept. And with the concept the “realm of freedom” is disclosed (TW 6, 251). What happens now to the power of substance—and to the violence with which power appears in its exteriority—in the beginning action of the concept, given that substance constitutes the genesis of the concept?⁸⁵ And what constitutes the freedom of the concept's beginning action?

The logical figure of the beginning in the concept has shown that the concept's initial action is the action of self-grounding, that is, of laying a foundation for the movement that has led to it as its genesis. Herein is the beginning of the concept's freedom and truth. But the action of going back that lays the foundation is also the action that establishes the context in which all successive development takes place. The position of ‘originality’ belongs neither to the beginning of being nor to the beginning of essence and not even to the alleged “originality” of the cause in relation to the effect. It is rather the mark of the concept. As such, however, the concept's foundation is not original in the common sense of the term (or is not ‘originalist’) but progressive and contextual. Captain Vere's first action is to determine the context in which to reframe the central incident of the story: he appoints the drumhead court (rather than waiting for a regular trial), he brings the framework of Martial Law to the forefront. The beginning of the concept—“*der Begriff im Anfang*” (TW 6, 272—my emphasis)—constitutes the concept as the identity that immanently differentiates itself: the universal differentiates itself in particularity and individuality. As the formal universal, the concept draws differences (is the action of *Unterscheiden*) that are equal because they are all internal determinations or particularizations of the same abstract universal. Each and every “moment” of the concept is itself the entire concept as well as a determination of the concept; there is no distinction and imbalance of cause and effect, passive and active substance; there is no exteriority sustaining violent action in this relation. The power relations leading to violence, which are proper to substance and its causality, have been, at this stage, left behind, *aufgehoben*. To be the concept in the beginning, however, is a precarious and difficult position. The universal must remain universal, fair and neutral toward the particulars—it must be the universal and act as the universal “only” (TW 6, 274). It cannot judge (yet). Judgment is the advancement from this beginning; it is that which

follows this beginning (because of its intrinsic deficiency, and by exposing such deficiency). The figure of Captain Vere—in the speech to the drum-head court—embodies the precariousness of this predicament, which is the precarious character of all free action in its very inception. The risk of a rush judgment⁸⁶ exposes the temptation of overstepping the beginning: it leads back into the strictures of causal relations, into the separation of passive and active substance/agent, and thereby to the violence that sustains it. Instead of beginning by a free action, maintaining his ‘universality,’ withholding judgment, and treating all parties as equal, Captain Vere embodies the incapacity of making such a beginning, falling back into the logic of essence and its violence. While Hegel presents the beginning of essence as the position of the skeptic who suspends judgment, showing the self-defeating character of such a beginning, at the level of the concept such a suspension of judgment is required as that which constitutes the nature of the concept. Properly, however, what makes the concept’s free action in the beginning is not so much a ‘suspension’ of judgment. Logically, judgment presupposes the concept whose original diremption or “first realization” it is (TW 6, 302). Logically, the concept is “in the beginning.” And there is no (free and true) action without such a beginning.

We have seen that the “concept” of the beginning of being is that being is a “simple” that “immediately vanishes” into nothing, and that essence begins with an attempt to restrain such vanishing through memory. But then no permanence is reached through a memory that only creates *Schein*. Now the task of giving permanence to the beginning pertains to the concept, which is bound to learn from this development since it constitutes its immanent genesis. The universal that the concept is in the beginning “is the simple that is at the same time the richest in itself.” How does this ‘richness’ inform the concept initial action? In particular, what kind of “power” does it lend to it, and does such power need violence to assert the concept’s universality over and above particularity and individuality? In its inception, the universal is “the abstract” (*das Abstrakte*), which implies that in it the determinations of the concrete must be “left aside.” Such “leaving-aside” is the action of a double negation (it is a negation of the negation that all determination as such is). Although this action initially appears to be “external” to the universal and to arbitrarily discriminate among the determinations assumed as conceptual content and those left aside, even in its abstractness the speculative universal is *internal* self-differentiation: the negation of negation is the action of “mediation” (TW 6, 275), whereby the universal “maintains itself” (TW 6, 276) in its determinations. There is

no external leaving-aside in the action of the dialectic-speculative concept as there is for the undialectic concept of general logic. Herein is indeed the place where the concept may fall prey to yet another temptation of violence, thereby falling back into the sphere of Essence or falling out of dialectic-speculative logic altogether. While the universality of the concept of general logic excludes richness of content (indeed leaves it aside; abstract and concrete are incompatible conceptual features), the universality of the speculative concept includes it and yet still makes abstraction from it (the universal is abstract as universal and yet is concrete because full of determinations). The universal *remains* universal even though it posits itself in a particular determination. Such determination does not destroy the universal, does not negate it, does not particularize it in a way that is incompatible with universality. This is indeed the 'neutrality' of the concept's position: it is not a 'blind' neutrality consisting of leaving difference aside or ignoring it; it is the considered neutrality that derives from attending to the differences, from making them internal to one's own position but maintaining one's universal stance throughout this process. In sum, the concept's stance is closer to the "sympathetic" position of Adam Smith's "impartial spectator" than to John Rawls's "veil of ignorance" or "original position." The power or *Macht* of the concept in its beginning consists in the capacity of "self-preservation" (*Selbsterhaltung*)—the capacity of maintaining universality in the engagement with the manifold differences of the world (TW 6, 276). Universality is not a making abstraction from all contents; it is rather the attitude of not being swayed by determinations and biases but remaining impartial in attending to them. Such attitude is the beginning or the condition of free judgment—a condition that can by no means be sidestepped. It is clear now in what sense Captain Vere fails to fulfill the promise of the concept's beginning. Not only does he pass judgment, predetermining the court's outcome hence undermining the fairness of the trial; he is also unable to maintain the position of universality in an active, open, and public engagement with the case at hand. And Melville stresses this point—the error of Vere's secrecy—with particular emphasis in framing the case.⁸⁷

The nonviolent power of the concept manifests itself in the different relation that it entertains with its "other" if compared to essence. The fundamental relationality (*Verhalten*) proper to essence appears in its beginning in the action of investing the other with the negativity of *Schein*, and it appears in its end in the violence exerted on it in the causal relation. This now yields to the action whereby the universal makes itself into the very "essence" or "positive nature" of its determinations. The task is not to sup-

press them (reducing them to the illusion of *Schein* and subjugating them with violence) but to maintain them revealing their truth, that is, their conceptual, universal validity. To this extent, the concept shows the inheritance of substance. The concept may indeed be considered “the substance of its determinations”—although the contingency and arbitrariness, as well as the necessity that affected substance and causality relations leading to violence, are now entirely overcome. The concept’s proper action is that of “mediation,” the action of “immanent reflection” (TW 6, 276f.). In its other the concept finds itself. And this is the first act of freedom. Hegel suggests that the action that fulfills this logic of the beginning concept is the action of “formation and creation.” Determination is no longer a “limit” (*terminus*) for the concept, a stubborn other to be reduced to *Schein* or to do violence to but is a necessary, internal moment of one’s own identity (TW 6, 277). Formation and creation are the actions that first institute the agent as subject. The beginning of the concept is the true beginning of subjectivity.

The universal, Hegel declares on this basis, is “the *free power* (*freie Macht*); it is itself and embraces its other (*greift über sein Anderes über*). Yet, it does not do this as something violent; but rather as something that is calm and at peace with itself. Just as it was called *free power*, it can also be called *free love* and *boundless beatitude*” (TW 6, 277—my emphasis).⁸⁸ Once the concept has gained its concrete universality, the power of the substance, still infected and internally undermined by violence, finally yields to the “free power” of the universal concept. And this is the power and freedom of “love” and “beatitude.” I shall not dwell here on the exact meaning that Hegel assigns to these notions. I have argued elsewhere that he is thereby referring to and transforming the very end of Spinoza’s *Ethica* V—to the notion of *amor dei intellectualis* and the *beatitudo* connected to it. The action of “free love” is the action with which the dialectic-speculative concept makes the beginning. This is the beginning of subjectivity in which the power of Spinoza’s substance, still affected with violence in its necessity and causality, is finally overcome in the power of “free love.”

In fact, the possibility that Captain Vere may have loved Billy Budd as a son is a missed possibility that Melville adumbrates more than once in the course of his narrative.⁸⁹ Such missed possibility results from the failure to make the conceptual beginning that the story assigns to Vere. Moreover, Vere is all but someone at peace with himself. The conclusion of the entire narrative—his last words pronounced under the pacifying effects of drugs—expresses, yet again, the consequence of Vere’s failed action, of his not living up to the conceptual beginning he should have fulfilled.

3. Transforming the Beginning

To conclude this chapter, I want to summarize its results in a brief consideration aimed at assessing the progress made and the transformation that occurs in the logical process as its dynamism is captured by attending to the three figures of the beginning action—in Being, Essence, and the Concept. I suggested in the previous chapters that my strategy for proving that Hegel's dialectic-speculative logic is a "logic of transformative processes" or the logic of the process of immanent transformation of thinking and reality is to offer a synchronic reading of the logic in which the succession of logical forms is disassembled and reconstructed according to the three different figures of the beginning action, respectively in Being, Essence, and the Concept. In so doing, I follow the indication of the "absolute method." We have seen in this chapter what the three different figures of the beginning action are and what the different logic that they display implies with regard to concrete human action. Now we have to briefly consider the *transformation* that has taken place with regard to the logic of the beginning.

First, the progress and transformation can be measured with regard to the level and degree of permanence and complexity of the movement introduced by the beginning action. The beginning made in being is instantaneous and utterly impermanent. *Verschwinden* describes the fleeting action that is caught in a to and fro with no direction between being and nothing. The absolute immediacy of such action—even the pure innocence expressed therein—is ultimately unsustainable as it ends in the very moment in which it begins. The evanescent character of being's beginning gains some permanence in essence's beginning. Herein *Verschwinden* is halted in the act with which memory calls essence into being. And yet, even this memory proves impermanent, or better illusory, as it produces being as a mere *Schein* that penetrates into essence itself, turning it into an illusory movement "from nothing to nothing." And yet, in this case, advancement is indeed made as the movement through nothing leads essence back, reflectively, to itself. Reflection—albeit in its initial immediacy—is the step forward that the second beginning makes over the first. To begin-again presents us with an action that has greater complexity than the action of beginning absolutely (although the latter may indeed appear, subjectively, more difficult, since to begin-again without falling back in the sphere of Being presents an amount of risk that the first beginning in its immediacy did not know). It is, however, only the beginning of the concept that establishes the highest level of permanence for the beginning action. Now the "genesis" of the concept is fully integrated in what the concept is. It is only at this level that action

gains a contextual dimension: the beginning action is the recontextualization of all that has led to it as well as of all successive development. Between the first and the last figure of the beginning, Hegel's logic achieves the full transformation of the metaphysical problem of origin into the historical foundation or beginning of action. While in being there is still the risk of theologizing in looking for origins, essence's memory yields to the stronger more permanent mediation of history in the concept.

Second, we can observe that the immediate and unqualified simplicity of being's beginning—innocence that kills—leads to the more convoluted attitude of the skeptic, who does not commit herself to anything in particular and yet ends up being nonetheless a citizen of the world, assuming, even though as merely given, the entire content of the world. This negative, indeed hypocritical attitude for all its negativity is still considered by Hegel a necessary moment internal to philosophy itself. Moreover, I have also argued that the skeptical suspension of judgment is taken up in the concept's beginning, in its separation from judgment. Captain Vere's failure to act at the level of the concept's beginning betrays, perhaps, his incapacity of making the skeptic's lesson his own.

Third, the transformation at play in the movement that connects the three beginnings can be ascertained with regard to the issue of difference. There is no difference in the beginning of being. Difference is a limit for essence, maintained in a relation that grounds the use of violence from the beginning to the end. In the concept, differences are taken up as such and maintained in the embrace of the universal: they are based on the act of love, not violence.

Fourth, I suggested that while the beginning in being, in its absolute indeterminateness, is unqualified and not qualifiable—is unintentional, possibly merely natural (Billy is not properly human; he is a cross between a god, a work of art, and an animal); the beginning of essence should be seen as the structure of the beginning of *human* action—the action caught in the bind of depending on (natural) being and yet attempting to distance or liberate itself from it, finding its own 'new' beginning. The beginning of being is 'free' only in a negative, very poor sense, namely, in the sense of not depending on any presupposition or law or criterion that precedes it. This is also its limit (and is indeed Hegel's critique to Kant's idea of spontaneity). The spontaneous action of being is free in a very minimal sense. True freedom, however, is gained only by capitalizing on one's logical past. And for this the memory of essence is not sufficient. The true step forward belongs to the concept's beginning action. This is indeed the beginning of freedom.

Chapter 5

Advancing *Transformations*

Janie stood where he left her for unmeasured time and thought. She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her. Then she went inside there to see what it was. It was her image of Jody tumbled down and shattered. But looking at it she saw that it never was the flesh and blood figure of her dreams. Just something she had grabbed up to drape her dreams over. In a way she turned her back upon the image where it lay and looked further [. . .]. She found that she had a host of thoughts she had never expressed to him, and numerous emotions she had never let Jody know about [. . .]. She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them.

—Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, chapter 6

Am I a fanatic? The opposite.
And where would I like to be?
Sitting under Plato's olive tree
or propped against its thick old trunk,

away from controversy
or anyone choleric.

If you would see stones set right, unthreatened
by mortar (masons say "mud"),
squared and smooth, let them rise as they should,
Ben Jonson said, or he implied.

In "Discoveries" he then said,
"Stand for truth. It's enough."

—Marianne Moore, "Enough," 1969

“Pensa, lettore, se quel che qui s’inizia / non procedesse, come tu avresti / di più sapere angosciosa carizia; / e per te vedrai come da questi / m’era in disio d’udir lor condizioni, / sì come a li occhi mi fur manifesti.”¹ Dante and Beatrice are in Paradise, arriving on Mercury from the sphere of the Moon. As Beatrice becomes radiant with joy, Dante reveals his “natura trasmutabile”—the human predicament, which is significantly expressed by his mutable and changeable nature.² Dante describes the souls he meets on Mercury in the likeness of a school of fish streaming toward him. But at the point in which everything indicates that the poet is going to inform us of their condition and of his conversation with them, the narration stops abruptly. Thereby the focus turns from the unfolding action to the “anxious lack” of information and to our “desire” to hear more. The vacuum in the narration produces a radical shift: by halting the story so abruptly not only is Dante leaving the paradisiac scene of the *Commedia*, but he exits the story altogether. Accordingly, he now addresses the reader directly. This switch interrupts the narration, seems to kill its immanent advancement, and leaves us stranded with a vague sense that the poet is teasing us, although we do not know exactly how or why. A suspicion, however, insinuates itself: perhaps that artful pause whereby we are kept from proceeding any further—perhaps that pause *is* itself the advancement? Maybe the advancement is properly an absence (*carizia*) or a vacuum; it is the feeling of expectation that arises when there is no apparent advancement. Perhaps it is the pause in the advancement that makes the story go on? A dialectical situation seems to emerge. Just as the beginning has in itself the seed of or the drive to move forward, that is, is more than just the beginning or is the “beginning of the advancement” (TW 6, 556), the advancement seems to announce itself as the opposite of what we expect it to be: it is the gesture that instead of taking us somewhere else, halts the movement and tells us to just stay put where we are, not to ask for more.

What it means to advance and the importance of the action of advancing—in thinking and acting, in telling and hearing a story—can be clearly understood once the advance is blocked just after the beginning. We expect to hear more but nothing comes, and this signals that the advancement is not given automatically with the beginning, is not a mere continuation of it. This is Dante’s suggestion. Hegel makes the same point by claiming that (methodologically) the moment of the advancement is both synthetic and analytic. The pause in the movement makes us realize what the issue of the advancement properly is (in contrast with the issue of the beginning)—or makes us realize that to advance is indeed an issue, and is an issue in its

own right, independently of the beginning. We feel as if we were holding our breath; we are suspended in a contradictory predicament: ready to move forward, we are, instead, pulled back to where we are. To be sure, what we are left with in this case is not just the beginning and the impetus—or the *Trieb* and drive—proper to the movement of beginning, but the “desire” to hear more, the need to move on and to get to something else and new. And yet, the real problem of the advancement *after* and *beyond* the beginning but also *from* the beginning is not in the first place the problem of achieving some new content or a new destination. It is instead the much more basic problem of *moving on* from where we presently stand, of taking the next step—wherever such step will take us, of uttering the next word—whatever that word may be. For only the action of taking a step or uttering another word will take us out of the paralysis in which the beginning remains suspended and unresolved as a mere instantaneous beginning; only such action will lead us on toward a more developed unity of meaning. The action of taking that step signals that the process is ongoing (or that it is, indeed, a true and real process), that thinking is in motion. Advancing is yet again an issue that regards the very structure of action. Advancing is the properly *transformative* moment of action: it is the current that leads us on in a transformative way by changing the way we think and act, by generating a difference within the dynamic of the movement in which we are implicated. As such it is the defining issue proper to a logic of movement and transformation such as Hegel’s dialectic-speculative logic.

Advancing—the Question

Taking our cue from the lines cited in the opening of this chapter, we can take Dante—the person, the poet, and the protagonist of the *Commedia*—to be revealing to us that to advance is to be “in transformation” or “in translation,” that is, to fully display one’s *transmutabile natura*. But to advance is also to be right in the middle of the process and of the story—indeed, *nel mezzo del cammin*. Once the entire process that is the action of thinking in its pure logical activity is taken into account, and once the beginning is connected to the end in order to form a unitary story, it becomes clear that the issue disclosed by the moment of the advancement concerns the predicament of “being-in-the-middle” of a process of inner transformation—neither at the beginning nor at the end but after the beginning has taken place and cannot be revoked or undone, and on the way to the end even

though of the latter we have as yet no certainty or presentiment. This is indeed a peculiar predicament. As Dante's *Commedia* teaches, "nel mezzo del cammin" a "crisis" occurs—a biographical, poetical, historical, and political crisis—which changes everything that is to follow. Being-in-the-middle connects the crisis to its resolution. And this is the advancement. It is the condition of living in the "interregnum," in a period of historical transition in which old institutions are no longer present or no longer display inner validity and recognition but nothing new has yet replaced them. It is the stasis of the revolution or intestine war described by Thucydides:³ the point of stillness in the whirlwind that investing everything yields radical change. In the middle we encounter a crisis, and the advancement is the "turning point" that will either lead us out of it if we consent to change our ways—the ways in which we think, live, and act—or make us perish if we resist change and remain stuck in the present condition, holding on to dead institutions and practices. This is an important point. To say that the advancement is not automatically given (with and in the beginning) means that attitudes or figures of thinking and acting are possible that do not advance the action of the story. The advancement as a problem for thinking in the process of transformation is the predicament of finitude in connection with the infinite (it is the problem of what Hegel calls the "true infinite"); it is the moment in which the individual is confronted with the much larger story of which she is part and in which she must earn her place lest she perishes, overwhelmed by vaster forces; and finally, the advancement as a problem sums up the difficulties and the contradictions encountered by an action that wants to proceed and claim its absoluteness but cannot proceed by claiming its absoluteness or cannot proceed until it keeps claiming its absoluteness. For the reverse is rather the case, if a sense can be given to the 'absoluteness' reclaimed by thinking, this is rather to be the result or the reward of having advanced. In fact, the moment of the advancement is the crucial and defining character of discursive thinking, that is, of an action that unlike intuition (both sensible and intellectual) is not burnt out in an instantaneous (pseudo-) beginning—this, in effect, 'absolute'—but must take on itself the sustained movement of advancing. Only that which is discursive hence not *absolutus*, and not the intuitive Absolute, knows the problem of the advancement. Indeed, as we have seen in the previous chapter, discursive thinking makes a beginning that is always already the beginning of the advancement.

Hegel's account of the advancement—*Fortgang*—as the second moment of the "absolute method" makes it clear that the 'successful' or

'true' advancement of speculative thinking is the action that *immanently* pushes on the determination process, structures action in increasingly complex ways, and sustains the thread of a unitary story that, as such, eventually reaches a conclusive and meaningful end. Now, by confronting the different figures that the advancing action can take—assessing failed and more or less successful ways of structuring the action that advances—we can ascertain the transformation in the way in which thinking shapes its advancements as well as the possibility of changing the way in which we think of the ongoing process of reality. This is the overall task and the itinerary of the present chapter. Drawing to the center the moment of the advancement, I start by showing the difference between the two perspectives that Hegel's logic discloses on this issue. On the one hand, the advancement is a moment of the "absolute method"—the methodological perspective that positions the advancement as the middle moment of the story of the logic or the methodological standpoint from which such story is told. On the other hand, once the unitary plot has been established by the method, at stake is a synchronic confrontation of the different ways or logical figures in which thinking shapes the action of the advancement, respectively, in Being, Essence, the Concept. Or, alternatively, at stake is a confrontation of the different figures taken by thinking's action "in the middle" of the process of its transformation. As in the previous chapter, I discuss a number of figures of the advancement from the three different spheres of the logic. I consider these figures to be paradigmatic cases or examples for different strategies of advancing action. It is only a synchronic confrontation of various modes of advancing that can disclose the transformation that thinking undergoes across the different spheres, thereby revealing the transformative character of the logic as a whole. The further task then is to point to the 'real' figures in concrete human action or artistic production that fulfill those logical forms, and to measure and bring to consciousness both the transformation that thinking has undergone by experimenting with those different ways of advancing, and the ways in which real transformation processes advance in reality and in history.

1. Logical Advancements: The Two Perspectives

As a moment of the absolute method, and the advancement—*Fortgehen*—is a merely formal consideration of what all the specific, discrete actions that advance, respectively, the movement of Being, Essence, the Concept (and

all the middle stages within these spheres) have in common. Accordingly, it does not indicate a particular logical content but the shared form of a mode of action.⁴ As is the case of the other moments of the method, the advancement indicates the *immanent* dynamism of the process, that is, it is not produced by the external intervention of a *deus ex machina* (external reflection, extraneous presuppositions, interests, goals, values) called in to put in motion what otherwise cannot carry on by itself. The analogy with the life process is here important: the source of life is internal and can only be internal; once the movement is brought to the halt of death it cannot be reignited by an external intervention. In this case, only a second beginning can save the process. But since a second beginning—which for Hegel is represented by the Fichtean way of the two principles, the I and Not-I, for example—is no *immanent* advancement, the development that thereby obtains is not a living, self-maintaining process. In fact, the advancement is the inner self-movement of life itself; it is the energy of the “soul” (that soul which is the method) considered with regard to the process to which the soul infuses life (TW 6, 551).

However, since the advancement lies in the middle, and “a middle,” as Aristotle puts it, “is that which both follows a preceding event and has further consequences,” the action that advances does have a presupposition—an internal and necessary presupposition—which is the beginning, while it is also connected to what follows by a relation that ties the movement of advancing to the process that eventually reaches the end. As mentioned earlier, Hegel underscores that the relation between the beginning and the advancement is both analytic—since the advancement results immanently from the beginning (and the beginning is the beginning *of the advancement*)—and synthetic, since the advancement is not contained or preformed in the beginning but is something utterly different, it is a different problem and a different action.⁵ The advancement is the negation of the beginning; it is “other” than the beginning. But it is also that which turns the beginning into something else, that is, into the “other of itself” (TW 6, 557, 562). And yet the advancement is, at the same time, the mediation and truth of the beginning as it discloses the true significance of that which in its incipient immediacy is only partial, deficient, and one-sided. On the other hand, the relation that connects the middle to the end or leads the advancement on to the end is also both synthetic and analytic. While the movement of the middle advances toward the end, there is nothing in the middle that prefigures the end—neither the end as an already set goal to be attained, nor as an intention to be fulfilled, nor as the certainty of a more or

less meaningful conclusion. And yet, on this side as well, the advancement is the presupposition of the end (or, at least, of a certain way of ending). Finally, it should be noted that methodologically I take the advancement to be a movement devoid of evaluative connotation. The advancement is the action that progresses and proceeds and simply carries on—but there is nothing in such a movement that suggests a direction toward the ‘better’ (or alternatively the ‘worse’), nothing that requires the reference to an axiological scale or a value judgment. For the advancement is ‘successful’ not because it attains a certain preordained, desired goal. Since in it there is no axiologically ‘higher’ goal to be achieved, the advancement is ‘successful’ only insofar as it simply is the action that moves immanently on leading to the next step—and does not bring back to already explored positions, for example, nor gets trapped in an unsolvable stalemate, nor results in an infinite and fruitless repetition of the same. Success is simply the actual attainment of the next step, the occurrence of the action that keeps the process going (or advancing, as it were) instead of bringing it to its premature end.

The advancement is the negative and properly transformative moment of action. It marks the action’s encounter with a crisis and a stasis but also entails the *Wendungspunkt* or *metabolē* of its course. The resolution of the crisis and the radical change in the course of the action characterize all successful advancement and all true transformation.⁶ Methodologically, then, to advance is not simply to proceed in a continuous straight line—the advancement combines continuity and discontinuity and has a more complex geometry, the circle being famously Hegel’s favorite way of describing it. The crucial point for the advancement, however, is to pinpoint the moment in which the linear trajectory encounters discontinuity, thereby curving reflexively onto itself on the way to the resolution of the crisis, that is, in order to return full circle onto itself. For, it is here, in the moment of discontinuity, that the true advancement is made. Properly, advancing is the *negation* of the act of beginning. It is the action that overcomes the beginning, leaves it behind, and transforms it or translates it into something utterly different. This is the structure common to two logical movements: on the one hand, to the movement of making (or being made into) the “other of oneself”; on the other hand, it is the structure of what Hegel generally designates as *Aufhebung* or dialectical overcoming. But the advancement is not only the transformation of the beginning. It is also self-transformation in relation to the beginning. Formally, negativity and contradiction, difference and relation to otherness characterize the action of advancing. This is an action that has a fundamentally relational structure—the very structure

proper of the predicament of being-in-the-middle, connected as it is on both sides with a beginning that no longer is and with an end that is not yet. Advancing is the movement of a relation without *relata* and before the *relata*.

The advancing action is marked by the relativity that defies the claim of absoluteness: its fundamentally relational character is the opposite of being *ab-solutus* of all relations. This not only means that advancement can be made only at the condition that thinking abandons (or negates) the claim of absoluteness inherent in the beginning, setting itself rather in relation (whereby the beginning is redefined or turned into something "other"). It also means that in the moment in which thinking is forced by an inner contradiction to abandon the claim of absoluteness, only then advancement is made. The advancement defies the claim of absoluteness in two respects. For, in order to advance a double dependency must be acknowledged. *Fortgehen* is conditioned *a parte ante* by the beginning, while is set *a parte post* in relation to the end, which is to follow. Hegel expresses this idea with the notions of *Ausführung*, *Durchführung*, and *Vollendung*.⁷ In this respect the middle is an open-ended position that must accept such open-endedness as constitutive of its own predicament but must not turn it into the inconclusive reiteration of the bad infinite or *Sollen* (for, in this case, the advancement would be no advancement but the end of the process or its static repetitive *impasse*). The advancement is open to an end (to a formal end, whatever the content may be) that makes it, retrospectively, into the advancement that the middle moment properly is. Without the end, the advancement would not be true advancement but sheer repetition of the same. However, true advancement is made only if neither the beginning nor the end is presupposed as fixed points to be instrumentally connected by the middle. It is instead the middle that first generates the transformed beginning and the instance of the end. In other words, the action of advancing proves that relation comes before that which stands in relation (and in order for something to stand in relation).

In addressing the second moment of the method, Hegel makes it clear that advancement is achieved, dialectically, neither by searching for something new nor by a willful stance to get somewhere. In these cases, the middle is truly irrelevant (because merely instrumental)—it is not advancing that is at issue but arriving, that is, the goal of the movement that ultimately erases the relevance of the movement itself. In order to advance, the story must pause—and even entirely break and disrupt the line of its narrative, as Dante suggests in the passage quoted in the opening of the chapter. Or better: the story advances as it pauses and refuses to go on, thereby produc-

ing a reflective acknowledgment of what it means to move on—albeit only negatively, only in the raising need or unfulfilled desire for it.⁸ Perhaps the advancement always and necessarily displays a negative structure, is always the movement of a void and through a void. Hegel contends that in order for the advancement to be made thinking should not aim at anything else and look for anything else besides attending to a firm consideration of the determinations “in and for themselves.”⁹ Thinking must remain where it is and dwell in its current predicament. It must think through its present position, exhaust it in all its implications, fulfill the potential of what is at hand, and take full responsibility for what it stands for. In so doing, thinking is inevitably put in touch with the lack, the contradiction, and the one-sidedness that its present position necessarily entails. Thinking only has to dwell enough in such a position (instead of rushing ahead to something else), and its insufficiency and defectiveness will become undeniable. This is, to be sure, the immanent way in which thinking is compelled to relinquish the claim of absoluteness—a claim that is proper of all determinations. This also explains Hegel’s appeal to the virtue of “patience” when at stake is “the work of the negative” that characterizes dialectic (TW3, 24), and it explains his opposing dialectical thinking to the impatience of intellectual intuition, content only with results, satisfied only with an unmoved absolute, which it handles all too swiftly in the hope of avoiding contradiction. Patience is needed in order to dwell within the problem at hand—an act that is crucial to the dialectical advancement. For the solution is always nested within the problem (although is not automatically or analytically given with it). One should only learn how to find it by patiently attending to the problem itself (not by attempting to escape it). This is the true advancement. In attending to things in their actual presence, in thinking them through completely, their “soul,” which is their inner movement and internal contradiction, is first brought to light. But what then is the difference between the blocked movement of death that cannot advance and the action that dialectically advances to “completion” by pausing and staying put where it is? If the pause—and even the stasis—in the movement is essential to the true advancement, what is the opposite of the action that advances? I shall return to this question in the following considerations.

Once the story of the logic is told and the moments of the method have come to constitute its internal structure, we are led to a new reading of the logical process. This requires endorsing the different perspective on the issue of the advancement whereby the overall linear narrative of the logic is disrupted and its manifold partial second moments—the different

advancements and transitions—are reorganized synchronically and comparatively so as to form a sort of ‘typology’ of the action that advances. Now the first question is: What is it that specifically distinguishes from each other the different actions that throughout the logic can now (and now for the first time) be identified as middle moments or moments of advancement and transition to another course of events? In what do the different logical advancements properly *differ* from each other (despite their being all forms of the advancement)? On the basis of the answer to these questions it becomes possible, second, to ascertain how thinking, moving through the different spheres of the logic, transforms itself or changes the way in which it advances *as thinking process*. As I claimed in the previous chapter with regard to the moment of the beginning, what needs to be undertaken is a synchronic confrontation of the different figures of logical advancement—the synchronic reading that allows us to bring to light the dynamic of internal transformation that thinking undergoes in the logical process as a whole. In fact, this dynamic is undetectable until the process is taken in its immanent unfolding, step by step. In other words, at issue now is first the task of differentiating the various figures or modes of action that one and the same methodological form of the advancement displays in the logical process, and then to compare these figures in order to bring to the fore how, in fact, thinking does change and advance the strategy of making its transitions throughout the logic. At issue, more generally, are both the transformation of the action of advancing and the ways in which transformation itself can be advanced and carried on. Moreover, once we leave the methodological description of *Fortgehen*, advancing no longer concerns the *form* of the movement. It now becomes a problem of *content*, which can be summarized in the simple question: Now what? What, concretely, is the next step and how can we undertake it?¹⁰

Again, the fruitfulness of this second perspective on the logical movement, that is, of the view that coming *after* the thematization of the method reenacts it by offering a new run through the entire logic, this time as a complete story (or after its conclusion), is confirmed by Hegel himself in those crucial passages that seem to interrupt the immanent development of the text in order to offer a synchronic and comparative reflection on select episodes of its story.¹¹ In the *Logic of the Concept*, introducing the general structure of judgment—*Das Urteil*—that results from the movement of the *Begriff* as its “original partition” (*ursprüngliche Teilung*: TW 6, 301), Hegel offers an insight into the difference that separates the various ways that pure thinking has of articulating the crucial action of *Übergang* or

logical transition. Hegel sums up the movement of judgment by claiming that in judgment the subject as the individual appears first as “that which is or is for itself”—*das Seiende* or *Fürsichseiende*—in the determination of individuality, as a real object on which judgment is pronounced (TW 6, 306). The predicate as the universal, by contrast, appears as the movement of reflection on the subject—a movement, however, that is properly the subject’s own “reflection in itself.” Through the (self-) reflection taking place in judgment, the subject sheds its immediacy and overcomes the character of being that belongs to its determinations (as the mere *Ansichsein* of the subject). Through the judgment, the individual as a “first, immediate” from which one begins and takes departure “is raised” to universality, and, reciprocally, through the judgment the universal, which is only “the universal that is in itself,” “descends” in the individual to its concrete existence and thereby acquires a “being for itself” (TW 6, 307). Thus, the true significance of judgment lies in its making the double transition whereby what is a mere “first” is overcome in its immediate being and “being in itself,” and is shown to be something else—something higher or lower but in any case something mediated, different, and more complex and rich either because more universal (in the case of the individual, which is raised to universality) or because more concrete (in the case of the universal, which descends to the individual). Instead of fixating things in what they allegedly *are* (the simplicity of their sheer being—TW 6, 303), instead of holding fast to a given static point (the subject), the dialectical movement of judgment scrambles hierarchies and values, thereby bringing fluidity to their relations, making things other than what they appear to be, mediating them with each other, putting them in touch with their “transmutable” nature, which is their truth.¹²

After having made this general point on the nature of judgment insofar as it results from the movement of the concept, Hegel brings the immanent narrative to a halt, and observes:

This meaning of judgment should be taken as its *objective* sense and at the same time as the *true* form of all the preceding forms of transition (*Formen des Übergangs*). What is *becomes* and *changes* itself (*wird und verändert sich*); the finite *goes under* (*untergeht*) into the infinite; what exists *emerges* (*hervorgeht*) from its ground in appearance and *goes to the ground* (*geht zugrunde*); the accident *manifests* (*manifestiert*) the *richness* of substance as well as its *power* (*Macht*); in being is *transition* into other (*Übergang*

in Anderes), in essence appearing in another (*Scheinen an einem Anderen*), through which the *necessary* relation reveals itself. This transition and appearing has now itself transitioned into the *original dividing* (*in das ursprüngliche Teilen*) of the concept [. . .]. (TW 6, 307).

The movement of judgment (of pure thinking, which is identical with the activity of judging) is here considered as one way of advancing the logical process—and heretofore as the highest and the “true” way of advancing. This insight, however, is possible only because judgment is not viewed in the immanent perspective from which it arises but is instead set synchronically in relation to and in its difference from other analogous ways of making the transition from one determination to another, ways that have been explored respectively in the spheres of Being and Essence. Thereby judgment is not considered as the successor of the concept (as is the case in the account of judgment given before this passage, at the beginning of the chapter “Das Urteil”). In the perspective of this passage, judgment is placed instead in line with the other modalities of being-in-the-middle of a process of inner transformation presented in Being and Essence. This latter is the perspective of the method, which offers an account of the logical story according to the second moment of the absolute method. As I suggested earlier, after the method, the logical movement is reconsidered and reenacted in a disjointed perspective, out of sequence, as it were. It is no longer viewed in a line of succession but is reconstructed by offering a vertical slice in which a comparative account is given of different ways of performing the same type of action, namely, the formal action of advancing or ‘transitioning.’ It is only in this perspective that it becomes possible to mark the differences in the modes of transition and ultimately to claim that judgment is “the *true* form of all the preceding forms of transition.” “True” here must be taken as meaning more advanced, higher, more complex, and more ‘successful’ in the sense I previously indicated.

Moreover, Hegel’s claim is that both the *Übergehen* that characterizes the way of advancing proper to the determinations of Being and the *Scheinen* that characterizes the way of advancing proper to the determinations of Essence ultimately themselves make “the transition” (*ist [. . .] übergegangen*) to the activity of judgment. This is how the way of advancing proper specifically to the sphere of the Concept is now obtained. In the methodological perspective, the middle is not taken as a fixed and particular content but as the dynamic form of an action that is either determined reflexively in itself

(being *changes itself*) or transitively (the accident *manifests* the substance), and it is conditioned in its flow either *a parte ante* (what exists *emerges from*) or *a parte post* (the finite *goes under into*). *Werden, sich Verändern, Untergehen, Hervorgehen, Zugrundegehen* are different forms or modes of the same methodological activity that is the movement of advancing, transitioning, transforming that is constitutive of the logical process as process. What we have, in all these cases, is the activity through which the movement of thinking is pushed forward, and the terms that enclose the movement are distinctively shaped as what they are in their logical determinateness (as the finite and the infinite, as what exists and its ground, as accident and substance) by the distinctive character assumed by the action of moving on. In other words, what Hegel is interested in describing—and comparing—by bringing the methodological perspective of the advancement to the forefront is not the content-determination of the “finite” (which is at issue instead in the immanent development, in the sphere of Being) but the way in which the finite is determined as what it is by the act of its *transitioning* into its other, that is, the infinite: what makes the finite what it properly is, is precisely its action of “going under into the infinite.” In this perspective, that which is transformed is determined on the basis of the modality of the action of transforming and not vice versa; the way in which thinking makes the advancement determines the content of the determinations into which it advances. The general point here is that action constitutes the character (and the agent), not vice versa. Whatever transforms itself in the modality of “becoming” or “going under into the infinite” is finite, that is, is a determination of the advancement in the sphere of Being. That is, if one’s relation to the other takes on the form of *Untergehen*, then this modality of action betrays the way in which only the finite can and does indeed act: the finite sets a barrier against its other but is also compelled to go beyond it and is then entirely transformed by its “going under into” the infinite.¹³ The finite *becomes* its other. The concept, by contrast, relates to its other through the activity of judging, whereby self-reflectively both the subject and the predicate transform themselves as they are mediated and thereby connected with their other. At stake in all these cases are different ways of acting toward otherness, ways that transform the self and shape what is viewed or construed as the ‘other.’ This, I submit, is a new and fruitful way of reading Hegel’s logical dialectic. The starting point is the way in which determinations behave or act, not the specific content of those determinations.¹⁴ What the logic as a whole offers (in its three spheres) is a set of alternative ways of acting when put in a similar situation or under similar

conditions: since Being, Essence, the Concept act differently moving out of the self into a confrontation with the other, a comparative study of those different actions can be undertaken.

Thus, at this point, we have to turn to the examination of the way in which Being, Essence, the Concept, respectively, make the advancement. I shall do so by selecting some paradigmatic cases. On this basis I will then show the relevance that the comparison of these different ways of carrying the process on has for thinking of concrete human action in the world.

1.1. Advancing Being: Acting in Search of Determination, or *Dasein*

After the absolute beginning is made, thinking must prove itself *discursive* thinking. For only discursive thinking is in need to advance and can in effect advance beyond the beginning. Intuition is all contained in an act that, as we have seen, precisely because it is entirely exhausted in its uniqueness and self-sufficiency is also no true beginning. Intuition is the position of indifference and in indifference there is no progress. To prove itself discursive, thinking must show that it is capable of generating a sustained movement, capable of leaving a trace, of making a difference away from and other than the vanishing of the beginning, which erases everything that is and is not at the same time. The action of advancing is, accordingly, the action of searching for and attempting to gain a first form of *determination* in which being can coalesce and properly 'be,' come to a standstill instead of simply vanishing. Thus, determination sanctions a pause in and consequently a transformation of the movement of vanishing. This is the central issue that defines finitude, characterizing the modality in which the finite asserts itself for what it is, and eventually transforms itself by overcoming precisely whatever it is that it takes as constitutive of its being. In the sphere of Being the problem of the advancement out of and from the absolute beginning is the problem of breaking the precarious "equilibrium" (*Gleichgewicht*: TW 5, 113) of the absolute immediacy with which being and nothing merge into each other in the indistinct flux of "becoming," with no direction. In fact, the advancement is made precisely by bringing the whirlwind of becoming to a seeming halt. This is the action of the "overcoming of becoming" (*Aufheben des Werdens*: TW 5, 113) that leads to the relatively more solid and consistent footing that thinking gains in *Da-Sein*. Herein we have the first pause that thinking seems able to make in its incipient activity. Its action thereby coalesces in the *Da* of *Da-sein*. And with such a pause the advancement is first made. Indeed, in the pause of the emerging *Dasein* the

action of being finds its properly dynamic cipher as the movement of being pushes on away from the immediacy and indeterminateness of *Sein-Nichts* and crystallizes into the search for determinateness that Hegel indicates as the sphere of *Dasein*.

Being “becomes and changes itself” (TW 6, 307)—Hegel claims in the passage analyzed earlier from the Logic of the Concept. This is the general character displayed by the advancement in Being. For, in the beginning, being does not properly become; in its identity with nothing, being *is* immediately *becoming*. That being “becomes and changes itself,” that *Werden* is properly *Veränderung* or the “becoming other” of *being* is the claim of the advancement, a claim that can take place only within the apparent fixity and solidity of *Dasein*. Thus, the first step out of the beginning is the resolution of the movement of vanishing into the “quiet unity” and the “quiet simplicity” that the unity of being and nothing has now become (TW 5, 113). This is the “vanishing of the vanishing” that becoming is in the beginning. However, once thinking pauses in the “quiet unity” in which the beginning collapses, becoming is transformed. It is no longer the action that begins but is, this time, the action that advances. Becoming is not simply the “ceaseless unrest” (*haltungslose Unruhe*) that made the beginning. It is, more precisely, a “ceaseless unrest *that collapses into a quiet result*” (TW 5, 113—my emphasis). Advancing is the action that goes somewhere or achieves something (a “quiet result”)—or so it seems. This completion or fulfillment of the beginning is the advancement. In other words, thinking advances as it *completes* the claim of the beginning, but in so doing the beginning is fundamentally transformed, is made into its other and even into its contradictory opposite—restless movement is turned into a quiet result. Becoming is now, in a contradictory and dialectical way, *both* restless movement *and* quiet result at the same time. Thus, as thinking advances by the action of carrying “becoming” through, becoming “contradicts itself in itself” (TW 5, 113). Becoming advances as it contradicts its own being a mere beginning. Becoming is not a mere beginning because it continues beyond the beginning as it carries the logical process on to *Dasein* as its result. And yet, by contradicting the beginning, the action that advances shows the first truth of the beginning. Such truth is a result; it is a result that now *is* (or is first posited as *seiend*—instead of vanishing). Becoming is truly the self-contradictory action whereby what is in flux precisely by being in flux is brought to a halt in a unity that has the consistency and the solidity (albeit a tenuous and unilateral solidity) of being—that simply is “there” (although not in real space but only in logical space—TW 5, 116),

assuming the “figure” (*Gestalt*) of *Dasein* (TW 5, 113). *Dasein* is the first and most elementary modality of the action that advances; it is the logical space within which the search for determinateness that characterizes the figure of the advancement in the sphere of Being takes place.¹⁵ The action that advances is the action that immanently articulates the apparent solidity of the logical space that is *Dasein*, thereby showing, with yet another contradictory turn of events, that what *Dasein* properly is, is the movement of “becoming other”—*Veränderung*. While searching for determination seems the action that establishes one's first identity, that is, that establishes what one is, the movement of *Dasein* attains rather the opposite result or shows that the opposite is instead the truth. In the process of determination advancement is made by one's becoming other than what one is (and this even before being is able to be anything, or before there even is such a thing as ‘what one is’). In other words, advancement is made by showing that what one is, is the “other of oneself.”

“*Dasein* is determinate being”; its determinateness is a “determinateness that *is*,” a determination that remains despite its immediacy and does not immediately vanish. This is “quality” (TW 5, 115). Every action that advances beyond the immediate beginning entails a first mediation, implies taking a position, being entirely that position (or being defined or completely determined by it) and defending such position “against . . .”—against whatever else, against what is taken, generically and simply, as the “other.” Such action has a presupposed negative bias against the other, although, at first, it may simply be “indifferent” (*gleichgültig*; TW 5, 125) to whatever else is not itself but, generically, just “other.” At this stage, being ‘qualified’ in its determinateness, the action is “something” set “against an other” (“*Etwas gegen ein Anderes*”: TW 5, 115). Thereby it is also “transmutable” or alterable: *veränderlich*. And this is what makes it “finite.” The action that *is* (or ‘is there’—*da-seiend*) in its qualified (and more or less firm: *Da-*) position is characterized by a negative attitude not only in relation to the other but also “absolutely” within itself (TW 5, 115). The action that advances out of the utter indeterminacy of the absolute beginning is an action that in order to move on beyond such beginning must gain a consistency of its own. It must *be* “something” and not just an indistinct vanishing flux. To be something, however, is to set oneself in opposition to—or even just in relation, in a relation of mere indifferent coordination with—the “other,” to distinguish oneself from the other: “*Etwas gegen ein Anderes*,” “*Etwas und ein Anderes*.”¹⁶ But Hegel shows that eventually to be something is to *become* that very other—and this is what to truly become or to alter one-

self properly is. The point, however, is that to become other is to be (and become) oneself. Hegel's point, paradoxically, is that changing oneself is precisely what constitutes one's identity. One does not own a preconstituted substantial identity or determination, which is *then* transformed (allegedly in relation to a similarly fixed 'other'). To be able to change, transform oneself, move on is, instead, precisely what makes one into who one is. Herein we find Hegel's true dissolution of the metaphysical and substantialist view of identity. The action of becoming other not only *precedes* one's (substantial) identity but utterly *replaces* it.

Thus, the immanent articulation of the action that is *Dasein* shows that true advancement is made not by holding on to the absolutist claim that allegedly makes the action "something"—determinate and qualified—against the other. True advancement is made by *changing* that claim and accepting the non-absoluteness of each quality, hence by making oneself into the other (and ultimately into one's other and into the "other of oneself"). The advancement is the contradictory predicament whereby taking a stance that is claimed fixed and set in stone—*Da-Sein*—turns out to be exactly the opposite, namely, turns out to be the movement of a first, still elementary way of transmutation. And yet, in this first figure of the advancement, transformation happens precisely as action resists transformation so radically that the position of 'resisting-transformation' turns out to be the very determinateness or quality or description of the action itself. What we have here is the fanatic stubbornness that by insisting on the absoluteness of its own claim against the rest of the world shows precisely that such a claim has a limited value hence is all but absolute—that it is only the claim of the finite, the action that defines the finite.

Dasein, Hegel contends, "proceeds from becoming" leaving the "mediation" of becoming "behind" and displaying only immediacy in its form. Thereby the action that *Dasein* is claims to be "a first (*ein Erstes*) from which departure is made" (TW 5, 116). This is how the action advances in the sphere of Being. The advancement is a *Hervorgehen*—an emerging and coming forth—that (i) is now mediated and (ii) takes a position with regard to such mediation by leaving it "behind." The advancement of being does not revisit the beginning but leaves it behind and is rather projected forward—or better, it simply stays there, where it is—*Da-sein*. The advancement is a second that emerges from that first, which is the beginning. And yet since the advancement is truly the "first" step beyond the beginning, it rightly claims to be the "first" (or rather "a first") step forward. This confirms what Hegel maintains with regard to the method: the advancement is both analytic and synthetic

in relation to the beginning. It does result from the beginning but is also an utterly new step in relation to it. While *Dasein* is in itself *Sein*, it is not the same immediate being with which the beginning is made. It is instead “a determinate being, a *concrete* being” (TW 5, 117), it is *Sein* carried a step forward to the *Da* of *Da-Sein*. Accordingly, it is a manifold of determinations crystallized in the action that now takes a determined logical stand: *Da-Sein* names the action that, for the first time, takes a position. Thus, in this sphere, the overall action of advancing consists in progressively developing the multiplicity of determinations of which *Dasein* consists. The way in which *Dasein* moves the logical action on is by searching for determinateness. This is the search for a first, vestigial form of identity. It is the action that identifies itself as “something” that is (*seiend*) through its quality. Quality is the position in which determinateness becomes visible and imposes itself. As quality, determinateness first attempts to impose itself in its isolation and in its sheer “unilateral character.”¹⁷ However, given the way in which *Dasein* obtains from the overcoming of becoming, which is itself the unity of being and nothing, its action, searching for a qualifying determinateness but constantly affected by its isolationist and unilateral bias, will display two sides. The quality that it reclaims as making it what it is as a distinguishing quality valid in its affirmed being is “reality”; the quality affected by the gesture that negates (*Verneinung*) “is still a quality, but one that counts as a lack.”¹⁸

This doubleness affecting the quality of the action that pushes the process on by lending to it a first form of developed existence (*Dasein*)—a doubleness inherited by the unity of being *and* nothing—is “hidden” (*vesteckt*: TW 5, 118) in *Dasein*'s first claim, which is a fundamentally unilateral claim of utter absoluteness. The first positive attempt to an advance is the action whereby thinking posits *Realität* as the totalizing “sum total” (*Inbegriff*) of all affirmation and perfection with the exclusion of all negation, lack, and limitation. With this position, thinking claims to advance beyond the absolutely indeterminate being of the beginning, taking a stance that is itself absolute, allegedly unassailable by negation, and yet also completely determined. Furthermore, it claims that in positing such a totalizing affirmative whole as “reality” this step is the only unmatched advance possible beyond the beginning. In this way, the absolutist posture of the second moment of the process strikes back against the beginning, which itself wanted to be the Absolute but could not (for the Absolute is no beginning). Unable to be a first, the Absolute now attempts to be a second. But it fails just as well. The traditional metaphysical concept of god as *ens realissimum* and *totum realitatis*, but also Spinoza's idea of a unique substance with no

real differences and no real determination (TW 5, 119, 121, respectively), corresponds to this attempt of thinking to move on beyond the beginning with an absolutist gesture that pretends to defy all negation and contradiction. However, Hegel shows that this position is untenable *if taken as the advancement of the process*. For, if “reality” is indeed an advancement—or the advancement—beyond the beginning, it cannot be the utter indeterminacy of the pure being of the beginning. But if it is not, then reality entails determination hence negation, which is precisely the quality that makes it into *Dasein* away from and beyond mere *Sein* but also away from the “empty” indistinct and unmoved “Absolute” (TW 5, 119f.). In other words, if reality is an advancement, it is not absolute but entails determination and negation (*Dasein* is the sphere of finitude); if instead it is taken as absolute or as the ‘sum-total’ of all reality, then it is not an advancement but is ultimately indistinguishable from the indeterminateness of pure being.

The opposite “unilateral” claim or the opposite *Einseitigkeit* to the position of “absolute reality” is as dangerous as it is absolutistic. This is the claim that swallows all determination in the “absolute power” (*absolute Macht*) of a totalizing negation that renders all further advance or real determination impossible (TW 5, 120f.). Both absolutistic positions (totalizing affirmation and all-destructive negation) signal the risk that the advancement of being has constantly to counter—the temptation of an absoluteness that, while claiming to be the decisive and indeed conclusive step forward, brings instead the process back to the indistinctness of the beginning since it is unable to come to terms with its own unilateral character. This predicament, however, dialectically shows that the advancement is not made by the Absolute but by the finite—or rather, it shows that in attempting to advance through its absolutist claim, thinking proves its action to be the action of the finite, not an allegedly ‘absolute’ action. Advancement belongs to the finite or, the action that advances is a necessarily finite action. And yet, importantly, it still belongs to the advancement to reach the infinite, to be truly infinite. This, however, is not a naïve claim of absoluteness but is rather the result of the finite’s inner transformation, of its “becoming other,” of its yielding to otherness instead of stubbornly resisting it. Indeed, true advancement is made in the figure of ‘becoming the other of oneself.’ Hegel maintains that only in engaging in “external relation” (*äusserliche Beziehung*) is the determination revealed as the “immanent determination” (*immanente Bestimmung*) of the action (TW 5, 122). It follows that true advance is made not by closing oneself up in a claim of totalizing absoluteness but rather in accepting the inevitable (and transforming) connection

to the other—a connection that is there just by the fact of simply denying the other. Thus, dialectically, Hegel's logic of being shows that the absolutist claim (be it the claim of reality or that of negation), unable to avoid the relation to the other, turns out to be the immanent and true determination of the finite—of that which is always and necessarily defined *in relation to the other*. This is the action that (i) “maintains itself” or holds its own at all cost in its specific ways in relation to the other so as not to let the other exercise any influence on it, and it is the action that (ii) affirms its own value and determination by imposing them “on the other” (TW 5, 122).

Thus, the action of “finitude” (*Endlichkeit*) is the second moment of the process of *Dasein*. This action is internally split by the duality of “something *and* other,” “something and an other.”¹⁹ The connection to other is not properly a relation but rather a juxtaposition—the extrinsic and indifferent conjunction of an “and.” At stake is an action that by gaining determinateness, hence the consistency of being there (*daseiend*) acquires a first form of individuality—is “something,” as it were, and it is something distinct from and in connection with another—set against the other or simply “indifferent” toward the other (TW 5, 125). Hegel underscores that the type of determinateness that confers “reality” to being is not just any determination (merely empirical extrinsic features, for example, that may be contingently attached to being such as skin color, sex, or age) but is rather a conceptual reality that, logically, can claim a certain defining “value” (TW 5, 119) *in relation to something else* (or, it claims that what counts as determining are those same empirical features but only when they are made into alleged absolute “values” of their own). Thereby, the issue of the “limit” (*Grenze*) and its relation to individuality comes already to the fore (TW 5, 121). Beyond the traditional logical problem of individuation and beyond Spinoza's ontological principle of *omnis determinatio est negatio*, at stake, for Hegel, is the question of what guarantees the “substantiality”—in the sense of the Latin *subsistere* as the survival—of the “individual.” What is the action that constitutes individuality in its individual identity allowing it to subsist or to survive as the trace of a “being-there” (*Dasein*), conferring to it a permanence (*Da-sein*) that resists the indistinctness of becoming? The task is to determine where something *ends*, what its limit is, whereby such limit ultimately retains a privilege over any other defining mark that something may display. Indeed, the advancement is the *middle* between the beginning *and the end*. The action that advances carries the beginning on and develops up to the point in which something else, something truly different and other, takes place, namely, the end. And yet, neither the beginning (as

beginning) nor the end (as end) constitutes the advance properly. Similarly to the limit, the action that advances is the action of ‘being-in-the-middle.’ The advancement is the predicament of being-in-the-middle between the vanishing that makes the beginning and the becoming-other that seem to sanction the end.

“The individual,” Hegel contends, “is relation to itself insofar as it imposes limits on everything else; but thereby these limits are also its own limits; they are relations to other.” This means that the individual “does not have its own *Dasein* in itself” (TW 5, 121) but rather in those relations to the other against which it sets its limits. Paradoxically, the strategy of gaining identity by drawing limits leads to a sort of eccentric identity—that is, an identity that is not placed in oneself but is always somewhere else, namely, in the difference, in the different other defined precisely by the limit. At this point, however, hinting at the more advanced modality of action proper to the concept, Hegel recognizes that the strategy of gaining determination enacted by being does not get to the heart of the problem of asserting the individual’s identity. “The individual is indeed *more* than that which is enclosed on every side; but this ‘more’ belongs to another sphere, the sphere of the Concept.” The strategy proper to the action taking place in the logic and “metaphysics of being” (TW 5, 121) goes only as far as construing individual identity as a fortress completely enclosed by limits and defended on all sides against the different other. The problem with such an identity, however, is immediately clear. It is, for one thing, an eccentric, always displaced, or negative identity or identifying action, and it is, for another, a reductive identity that is unable to express what identity is properly meant to express, namely, true individuality. In both regards, the advance this action makes over and beyond the beginning is only a blocked advance. Hence the merely negative, utterly destructive action (which Hegel indicates as “the negative movement of the understanding”) that ultimately erases all determination and difference and sinks into the “abstract identity” of substance, into the sheer formality of an empty tautology, the abstract $A = A$, the principle of identity that comes to the fore in the Logic of Essence (TW 5, 121).

1.2. Advancing Essence: Acting in/as the Middle by Returning Back to Oneself, or *Gesetzsein*

In the movement of *Schein* that opens the second sphere of the logic, the activity of “reflection” marks the first advancement of essence. Moving in

search of determination beyond and behind the illusion of *Schein*, reflection crystallizes its activity in the *Reflexionsbestimmungen*—identity, difference, and contradiction. In Essence, determination is reflected, and it is reflecting determination. As in the sphere of Being, and consistently with the methodological description of the structure of the advancing action, essence advances as thinking institutes a pause in the movement whereby a different course of action than the one opened up by the beginning takes place. The advancement is made, dialectically, by landing to a position that is an apparently or relatively fixed point in the ongoing immanent movement of determination—a position that allows thinking to pause and take stock of where it is. This was *Da-sein* in the sphere of Being; in the sphere of Essence, it is *Gesetzt-sein*—the action that crystallizes the activity of reflection in the form of its “being posited.” This constitutes the basis from which the determinations of reflection obtain—the basis from which essence advances through its essential determinations or “essentialities” (*Wesenheiten*: TW 6, 34). The advancement of essence sets out by instituting a parallel with the way in which the first advance is made in Being. This is, to be sure, more than an intralogical comparison. For, being is the ground of essence; it is that from which—or that from the memory of which—the beginning of essence is made. Now, in the advancement, this beginning is present yet again, although in its negation, as *aufgehobenes*. Moreover, essence advances not only as it compares itself with being but also as it distances and differentiates itself from it—and, more precisely, as it shows a more successful way of accomplishing the advance first attempted by being. Accordingly, Hegel signals that “in the sphere of Essence *Gesetztsein* corresponds (*entspricht*) to *Dasein*” (TW 6, 32). To be posited is also a *Dasein*, but its basis, this time, is not immediate being but “being as essence or pure negativity.” *Gesetztsein* is the *Dasein*—and the action—of essence, not of being. Expressing the moment of negativity proper to all advancement, the determination belonging to *Gesetztsein* is not negation taken in the simplicity of immediate being, but negation taken in its immediate ‘*aufgehoben-sein*.’ To be posited no longer means simply to be there—a position as clear and incontrovertible in its alleged absoluteness as we can have. It means instead to have been negated, to have been overcome in this negation, and yet, despite all this, still to be in force of the claim that replaces the factuality of being with the indirect assertion: ‘to be posited.’ The advancement of essence is an assertive ‘statement’ that reflectively replaces the self-explanatory factuality of being—*Da-sein* is now *Gesetzt-sein*.

And yet, to be posited sanctions an advancement that is defective and ambiguous insofar as it is placed, precisely as the first advancement of essence, in-between and is surrounded on all sides. The peremptory attitude that affirms: ‘being posited’ seems contradicted by the fact that such positedness appears to be an ambiguous compromise. “*Gesetzsein* faces *Dasein* on the one hand, and essence on the other, and should be considered as the middle (als die Mitte) that conjoins (zusammenschliesst) *Dasein* with essence, and vice versa, essence with *Dasein*” (TW 6, 32f.). *Gesetzsein* is the action that being in the middle turns out to be the mediating instrument or “means,” doubly conjoining the two extremes—*Dasein* with essence and essence with *Dasein*. In this way, *Gesetzsein* is, properly, a double action. But it is also an action that has a fundamentally “double meaning.” The claim that a determination is posited—and, more precisely, “only posited”—is an ambiguous claim, according to whether the positedness “is set against (im Gegensatz) *Dasein* or essence.” We know from Being that determinateness is determination “against . . .” Now it is the specification: ‘Against what?’ that seems to make the difference. The alternative or the double or ambiguous meaning arises when at stake is the evaluation of which one, *Dasein* or *Gesetzsein*, is “higher” (TW 6, 33). Ultimately, this is an evaluation that concerns the advancement of essence over and above that of being. In this competitive confrontation we gain an important new feature of the advancing in essence: in the act of advancing, essence confronts itself with the way in which being was advancing (hence the question: Which one is “higher?”). Now this comparison constitutes the way in which essence proceeds in its reflective self-determination—its advancement is double (is a double action and has a double meaning) and confrontational. While external reflection takes the solidity of *Dasein* to be higher, Hegel underlines that “in fact” it is *Gesetzsein* that is higher.²⁰ In the act of being posited, thinking has advanced beyond the determination that made the advance of being and is now moving within essence. The action crystallized in the form of *Gesetzsein* expresses the negation of the return into itself that essence was in its inception, thereby showing, yet again and at a new level, that the claim of absoluteness, even the claim that is reflectively bent back to itself,²¹ necessarily leads to the “other” and is made relative by the other. In fact, “*Gesetzsein* is an other” (TW 6, 32). This fundamental stance remains the crucial character of the action proper to all “determinations of reflection,” that is, of the first movement whereby essence advances beyond its beginning. Although *Gesetzsein* is “not yet a determination of reflection,”

it is the movement toward them and their logical basis. And this makes it into the very action that these determinations perform. The contradictory space—the threshold, as it were—that separates the claim “Das Gesetzsein ist noch nicht Reflexionsbestimmung” from the claim “So ist das Gesetzsein Reflexionsbestimmung” is covered by the movement of essence’s first advancement (TW 6, 33).

The “determination of reflection” in essence differs from “quality” as determination of being to the extent that the latter is “immediate relation to other in general,” while *Gesetzsein* is still “relation to other but as immanently reflected being in itself” (TW 6, 33). The other in relation to which the advancement of essence is placed is a more complex other than the one appearing in being. It is an other that “being reflected in itself” already puts the claim of absoluteness—its assertive positedness—in check as it demands, from the outset, the gesture of turning back, of reconsidering. Reflection that determines is always bent back toward itself, is always and necessarily reconsidering (and hence compromising or at least eventually open to compromise). Moreover, just as in being, in essence the advancement is made by fixating the negativity of the movement in an allegedly ‘solid’ form. While being lent solidity and a first permanence to *Dasein*, separating negativity from it (or rather from of the indistinguishable flux of vanishing), now determination is gained as reflection produces the “equality with itself” (*Gleichheit mit sich*) that sustains essence even in its negativity. For, having its ground in negativity, reflection is equal to itself precisely in this negativity. While the negativity of being is fleeting and unstable (*übergehende*), the negativity that constitutes the determination of essence is more serious because more stable—it is, as it were, “essential” (*wesentliche*). Such essential, posited, self-reflected negativity is what gives consistency and permanence—*Bestehen*—to the advancement of essence. While in the advancement of being negativity constantly mutates and changes (*verändert sich* or becomes other), in the advancement of essence negativity is a “permanent” and dominating presence (TW 6, 34). Selfsameness or equality with itself is the basis of the movement of reflective determination—the basis of the relations of identity, difference, contradiction. And it is also the basis of the confrontation with the other that, as it turns out, ultimately defines what essence is. The advancement of essence is the attempt to preserve one’s asserted (or posited) self-equality. But self-equality is a fundamentally negative stance first of all toward oneself, and it is also a merely empty stance if it maintains its detachment from the other. This, however, is impossible since otherness is built into *Gesetzsein* from the outset.²² Selfsameness, then, becomes meaningful only as the action

that relates to the other, constantly reshaping itself, constantly rethinking and revisiting, indeed compromising the limits of that selfsameness. Thus, the paradox of the advancement of essence is that while self-equality is taken as the nonnegotiable presupposition in the confrontation with the other, it is also that which the confrontational action of essence ultimately always compromises. In this compromised self-equality lies the ‘permanence’ that negativity receives in essence. Herein the reflected position of the negative equal to itself in its proclaimed positedness (yet carefully operating a balancing act in its being in the middle—and in its being a middle and a means) replaces the absolutist claim of being that purportedly accepts no middle ground.

And yet, initially, the determinations of reflection being completely self-centered seem to be “free essentialities, floating in the void without reciprocal attraction or repulsion” (TW 6, 34). In their proclaimed essentiality, the determinations of reflections express the rigidity of an action that “has become entranced and infinitely fixed by virtue of the reference to itself,” an action that egotistically “has deflected its reflection in other into reflection in itself.” The movement of these determinations is the process that eventually shakes the rigidity and self-centeredness out of them, bringing essence out of itself and out of its reflected negativity—or rather bringing the other at the very center of essence, at its truly ‘essential’ and destabilizing core. The determinateness of reflection is “the relation to its being other in itself (*die Beziehung auf ihr Anderssein an ihr selbst*)” (TW 6, 35). The advancement of essence is the action that appropriates its other and brings the other into itself—into a self that is first instituted by the reflective act of claiming the other back to it. In contrast to the indifferent juxtaposition of “something *and* other” in being, the determinateness of reflection “is not a determinateness that exists quiescent, one which would be referred to an other in such a way that the referred term and its reference would be different, each something existing in itself, each a something that excludes its other and its reference to this other from itself.” The relation now goes to the heart of the essential determination and is one with the other that informs it. In the movement of being, as quality meets its other, it also “passes over into other,” changing into it. The determination of reflection, by contrast, “has taken its other back to itself” (TW 6, 35). The action of essence is no longer a linear action: something *and* other, something *against* an other, the movement of *becoming* other. It is, instead, the indirect reflected action that bending backward brings the other reflectively into itself, thereby instituting “essentiality” as that which having “deflected the relation to other in itself” is the negative unity of itself and its other (TW 6, 35). Thus, essence

advances as its determination is gained by an act of “determinate reflection.” Accordingly, the advancement of essence is the action of an “infinite return in itself,” an action that unlike the immediate and linear movement of being is characterized by its negativity and is the movement of “absolute mediation” with itself through the different moments of identity, difference, and contradiction in which essence is present as in its reflected determinations (TW 6, 35f.). Essence advances, bending back into itself.

1.3. Advancing the Concept, by Judging: Crisis and Stasis

Judgment is the action with which the concept advances out of the self-sufficient and self-enclosed totality of its moments and advances in the element most proper to it, which is freedom. Thereby the advancement of the concept is the process that gives determinateness to freedom. In this sphere the challenge of the advancement is no longer the drive to escape the emptiness of the beginning (which constitutes the action of *Dasein*) or the need to counter the elusive negativity of the beginning (as *Schein*) with the assertiveness of a self-proclaimed reflective position (which constitutes the action—and the statement—of *Gesetzsein*). The challenge of the concept is to dare disturb the self-transparency of the unity of its moments and accept that the only way to advance, that is, to gain further determination, is to divide or split that original unity in an absolute way. For, since the concept being the unity of its moments and being fully present in each of its moments is as such still only the beginning of freedom, further determination must be attained; and since the concept is the movement of thinking in the realm of freedom, the action that advances the concept's determination is *free* action, that is, is *self-determination*. Accordingly, judgment is presented as the action whereby the concept “returns to itself” by producing “the absolute, original division of itself” (TW 6, 301). In fact, the concept has been ‘in’ and ‘with’ itself from the outset; this is precisely the meaning of its incipient freedom. The “return in itself” (*Rückkehr in sich*) that is the moment of the concept's individuality is the position of the entire concept, which never leaves its own totality (TW 6, 298f., 301). It follows that it is only the act of an “original split”—*Ur-Teilung* and “ursprüngliche Teilung” (TW 6, 301)—that can bring to the concept new and further determination. Significantly, the second moment of the development of the concept, that is, the action of splitting itself, is more “original” than the unity that the concept is in the beginning and from which that division seems to proceed. Confirming Hegel's view of the beginning, what is ‘original’ does

not come first; it is an advancement over and beyond the first. Judgment is an advancement that remains *am Begriff selbst*, bringing the concept to a more original, yet also more advanced determinateness—it is a pure action that unlike that of being or essence does not need to lead the movement on to another ‘place,’ to the relative permanence of the forms of *Dasein* or *Gesetzsein* in order to be determination (determination that ‘is there’ or, alternatively, ‘is posited’). Being advances in a linear fashion by connecting determinations—alternatively indifferent to or antagonistic with one another; essence advances by reflectively going back to itself, yet is never content with itself, compromising instead of strengthening its own position and dragging the other back to itself. The concept, by contrast, advances “in itself” (and within itself)—it advances by staying where it is, splitting itself, and thereby acquiring a more original dimension that is still *in itself*. The concept does not go ‘anywhere’ but only finds in and within itself a more original position. This is the work of judging. In an act of division that is as original as it is absolute, the concept acquires its true determination, but it also stays exactly where it is: dialectically, in its judging split the concept both radically changes and remains what (and where) it is. This is the dynamic movement of freedom’s determination. This is the *stasis* that defines the concept’s predicament in the movement of judgment: the concept’s action advances by staying just where it is. This is also the concept’s deepest crisis—the *krisis* that is the act of judging: *krino*.

Moreover, the concept’s advancing action capitalizes on both the reflective positing of essence and being’s claim of “reality” for its determination. Harkening back to essence, Hegel contends, “judgment is the determinateness of the concept *posited* in the concept itself” (TW 6, 301—my emphasis); referring back to being, “judgment is the first realization (*Realisierung*) of the concept,” for “reality (*Realität*) indicates the entry into *Dasein* as determinate being in general” (TW 6, 302). To be sure, the concept is always already determined (in and by its moments). In the beginning, however, such determinateness is merely abstract and subjective—and this means that the concept’s action is the action of abstracting. “Abstracting” (*das Abstrahieren*) is itself what the concept in its inception properly is.²³ Now, while the concept is the act of determining by “placing its determinations over against each other” (this *Gegeneinanderstellen* is properly the unity of the concept), judging is “the act of positing the determinate concept through the concept itself” (TW 6, 301). Thus, Hegel underlines that the actions of *Begreifen* and *Urteilen*—conceiving and judging—are two distinct actions or rather “functions,” although they are taking place within the same unity and

totality that is the concept. Endorsing the terminology already employed by Kant, Hegel notices that the activity of “judging is *another* function than conceiving; or rather, it is *the other* function of the concept, for it is the determining of the concept through itself.”²⁴ Judging is “the other” function, namely, the function of the conceptual advancement; it is the action of *self-determination* hence freedom. Indeed, “the further advance (*Fortgang*) of judgment” through its different forms is the “progressive determination of the concept” (TW 6, 302).

Kant had called the “action” (*Handlung*) of the understanding in judgment a “function” of the unity of representations in the synthesis. *Funktion*, which Kant opposes to the *Affektion* proper to sensibility (and specifically to intuition), is the “unity of the action of ordering different representations under a common representation.” This action, which in turn expresses the “spontaneity of thinking,” is the basis on which the understanding’s concepts rest (KrV B93/A68). In the relation between concept and judgment Hegel assigns to judgment an apparently different “function”: in its first emergence out of the concept, judgment is not unification (or synthesis) but rather split and division. And yet, for Hegel as for Kant, judgment is an action more ‘original’ than the concept (to the extent that the source of truth and meaning is concerned), although somehow (i.e., methodologically) judgment comes ‘after’ the concept—as its advancement.²⁵ Meaning, truth, and determinateness first emerge as the action progresses, that is, with judgment. Meaning, just as judgment, is a function of *discursive* thinking and knowing (KrV BB93/A68). Judgment is a split but, for Kant as for Hegel, it is also a mediated and mediating action.²⁶

According to the methodological character of the moment of the advancement, the negativity proper to judgment produces a crisis. Herein lies the transformative dimension of the advancing action. Although judgment expresses the concept’s free act of self-determination, it also sanctions the crisis of the unity of its moments that in the division or split of judgment ceases to exist. However, precisely such a crisis is the development and realization of the concept—its *Entwicklung* and *Realisierung*. Originally, that is, in its etymological meaning, judgment is (a) crisis—κρίσις. But judgment is crisis—and is an original crisis—also because it shows that while the concept in its initial, allegedly autonomous position claimed to be thoroughly determined in its moments, truly no determinateness precedes judgment as all determinateness (and truth and meaning) first proceeds from it. S and P are—or rather become—what they are first and only through the judgment. In their isolation, they are only inert and empty “names,” and

they become something determinate and meaningful only in and through judgment (TW 6, 303). The relation that judgment institutes and that is identical with the split that it produces is the crisis of the “unity of the concept.” For it shows that such unity is only the relation of self-subsistent, fixed terms, “not yet the concrete, fulfilled unity returned to itself from [this] reality” (TW 6, 304). In this way, the concept as a fulfilled concrete unity results from judgment, which is accordingly a more original action. “Judgment is the diremption (*Diremtion*) of the concept through itself.” Or, in an equivalent formulation, it is “the original split of the original one” (TW 6, 304).

The crisis that judgment brings forth in the concept’s abstract unity through its original diremption or split (or the crisis that the concept brings onto itself in the action of judgment) pauses the process and brings it to the halt of a stasis. In fact, the moment of crisis-stasis that is judgment is the logical ‘place’ in which the action pulls together in order to advance by gaining a truly new direction able to critically discriminate or indeed ‘decide’ among possible alternatives. This is the properly transformative moment of action, the *metabolē* in which the new turn of events emerges that brings the concept to its “realization” (TW 6, 302).

But now let me get to the story—one among the many stories that may be told to illustrate the different strategies of the advancing or, alternatively, of the not-advancing-action presented by Hegel’s logic.

2. Advancing Beyond Fanaticism—Molière’s *Tartuffe*

We are in the last act of Molière’s *Le Tartuffe, ou l’imposteur*, first performed in Versailles in May 1664,²⁷ at the turning point of the play’s plot. Orgon has finally ‘seen’ with his own eyes the action that betrays the impostor and the deceiver behind the devout appearances of Tartuffe. As a consequence, he has immediately and rashly endorsed the extreme position directly opposite to the one he has held so far: blind infatuation turns immediately to unmitigated hate; unconditioned trust turns into full and indiscriminate mistrust as he utterly rejects not only Tartuffe but all pious and godly men as such and with them all claim of devotion and virtue. And here is Clèante’s sensible comment on Orgon’s reaction:

There you go again! No moderation in anything! You are incapable of being temperate and sensible; you seem to have no idea

of behaving reasonably. You must always be rushing from one extreme to the other. You see your mistake now; you've learned that you were taken in by an assumed piety; but what's the good of correcting an error by an even greater one, and failing to make a distinction between a scoundrelly good-for-nothing and genuinely good men? Because an audacious rogue has deceived you by a pretentious assumption of virtue and piety must you go and think everybody is like him and that there are no truly devout people nowadays. Leave such foolish inferences to the unbelievers; distinguish between virtue and the outward appearance of it [. . .], and keep a sense of proportion. (V, 1, 154f.)

Clèante's appraisal of Orgon's reaction to the latest turn of events sums up the traits of the fanatic that is an 'absolutist' in all he says and does. But the fanatic depicted by Molière is, famously, a double figure. The fanatic-absolutist Orgon is the shadow and the instrument of the protagonist of the play, the fanatic-hypocrite Tartuffe. The two figures—as the two complementary sides of fanaticism—are inextricably linked and indeed codependent in their dealing and scheming as their relationship is precisely what fuels and moves the entire action of the play.²⁸ The impostor's deception can and does work (i.e., is indeed deception) only because—and only to the extent to which—the impostor can use the blind absolutism of the fanatic (and the culture of fear he engenders in others) to further his own hidden schemes. The hypocrite puts the appearance of devotion and virtue between his own self-interest and the absolutist's readiness to follow him blindly and unreservedly to the extreme consequences. Orgon is the fanatic-absolutist entirely and single-mindedly consumed by one exclusive and totally absorbing determination, which is the devotion he sees embodied in the fanatic-hypocrite Tartuffe. To be sure, there is more Tartuffe than devotion in Molière's portrait of Orgon's infatuation, and this artful presentation is certainly the point in which the two figures of Tartuffe and Orgon meet. Indeed, there is hypocrisy *and* absolutism in both characters: Orgon is hypocritically mistaking the man Tartuffe for the lofty ideas of piety and virtue; Tartuffe is so completely absorbed in the pursuit of his objective, namely, his material passion and profit, that he appears ridiculous to whomever is not blinded by him; he is a true absolutist not with regard to religion or abstract ideas but with regard to material self-interest.

For the absolutist Orgon there is nothing and no one else but Tartuffe—not his wife, not his family, not even his honor and property or the

value and dignity of his promises.²⁹ As Dorine, who along with Clèante is the voice of judgment,³⁰ sharply remarks, Orgon is just “crazy about him” (I, 2, 115)—he seems blinded by an irrational passion for Tartuffe. From the outset, even before the two figures appear on the scene, Orgon is entirely defined by his crazy infatuation for Tartuffe, and in this he is set against everyone else (on the basis of an equally strong passion, his mother, Madame Pernelle, is seemingly Orgon’s only ally in the play—at least until its last turn of events in act V, scene 3). For Orgon, Tartuffe is the one and only reality—the “sum total” or *Inbegriff* of reality, as it were. Everything revolves around him. The figure of Orgon is first introduced on the scene in a comic exchange with the servant Dorine. Upon his return from travels in the country, Orgon is shown zealously inquiring about his family at home during the time of his absence. While Dorine is ready to provide information about his wife Elmire and her various illnesses and recoveries, we hear Orgon ignoring her account and insistently repeating one and only one question, one and only one refrain, “And Tartuffe?” (I, 4, 116). Tartuffe is, in fact, all he is interested in. Moreover, what does not receive Tartuffe’s approval or the stamp of his devotion is simply to be condemned and forbidden to the entire family: the “righteous severity” of the fanatic “condemns everything and forgives nothing”³¹—no compromise, no middle ground is possible. The connection between the affirmation of everything that is positively related to Tartuffe and the negation of all the rest is as evident as it is implacable and absolute. Orgon’s all-consuming ‘determination’ is what makes him who he is: “under his influence,” he proudly confesses to Clèante, “I’m becoming another man” (I, 5, 117). But Molière shows that the exact opposite is the case: there is no becoming, no change, and no progress in the figure of the absolutist. Hence, advance is possible only at the condition of abandoning the position of absolutism entirely. Orgon’s single-minded determination instead informs his entire action throughout the play. Such is the extent of the claim of absoluteness raised by the fanatic. The fixed and all-encompassing ‘determination’ that Tartuffe is for Orgon constitutes his *Dasein*—is the anchor of his being, the center of his world, his only thought, and his only motivation for action. Indeed, Tartuffe is for Orgon an *idée fixe*. The absolutist cannot change his one idea just as he cannot compromise it—he can only affirm it in its fixed absoluteness and radically negate all the rest. Truly, it is precisely this affirmation that gives ‘reality’ to Orgon’s *idée fixe*, not what Tartuffe actually does, which Orgon refuses to ‘see.’ The fanatic-absolutist is stuck in his absolute determination—he is nailed down by and to his *Dasein*. As

Molière remarks in the 1669 preface to the play, the fanatics (the fictional ones depicted in his play and those who have been persecuting him, censoring the play from the start) “are not prepared to change their opinion” (99). This inability to change one’s mind is a central mark of all fanaticism. The fanatic cannot change his mind because, given his total investment in his one and only determination, to change would mean to destroy the absoluteness of such determination, hence to radically change who he is, to turn one’s identity not only into an “other” but into the “other of himself.” And this is a risk the fanatic cannot undergo, a step he cannot take. Thus, the fanatic-absolutist can only go to the opposite extreme, endorsing the opposite determination in an equally absolutist and uncompromising way. In this way, however, no real change and no real advance takes place, as Clèante promptly points out: Orgon is exactly the same rigid fanatic when he loves Tartuffe blindly, in all respects and in all his actions, as when he decides to hate him and reject him with his entire being.

Moreover, since the fanatic Orgon can accept neither dissent nor compromise on the course of action he has set his mind on, he requires total and unquestioned obedience from others. The action of the absolutist is directly and explicitly coercive of others, just as the action of the hypocrite is coercive indirectly. Orgon imposes his ‘determination’ or fixed idea—his “truth,” as it were—on others: his daughter Mariane must marry Tartuffe (even if this means to break his previous promise to Valère, let alone to make her miserable); his son Damis must leave the house with no inheritance (given his allegedly disrespectful behavior toward Tartuffe). For the “truth,” says Orgon, is simply “what I have decided” (II, 2, 122)—a claim that clearly displays the hypocrisy proper to all fanatic absolutism. The absolute is not so absolute after all; it is rather every fanatic’s own idea of it. Here lies, importantly, the element of self-deception that accompanies the fanatic attitude. Orgon is a “père absolu,” laments Mariane (II, 2, 126), to whom total and blind obedience is due and who pushes his “authority to the extreme” (IV, 3, 146). Just as the absolutist cannot change or compromise his determination, he cannot listen to reasons brought up by others and deviating from or in contradiction with his own resolutions. This predicament makes him utterly (and comically) blind to whatever goes on around him and may be in conflict with his absolute. The latter is all that is real—the *Inbegriff* of all reality—and hence is also all that the fanatic can see and wants to see. Whatever cannot be brought back to his absolute—and is not in accordance with the devout Tartuffe—is either simply not-real (is dismissed as the result of the machinations and envy of others)

or is labeled as impious and atheist (“sent le libertinage”—I, 5, 118) and as such rejected.³² Thus, not only is Orgon unable and unwilling to listen to anyone in his family who is advocating different interests or warning him of Tartuffe’s true intentions (Mariane, for example; or Damis, who is trying to make Orgon realize that he is acting against his own interest). Most importantly, he is unable to see who Tartuffe is. The absolutist is blind, first and foremost, to hypocrisy—hence, ultimately, to himself. Herein lies the self-deception implicit in all fanatical attitudes. But as Molière indicates in the 1669 preface to the play, this is also the reason why the hypocrites and the fanatics have no sense of irony: they “would not stand for a joke, they took immediate alarm and found it strange that I had the audacity to make fun of their antics or to decry so numerous and respectable a profession” (99).

Being blind to everyone and everything that is ‘other’ than his all-absorbing determination, the fanatic-absolutist ultimately wants everyone to be as blind as he is. In an exchange that mirrors the conclusive remarks quoted earlier, Clèante who, like Dorine, is the voice of reason and common sense against Orgon’s infatuation, offers an accurate portrait of the lack of judgment and discrimination proper to the fanatic: “That’s the way your sort of people usually talk. You would have everyone as blind as yourself. If one sees things clearly one is an atheist (*libertine*): whoever does not bow the knee to pious flummery is lacking in faith and respect for sacred things.” Clèante’s further point, however, concerns the real nature and manifestation of religious piety—and truth—itsself, that is, the possibility of its being counterfeit, its relation to its other and contradictory opposite. And it is here that judgment, which the fanatic is entirely lacking, is most needed: “Devotion, like courage, may be counterfeit. [. . .] The truly pious [. . .] are not those who make the biggest show. Would you make no distinction between hypocrisy and true religion (*l’hypocrisie et la devotion*)? Would you class both together, describe them in the same terms, respect the mask as you would the face itself, [. . .] confound appearance and reality, accept the shadow for the substance, base coin for true?” (I, 5, 118). While the fanatic-absolutist operates on a simplistic and simplified level of reality in which everything is either the absolute (its all-embracing determination) or its opposite, and the fanatic-hypocrite lives and thrives to the extent that the split between the mask and the face goes unrecognized by the absolutist, only judgment does discriminate between truth and its opposite and hence has a full-fledged picture of the reality of action. Moreover, while the absolutist is tyrannical in the imposition of (his) truth on others as

well as in his claim of reality (to which censure and negation of otherness correspond),³³ the man of clear judgment needs neither to censure the dissenting opinion and action nor to parade his virtue and devotion with grandstanding posturing. Judgment represents an action that in its being self-contained, in its sensitiveness to difference, is indeed more advanced than the blocked development of both the absolutism of *Dasein* and the deceiving doubleness of *Gesetzsein*.

Orgon's incapacity and refusal to 'see' who Tartuffe really (or 'essentially') is play a central role in the unfolding of the plot but also, more pointedly, in the progressive development of the figure of the fanatic-absolutist that he embodies. However, since the absolutist is constitutively unable to get out of his all-consuming fixation, only an external intervention—or mediation, as it were—seems able to make him confront his own predicament, expose the flaw of both the absolutist's and the hypocrite's fanaticism, and thereby bring this figure to a true 'advance' or resolution. Ironically (or dialectically) as much as the absolutist rejects all mediation, he can change only by consenting to it (more or less willingly). This is the function of Elmire's clever trick staged in the central scenes of act IV (scenes 3–8), namely, both to force the absolutist out of his stuck position and to make public the hypocrite's hidden plans. Given that the rushed move to the opposite extreme is, as Clèante rightly notices, no true advance or change in the fanatic's mind-set, the only advance possible for the absolutist is the complete demise of his absolutism. This is the radical transformation that consists in his becoming the other of himself. Such turning point we reach at the end of Molière's play, when Orgon, confronted with Madame Pernelle's persisting disbelief and stubborn faith in Tartuffe in the face of all evidence, finally understands what it means to be an absolutist—how aggravating and indeed dangerous this attitude is for others as well as for oneself. At this point, in Pernelle's absurd behavior, Orgon can see himself, that is, his own fanaticism in action.

Despite the cumulative evidence brought to him by his wife Elmire and his son Damis regarding the amorous attentions and inappropriate advances that Tartuffe has manifested to Elmire (III, 3), Orgon remains unmoved in his blind infatuation for Tartuffe. He stands where he is and is set at that—*Da-sein*. He cannot see but what he wants to see. He neither listens nor believes anything other than what he is already set to believe. He ironically claims, "I believe the appearances" (*je [. . .] crois les apparences*—IV, 3, 147)—but appearances for him are, circularly, nothing else but what he already believes they are. Given how closed Orgon's mind is to

accepting any evidence that speaks against Tartuffe, the way to shake him out of his obsession can only be *indirect*. Or, rather, should be a way to *directly* involve him in the very action that he refuses to see and to believe when it is reported to him by others. “What would you say if I were actually to show you that we are telling you the truth?” (IV, 3, 147). Enemy of all mediation, the absolutist can ‘see’ the truth only if it is immediately and directly *enacted* in front of him (and not mediated by others). Thus, Elmire presses on, “I’m not asking you to take my word for it. Supposing that I arranged for you to see and hear everything from some point of vantage, what would you say about this godly man of yours?” The plan is to make of Orgon “a witness to the truth” of everything Elmire has previously told him (IV, 3, 147). The truth not believed is now reenacted, having the absolutist as a direct witness. But Orgon can indeed be made a witness and ‘see’ who Tartuffe is only if he is hidden and not, in turn, seen—only at the condition that the unilateral dimension of being’s action is maintained and yet displaced within the action of essence.³⁴ The absolutist should be brought to the position of the hypocrite in order to understand what fanaticism is. For the absolutist, who is stuck in the position of being, entirely lacks self-reflection.

The aim of Elmire’s ruse is twofold, namely, to ‘cure’ the fanatic of his absolutism, and to “coax” the hypocrite “to drop his mask.” Significantly, the way to do this is precisely to go along with Tartuffe’s hypocritical action, not to contrast it—“to flatter his impudent desires and encourage his audacity” (IV, 4, 148).³⁵ It is not the clear rationality of Cléante’s arguments that can bring the fanatic out of his stuck predicament—Orgon is completely impenetrable to it; no reasons can persuade him. It is only the very hypocrisy that has blinded him that can cure him. Thus, the action develops as the self-contradictory predicament of hypocrisy is brought to light: what exposes hypocrisy is hypocritical action brought to its extreme consequences. The point is that in this unfolding action in which Elmire encourages Tartuffe in order to expose him, the burden of deciding when the action should be brought to an end and Tartuffe should be stopped is on Orgon: “it will be for you to call a halt to his insensate passion as soon as you think he has gone far enough” (IV, 4, 148). In this way, Orgon is not just a passive witness but is made to *act* against his own fanatic obsession (hence he is already made into the “other of himself”). And, Elmire insists, he must let the action unfold until he can accept the “truth”; he cannot stop short of mere “conjecture”; he must be “utterly convinced” by what he sees (IV, 5, 152).³⁶ The persuasiveness of no clear argument or judgment,

the intervention of no one else could bring Orgon to this point. For the fanatic-absolutist is impenetrable to all of this.

And yet, as I suggested earlier, the true transformation of the fanatic's position has here only begun. In fact, at this stage, the fanatic Orgon still acts as a full-hearted fanatic: now he simply rejects Tartuffe as irrevocably and radically as he had embraced him before. It is only at the very end of the play, when everything seems to rush toward disaster for Orgon, that he finally understands how a fanatic like him looks like when seen in action. In a comical exchange with his mother, Madame Pernelle, Orgon faces the absurdity of the fanatic's blindness (and deafness, as it were). As Pernelle continues undeterred to defend Tartuffe—and even claims “appearances can often be deceptive. One shouldn't judge by what one sees” (V, 3, 156)—Orgon cannot repeat enough to her: “*I saw it all myself*”; and, further, “I've told you I saw his wickedness with my own eyes”; escalating, to his total exasperation, “This is ridiculous talk. I *saw* him, I tell you, *saw him* with my own eyes. When I say I saw him I mean I really did see him! Must I go on saying it? How many times am I to tell you? Must I bawl at the top of my voice? (V, 3, 156).³⁷ This is, indeed, the repetition of the bad infinite that cannot be broken or resolved; it is the finite that cannot advance beyond itself. It is yet another example—and a comical one at that—of the way in which the action of the fanatic is blocked and stuck right where it has decided to stand—in its *Dasein*, in its absolute determination that constitutes for him the only reality.

But let us now turn to the fanatic-hypocrite side of the story, that is, to Tartuffe himself. Tartuffe is and is not the same fanatic represented by Orgon. Apparently, they do profess the same faith. Their action, however, is fundamentally different. The fanatic-absolutist immediately and completely identifies with his absolute fixation—unique and one-dimensional. This is his only reality, and in regard to it he is entirely transparent (perhaps even too transparent). By contrast, the fanatic-hypocrite's reality is always double and two-dimensional, always ambiguous, mediated, and constructed. The hypocrite's identity is fluid: he is consistently ‘other’ than what he appears to be—even though what this ‘other’ is remains elusive. His action is always split, circumspect, indirect. His reality is the reality of an assumed and asserted posture, the action of “studied posturing,” as Molière suggests in his First Petition to the King (1664) (104). It is the act of doing, saying, intending something that always stands for something else and always hints at something else—‘instead of’ or ‘in addition to’ what he immediately does, says, intends. This is the action of *Gesetzsein*. The reality and the action

of the fanatic-hypocrite is his studied, constructed, asserted posturing, his 'being-as-playing-a-role'³⁸—first and foremost the role of the “ultra-godly” man (104), then the role of the faithful servant to his king (V, 7, 162). Everything in *Tartuffe* is posturing and duplicity for the pursuit of his objective that is, apparently, his devotion but truly his personal profit and material interest. Everything and everybody is for him a means to this end. The action of the hypocrite is always a “double action” and is always invested by a “double meaning.”³⁹ In whatever he says and does there is an outward, public dimension and a hidden, secretive one—the latter negating the former. This is the necessary duplicity of the action of posturing (or, indeed, of acting a part). Posturing never asserts an independent self-standing claim; rather, it is meaningful only ‘against’—or ‘relative to’—a background of hidden intentions, interactions, beliefs, which, at the same time, constitutes its intrinsic ambiguity. In addition, *Tartuffe*’s posture receives its meaning relative to the audience for which he is performing—for Orgon or for Elmire, for example (to be “*only* posited,” Hegel suggests, is an ambiguous, incomplete claim or determination: the ‘against *what*’ needs to be specified in order to give meaning to that positedness).⁴⁰

The character of *Tartuffe* is first introduced at the beginning of act III (III, 2). Molière underscores his intention of having two full acts prepare the audience “for the entrance” of the play’s main foe (preface 1664, 100). As much as *Tartuffe*’s posturing fools Orgon, it never confounds the audience. *Tartuffe*’s scheming deceives Orgon (and only him) because he is himself a fanatic and as such is *Tartuffe*’s necessary counterpart in the play’s portrait of fanatical action. To make this point is the function of the first two acts. Moreover, the properly comical effects of the plot centered on the *Tartuffe*-Orgon relation hinge precisely on the fact that the hypocrite’s deception works only on the fanatic. As much as he hides and schemes, the hypocrite “is recognizable at once,” contends Molière, and “from first to last he never utters a word or performs one single action which does not clearly indicate to the audience that he is a scoundrel in direct contrast to the truly good man” (preface, 1664, 100). The fanatic-hypocrite is clearly identifiable because his hypocrisy and doubleness work only on the absolutist, whom he needs and uses for his purposes. Indeed, throughout the first two acts, Dorine, for one, has no problem in seeing right through *Tartuffe*’s posturing as she immediately acknowledges the discrepancy between what *Tartuffe* says, the appearances that he wants to convey, and the crook he really is.⁴¹ *Tartuffe* is placed in the middle of this complex net of appearances; he is defined by the failed correspondence of all the facets implied

in his posturing. He is, in fact, placed between the total credulity of the absolutist Orgon and the clear eyes of his family, first and foremost, Dorine, Elmire, and Clèante (and, in addition, he is always placed in front of the audience). As *Gesetzsein*, Tartuffe is surrounded on all sides.

As Tartuffe first enters the scene, we see him asking Dorine to cover her bosom as “such pernicious sights give rise to sinful thoughts.” Dorine’s answer does not fail to ironically expose his hypocrisy: “You’re mighty susceptible to temptation then!” (III, 2, 135). The reality and truth of the man Tartuffe is immediately and unambiguously clear to her. His posturing does not deceive her, just makes him laughable. The following scene continues on the same register, only with an even heightened comical note. Tartuffe’s posturing—the *Gesetzsein* he puts on and inhabits—is sketched out in the pompous language with which he first greets Elmire: “May the bounty of Heaven ever bestow on you health of body and of mind, and extend your blessings commensurate with the prayers of the most humble of its devotees!” (III, 3, 135). These words are as lofty as they are meaningless, and they mask the fundamental vacuity and negativity of Tartuffe’s figure. The ambiguity of his posturing—the “double meaning” of his *Gesetzsein* (TW 6, 33)—is comically revealed in the same scene by Tartuffe’s way of addressing Elmire (who has approached him wanting him to exert influence over Orgon and persuade him to respect his promise to Valère to have him marry his daughter Mariane): “I need hardly say how pleased I am to find myself alone with you. It’s an opportunity which I have besought Heaven to accord me—vainly until this moment” (III, 3, 136). The double meaning of these words is made evident in the development of the scene, as Tartuffe pronounces his utterly improper and quite crass love declaration to Elmire. This shows how pleased he is indeed at finding himself alone with her!

As Tartuffe is overheard in his “disgraceful declaration of guilty passion” (III, 4, 140) by Orgon’s son Damis (who hidden in a closet has witnessed the entire scene) and is vehemently accused by him, Molière gives us a paradigmatic example of the strategy followed by the hypocrite in carrying out his action. While Elmire attempts to downplay the incident and appeals to the general predicament of women in order to seek some kind of compromise (importantly, with the further strategic thought in mind to use Tartuffe so as to change Orgon’s mind on the issue of their daughter’s marriage), Tartuffe does not hesitate to confirm the ‘truth’ that accuses him, and to this aim he launches on a pathetic display of self-pity and self-accusation. Here again, however, it is a well-studied posture that he puts up—it is, yet again, a *Gesetzsein* that speaks, confirms, and

hyperbolically amplifies the truth by acting out his own guilt for which he now asks forgiveness. In his posturing, Tartuffe's intention is to mask (and ultimately deny) the truth precisely by affirming it—but clearly not believing it, and playing, rather, the role of the victim. He presents himself (or he posits himself) as the victim of human frailty as well as the victim of Damis's personal resentment. And victims should be forgiven not accused. This is his way to effectively deny the truth by making it powerless since all accusing force is taken out of it. In the face of Tartuffe's self-accusation, the deed that incriminates him loses all its relevance and value. This is the circling, reflective, indirect strategy of Tartuffe's hypocritical posturing that negates (his own guilt) by affirming, and indirectly affirms (Damis's guilt and bad intentions) by seemingly not doing so. Ultimately Tartuffe puts his own double-sided reality egotistically front and center, placing it between Orgon's blind fanaticism, which believes everything he tells him, and the 'truth' that everyone else sees but is no longer relevant after Tartuffe's contrite admission of guilt.

Thus, turning to Orgon, who accuses his son of falsely accusing him, Tartuffe exclaims, assuming a contrite posture, "Let him speak. You do wrong to accuse him. You would do better to believe what he tells you. Why should you take such a favorable view of me? After all, do you know what I am capable of? Why should you trust appearances?" (III, 4, 140). All these utterances have a double meaning, as they are taken in one way by Orgon, in another by the audience; they solicit answers that are always multidimensional—some answers are apparent, another hidden, another menacingly obscure ("do you know what I am capable of?"). In the latter question, "Why should you trust appearances?" Tartuffe's rhetoric has become so convoluted that the "appearances" referred to are alternatively—but perhaps, also, at the same time—the appearances of Tartuffe's own pretended virtuous character (for Orgon), and the factual appearances of Tartuffe's love declaration to Elmire (for everyone else).⁴² While the former seem the intended meaning, the latter is the obvious and inevitable meaning, which the audience connects to his words. The clash and the to and fro between the two produces the comic effect of the scene. This is indeed the advancement of essence that Hegel describes as the "reflected movement [. . .] from nothing to nothing and through nothing back to itself" (TW 6, 24). The movement of hypocrisy is indeed a purely negative movement that reproduces itself and increasingly confounds by multiplying ambiguities but does not achieve any positive result. It is a movement that is no movement at all—it is a self-aggrandizing but ultimately destructive

development. The linear repetition of the bad infinite proper to the sphere of Being is replaced—or reaffirmed—in the reflective reproduction of the nothingness of essence. “Why should you trust appearances?” Indeed, what is it that can be trusted, if anything can? This seems the genuine question ultimately raised by Molière’s play. Moreover, Tartuffe adds, “Do you think well of me because of what I seem to be?” But what is it that he ‘seems to be’ (III, 4, 140)? At this point even this simple question is puzzling. What the hypocrite’s posturing really posits or discloses is an ambiguous appearance that has no consistent reality but only the utter negativity of a mere *Schein*. In its sheer emptiness and negativity, this may seem the opposite of the all-encompassing affirmation of reality claimed by the absolutist. In fact, the two complement each other. The only thing that is ‘real’ in the appearances put forth by Tartuffe is the instrumental, intermediate character of his posturing as well as the aim of all Tartuffe’s actions, namely, the satisfaction of his lust and personal profit.

In the following scene Molière offers yet another example of Tartuffe’s indirect strategy, of his affirming by negating and negating by affirming. Tartuffe obtains what he wants by denying that he ever wants it. This indirection, however, works only because he puts Orgon in the middle and uses his absolutism in order to obtain the opposite of what Orgon believes he is after, and of what he himself openly denies being after. Tartuffe obtains his goal by denying his interest in it—and by having Orgon negate his own negation (hence by having Orgon go contrary to Tartuffe’s words and along with his hidden intention). Accordingly, he tells Orgon that because of Damis’s accusations, the best course of action would be for him never to see Elmire again. To which Orgon answers by endorsing the opposite course of action, which is, obviously, precisely what Tartuffe desires, namely, to be alone with Elmire. Here is Orgon: “No, you *shall* see her in spite of them all. Nothing gives me greater joy than to annoy them. *You shall appear with her constantly* and—to show my defiance, I’ll make you my sole heir” (III, 5, 143).⁴³

We have seen that Orgon, or the figure of the fanatic-absolutist, does not advance out of his stuck absolutism in the moment in which his absolute, namely, the undisputed model of devotion and virtue that Tartuffe represents for him, crumbles before his eyes (IV, 4–5). For, in this case, Orgon’s absolutism simply runs to the opposite extreme but fundamentally remains the same type of absolutist action. The figure of Orgon advances only in his final confrontation with Pernelle, when he finds himself exasperatingly trying to convince her of the opposite of what her own absolutistic

belief holds regarding Tartuffe. For, in her behavior, and only at this point, is Orgon first able to see himself. There are, however, additional circumstances that precipitate the resolution of Orgon's fanatic absolutism, hence the progress out of the predicament of absolutism. And these coincide with the circumstances that eventually produce the resolution or the advance in the figure of Tartuffe's fanatic hypocrisy. The turning point of the action of the fanatic-hypocrite takes place in the moment in which *the hypocrite himself* decides to stop posturing and reveals the reality of his intentions (or what he takes it to be). This is not directly the scene in which Tartuffe is found out by Orgon and exposed in his illicit behavior toward Elmire. As the previous scene in which Damis witnesses Tartuffe's love declaration shows, Tartuffe is always able to put on yet another mask and continue with his deceitful behavior *if he chooses to*. At the end of act IV, scene 7, however, we still have to discover another, even more hidden dimension of Tartuffe's self-interested scheming. There is the entire last act of the play still left for this development.

As Orgon has finally decided to reject Tartuffe once and for all and intimates that he "get out of the house without more ado" (IV, 7, 153), Tartuffe's answer comes as utterly surprising (for Orgon but perhaps even more so for the audience): "You are the one who must leave the house—you who talk as if you were master. This house is mine and I'll have you realize it (*je le ferai connaître*). What's more, I'll show you how vainly you resort to these devices for picking a quarrel with me. You little know what you are doing when you are insulting me" (IV, 7, 153). The surprise here lies both in the obscure content conveyed by Tartuffe's words, and in their vengeful and menacing tone. One thing, however, is immediately and strikingly clear: he is no longer posturing, or acting a role, or hiding behind a mask. What he says, whatever this may mean and whatever its implications, is for real. In this claim we find, for the first time, the 'true' Tartuffe without his posturing. Or, rather, we find the 'truth of' the action that has identified Tartuffe so far, namely, his hypocritical posturing—the truth of *Gesetzsein* (which lies precisely in its *Aufhebung*), his essence beyond and as a result of the development of the act of posturing. Orgon is the first to understand—or at least to get a hint of—the meaning of Tartuffe's words in the next short scene: "What he said makes me realize my mistake. My deed of gift begins to worry me," he says to a puzzled Elmire, and what is worse, he adds, "there is no going back" (IV, 8, 153). This is the beginning of Orgon's own advance away from Tartuffe's spell and away from his own absolutism. Reality is suddenly hitting him—this is the turning point of

the play and the end of the impasse of fanaticism. In the conclusion of act V, just before the last reversal in the play's action, Monsieur Loyal, acting on behalf of Tartuffe and serving Orgon the writ ordering him to leave his own house, confirms Tartuffe's previous enigmatic words. He declares to the now-evicted Orgon: Tartuffe "is lord and master (*maître et seigneur*) of your possessions from now on by virtue of the deed that I be the bearer of" (V, 4, 158f.). This shift is the reality that the double action of fanaticism has produced so far.

What is "higher" being or essence, *Dasein* or *Gesetzsein*? This is the question raised in Hegel's logic by the middle position that *Gesetzsein* occupies between *Dasein* and essence (TW 6, 33). This is the confrontation that necessarily ensues between the fanaticism of being and that of essence, a confrontation that only underscores their conflicted solidarity and mutual dependence since it is their concerted action alone that has led to this point. Is the posturing and scheming attitude of the hypocrite truly "higher" or more advanced (pragmatically, morally, politically) than the monomaniac attitude of the absolutist? Who is the "master of the house"? In the end, Molière's suggestion seems to be that only once both figures relinquish their fanaticism by advancing beyond themselves (in an act of self-*Aufhebung*, as it were) can the action truly move on and reach its conclusion. But when the action does move on what it reveals is the intervention of judgment and of a higher justice. Advancement is possible only as the advancement *beyond fanaticism as such*, that is, only once the position of fanaticism in all its forms and figures is eventually and completely abandoned (or *aufgehoben*). Orgon receives his property back by an act of the king. But now his condition has been mediated by Tartuffe's own action (itself ultimately a failed action or an action that is in turn itself overcome). The fanatic absolutism of being is *aufgehoben*. Tartuffe has effectively exercised his mediation, although his criminal career has also reached its end. The fanatic hypocrisy of *Gesetzsein* is *aufgehoben* as well, and it is overcome, this time, through its own action.

In Molière's play, judgment and its clear rationality—or the capacity to distinguish, in Cléante's words, the mask from the face, appearance from reality, the shadow from the substance, base coin from true coin (I, 5, 118)—comes in different guises. Dorine and Cléante exemplify the standpoint of judgment and within it express a difference of gender and social class. Throughout the development of the action, they fully understand both Orgon's irrational blindness and Tartuffe's hypocritical posturing, which, in their view, is clearly wicked but also fundamentally ridiculous. There is no doubt that neither Dorine nor Cléante is fooled for a moment by Tartuffe,

and it is obvious that they occupy a detached and higher ground in the action despite their full involvement in it. Significantly, their intervention in the plot does not consist in directly opposing Tartuffe (as Damis does, for example) in the name of truth, virtue, or any other pragmatic or alternatively lofty idea. It is the fanatic, not the woman and man of judgment, who upholds clear-cut and allegedly unquestionable moral values. There is an inner tension—or a constitutive split, as it were—in judgment. In their own way, both Dorine and Clèante reject extreme decisions and aim rather at a compromise between Orgon and Tartuffe. In the face of the extremism that is given free rein around them, they favor a moderate course of action that could rescue Orgon without angering Tartuffe too much and ultimately save the interest and the welfare of Orgon's family.⁴⁴ The standpoint of judgment or reason, in Dorine's and Clèante's case, is not invested by a moral or moralistic superiority. It rather, quite simply, expresses the capacity to tell apart those differences to which the fanatics are blind, and to endorse a moderate course of action having the welfare of all in view.⁴⁵

In the end, however, the judgment that seals the play and marks the final resolution of its plot is the judgment of the king, “a prince inimical to fraud, a monarch who can read men's hearts, whom no impostor's art deceives. The keen discernment of that lofty mind at all times sees things in their true perspective; nothing can disturb the firm constancy of his reason nor lead him to excess (*sa ferme raison ne tombe en nul excès*)” (V, 7, 162f.).⁴⁶ This is the *deus ex machina* that brings the play to conclusion. Rationality and judgment, which Molière here presents as embodied in the king, are constant, reliable, and not prey to excess, that is, they are not fanatical but *just*, they discern the truth and frame things and events in the right perspective, but they also know the long-standing *history* of criminal deeds that Tartuffe has left behind throughout the years. Moreover, judgment and reason are not inert spectators; they *act* with authoritative power and “sovereign prerogative” and thereby seal the play's overall development (V, 7, 163).

Does this conclusion imply that judgment and reason are not (or are never) fanatical but are rather, somehow, already ‘beyond’ fanaticism? I do not think so. After all, judgment comes out of the lesson of Being and Essence, of *Dasein* and *Gesetzsein*, which constitute its logical past. Judgment has gone and does go through fanaticism. However, the figures of judgment in Molière's play and then its conclusion suggest that only judgment (not the fanatical mind-set of the absolutist or the hypocrite) has *in itself* the resources to overcome fanaticism. Neither the absolutist nor the

hypocrite has these resources, that is, the discernment proper to judgment. The fanatic cannot advance in his fanaticism, and, more generally, there is no advancement in fanaticism. Fanaticism is precisely the figure of the blocked advancement. For both Orgon the absolutist and Tartuffe the hypocrite to advance means to radically abandon the mind-set that has defined them so far; it requires the necessary and total demise of their defining fanaticism. Whereas judgment may certainly fall prey to fanaticism, it knows how to advance beyond it, still remaining what it is. The fanatic has no judgment or discernment—he is utterly blinded by his absolutes. But this does not mean that judgment cannot itself be fanatical. Judgment, however, is the first cure against fanaticism—even against its own fanaticism. Ultimately, fanaticism is characterized by its constitutive unwillingness and inability to change and advance beyond the standstill that defines its mind-set. This, I believe, becomes clear once the typology of fanaticism at work in Molière's *Tartuffe* is set in conjunction with the figures of the advancement of thinking's action in Hegel's logic. What we find in Molière's play is a typology of fanaticism and its overcoming that illustrates, in a negative and indirect way, the different forms of the advancing action at issue in Hegel's logic. Ultimately, fanaticism, in its variations, is a mind-set and a modality of action characterized by the impossibility and the refusal to transform itself in its relation to oneself, to others, and to otherness in general. Fanaticism, like the case of violence examined in the previous chapter, is not the description of a monolithic action. And its variations do not concern only the content or the matter with regard to which fanatical attitudes are manifested, that is, religion and faith, politics, culture, ideology, and so on. As it is clear from Molière's example, there are ways of acting in a fanatic way that are structurally, formally, or logically different (although connected), whatever the contents about which one may display a fanatic mind-set.

2.1. The Logic of Fanaticism: Advancing Despite Oneself— The Absolutism of Being or Moral Conscience

In the preceding discussion, I have selected Molière's *Tartuffe* among the many possible stories that can be seen as illustrating, indirectly or in a negative way, the dynamic of the advancing action that Hegel's logic addresses in the three movements, respectively, of Being, Essence, the Concept. I say indirectly or negatively because I take fanaticism in the codependent incarnations of the extremist absolutist and the hypocrite to be a paradigmatic example of blocked and stalled advancement. The general point of my read-

ing of Molière's work was to indicate the relevance of the forms of Hegel's logic for the understanding of concrete human action. Considered against the negative backdrop of Molière's play (of the figures of Orgon and Tartuffe in particular) we can claim that the action that advances is the action that defies and overcomes—or, in its advance, has always already defied and overcome—fanaticism. Fanaticism is untenable if the action is to develop. But advance is, in effect, already made if what we have is to be action in the proper sense. Advance is already and de facto made if what we have is to be a story, that is, the expression of thought's discursivity, and accordingly is to be *told as a story*. On the other hand, in its stalled and frozen predicament of stasis, fanaticism should also be seen as the moment from and against which the advancing action is to be measured. Ultimately, the step leading to the standpoint of judgment is the only cure against fanaticism—it is the 'highest' form of advancement. And since judgment is a defining dimension or action of discursive thinking, one should not conclude that discursive thinking (unlike intellectual intuition, for example) cannot be fanatical but rather that discursive thinking has in itself the resources to go beyond fanaticism and is consequently gravely culpable if it does not undertake this step, that is, if it does not advance beyond fanaticism.

Kant had already insisted that the chief enemy of discursive thinking, which he opposes to intuitive thinking (or to the intuitive understanding), is the position of *Schwärmerei*, that is, of fanatical enthusiasm in its many different manifestations (metaphysical and epistemological, moral, religious, political).⁴⁷ With regard to the central point expressed by this Kantian conviction, Hegel can be seen as pursuing the same objective. *Schwärmerei* negates dialectic-speculative thinking to the extent that it is a position in which thinking, holding on to its undifferentiated and blind absoluteness, refuses to change, to move on, to advance, to become other than itself, to face the contradiction that it entails, to acknowledge its own finitude. And yet, the further implication of Hegel's idea of dialectical thinking is that fanaticism is itself a self-defying position or mind-set. For, ultimately, fanaticism cannot escape the necessity of thinking's own movement. If fanaticism claims to be a position that produces results in an action that can, in turn, be told by (and as) a story, then the unfolding of this very action and the telling of this story are the concrete proof that fanaticism cannot be consistently upheld. Thus, in the action and in the story of fanaticism we meet the internal, immanent refutation to which fanaticism is inescapably (or dialectically) brought. Of course, I take fanaticism and the typology that we have explored following Molière's play (just as the case of violence

examined in the previous chapter with Melville's help) to be only one of the many illustrations or possible *fulfillments* (in this case, in the negative) of the logic of the advancing action presented by Hegel. Certainly it is not the only one. Fanaticism is one of the many real figures assumed by the action that refuses to advance and change, and as such I have used it to bring to light the concrete significance of the forms of Hegel's logic for the understanding of more particular modalities of human action.⁴⁸

Now, keeping Molière's characters as a backdrop, I shall turn again to Hegel's logic. What needs to be shown henceforth is the complementary claim, namely, the relevance of concrete forms of human action for the development of the logic. My aim is to bring into focus the different ways in which examples of thinking's advancement in the three spheres of Being, Essence, the Concept articulate the claim that the action that advances is the action that leads beyond Fanaticism, or the claim that for thinking to advance is ipso facto to overcome Fanaticism. What I propose in this way is a 'real' reading of the logical forms of the advancement, which are viewed, this time, as standing for different strategies with which action can—and does, in effect—challenge the attitude and mind-set of fanaticism. In this perspective, the progress made by thinking's capacity to transform itself in Being, Essence, the Concept is measured in relation to the issue of how and to what extent, in those three logical spheres, thinking alternatively falls prey to or risks, avoids, or circumvents the dead end and the impasse proper of fanatical action. Thus, what I propose on the basis of this reading of Hegel's logic is a sort of typology of the action that in its determinate progress challenges the claim of fanaticism. Again, for thinking to change and to transform itself is to go beyond fanaticism in all its manifold manifestations. And since thinking's self-transformation is manifested in the logical figures and modalities of the advancement successively enacted in Being, Essence, and the Concept, I shall look at the different strategies of overcoming fanaticism at play, respectively, in these logical spheres. My task now is to assess the progress made in the overall transformation process staged by Hegel's logic. I take Fanaticism—its concrete figures and its inner logic—as my guiding example and show the relation that connects Molière's literary characters, Orgon, Tartuffe, Dorine-Clèante; the three logical figures of the advancement, *Dasein*, *Gesetzsein*, Judgment; and three concrete manifestations of the action that is alternatively trapped in or capable of overcoming the fanatic mind-set.

In the *Philosophy of Right*, at the end of the sphere of Morality (*Moralität*), which is placed as the middle stage between Abstract Right and Ethical

Life (*Sittlichkeit*), immediately before the argument that outlines the crucial “transition from morality to ethical life” (R §141), Hegel discusses the twofold phenomenon of “hypocrisy” (*Heuchelei*) and of the absolutism of subjectivity in which he sees the culmination and perversion of modern moral conscience (R §140 Remark). This is the highest and indeed the most unstable point reached by the development of moral subjectivity, which, precisely in its dialectical precariousness, leads to the crucial “transition” to the sphere of *Sittlichkeit*. The overall movement of *Moralität* can be seen as following two stages. In a first step, Hegel presents the ideas of the “good” and “moral conscience” as belonging to a practical subjectivity that is *in nuce* already absolutistic. Moral subjectivity (in its Kantian incarnation, for example) offers a paradigmatic example of consciousness’s blocked development. Moral subjectivity avoids determinateness upholding the formality of “duty,” and it avoids the commitment to actual objective action by placing the goodness of the will in the purity of intentions. And yet, despite all this, moral conscience can still maintain the lofty semblance of goodness (although it is always on the verge of slipping into evil: R §139 Remark). It is in the second step of this movement that Hegel draws the consequences of this position and brings to light the fundamental hypocrisy and the self-destructive absolutism already implicit in moral conscience. Significantly, it is from this point of radical stasis or blocked development that the momentous “transition” to ethical life is achieved. Which means that it is only in the sphere of *Sittlichkeit* that the fanatic is ‘cured,’ that action can advance, and freedom can be actualized freedom. If we connect Hegel’s analysis of moral conscience to the broader systematic structure of the *Philosophy of Right*, it is clear that the underlying claim of such analysis fits perfectly with the issue we have been following so far. At both stages of the development of moral conscience, what Hegel consistently brings to light in the position of conscience’s absolutism is its failure to advance, namely, its failure and refusal to gain determinateness (in the ideas of the good and duty), to compromise with actuality (in its insistence on the value of conscience’s inwardness), to move beyond the confines of a subjectivity that in its “interiority” is declared all-powerful and the ultimate judge of all values. Hegel’s claim is that a form of subjectivity (and a philosophy) that declares “morality”—and abstractly (or purely) moral freedom—to be absolute or to be the highest point reached by practical spirit, is a conscience that refuses to make the transition to the more complex, objective, and intersubjective structures of ethical life—to structures in which not absolutism but, if anything, the willingness of moderate and pragmatic compromise is a value. Now moral conscience by refusing

to change and to relinquish its absolutism in its encounter with the ethical world in which de facto it always and necessarily already lives and acts, is responsible for an act of fundamental self-deception. It is a conscience that cannot change and cannot advance, since the only possible advance is the “transition” to ethical life in which moral subjectivity is necessarily transformed and indeed always ‘compromised’ as its purity and intransigence must confront the interests, needs, and deeds of others. Ultimately, this is also a form of subjectivity that is incapable of proving itself ethically, that is, actually, free since it blocks the realization process in which ethical freedom properly consists. Such absolutistic conscience is blind to the context as well as to the consequences of its own action, is blind to other people, and to other values, although it hypocritically pronounces its own action as always good for others (R §140).

In the sphere of Morality, the “good” constitutes the “essence” of (or what is “essential” in) the subjective will, its very “value and dignity” (§132 Remark, 133). The good is the moment of “universality” and “substantiality” of a will that is always particular (R §§132A, 133). The subjective will has validity only insofar as it “*ought to* make the good its substantial goal and realize it” (R §131). Thereby the will, which is always particular in its volitions, through the absolutization of its end claims for itself an absolute value. The good is declared having an “absolute right” over “the abstract right of property and the particular ends of welfare” and happiness (R §130). And yet, this is only the absoluteness of an abstract, merely formal intention, which as such lacks the validation of action. It is an absoluteness that (only and always) “ought” to be because in the moment in which it actually is, it is no longer absolute but determinate, partial, compromised and compromising with the world. Or, as Hegel notices, such a position is “not yet the development (*Entwicklung*) of determinations”—and since it is not development, neither the universality of the good nor the will’s particularity is actually “posited.” The suspension of an unreal *Sollen* is no advancement, that is, is properly no real action (R §131N). As much as Hegel emphasizes the importance of the modern idea that recognizes the “right of the subjective will” in being held responsible for an action only to the extent in which it has a considered “insight” into its being good, which is ultimately the highly valuable standpoint of Kant’s moral philosophy (§135 Remark), he is also swift in pointing out the fundamental flaw of this position. The shortcoming consists in the fact that, taken in the abstract formality that defines its absolute and “unconditioned” value (R §135), the moral standpoint necessarily blocks any possible advancement—

the advance of moral consciousness and of action itself—because precisely in the blocked advancement consists the absoluteness of the good it holds to be its essence. In other words, the good retains its “absolute right” and its absolute value as the essence of the will by being framed as the “universal abstract essentiality” of “duty”—the form of duty that ought to be willed and done “for the sake of duty” (R §133).

The problem opened up by this (Kantian) formulation is twofold and can be expressed as the problem of the advancement out of the absolutism of the moral standpoint toward the reality of ethical life. Hegel’s point is that such advancement is impossible within purely moral conscience since it requires (and ultimately *is* itself) the “transition” to ethical life (hence is an advancement that leads necessarily beyond pure morality).⁴⁹ At stake is, first, the issue of the determination of the good, namely, the answer to the practical question: “*What* is duty?”—the duty that “ought” to be done; and second, the connected issue of the *realization* of duty in and through action, which as such leads the interiority of conscience out of itself in a confrontation with the exteriority and objectivity of the world (R §134). The impossibility of living up to these two interconnected sides of the problem of the developing action and, at the same time, of maintaining the self-enclosed absoluteness of the moral standpoint, elicits Hegel’s appraisal of this position as a fanatic position—indeed a *schwärmerisch* position, pace Kant. “One may indeed speak of duty in a most sublime way, and this kind of rhetoric places the human being high, and makes his heart swell with pride. But if there is no advance to any further determination (*wenn es zu keiner Bestimmung fortgeht*) it becomes quite tedious. For spirit demands that particularity to which it is entitled” (R §136Z). Indeed, duty can be declared an absolute and placed in the “sphere of the unconditioned” (*Sphäre des Unbedingten*) only to the extent that is left indeterminate. As such, however, duty is only an ineffectual “abstract universal,” the “identity that lacks all content,” the merely “indeterminate” (*Bestimmungslose*) (R §135). But then, in its sheer indeterminateness, it must remain a pure *Seinsollende* that no will can realize in action (or properly, that no will can *determinately* want). Incapable of advancing to any determination and particularity (for such advance would destroy or at least compromise its absoluteness), moral conscience stiffens within the confines of its interiority, which it now declares absolute—absolute, this time, in the sense of making itself into the ultimate judge of all values. In the figure of moral “conscience”—*das Gewissen*—subjectivity “in its universality reflected into itself is the absolute inward certainty of itself.” Against action’s demand for determinateness, which necessarily places it in

an external relation to others, “conscience is that deepest inner solitude within oneself in which all externality and limitation have disappeared—it is a total withdrawal into itself” (R §136Z). Although in point of fact it is incapable of accepting any particular determination whatsoever, conscience declares itself to be “that which posits particularity, that which determines and decides” (R §136). This is the arrogance but also the fundamental blindness and self-deceit that characterizes the fanatic attitude. The “truth,” says Orgon, is “what I have decided” (*Tartuffe*, II, 2, 122). “Conscience” consists in the assertion that what it knows and wills as right and good “is *truly* right and duty” (and reciprocally, that nothing is *truly* right and duty that is not known and willed by conscience). But granted that this is an indisputable right of subjective conscience (or an “absolute entitlement of self-consciousness”), is this a “true conscience” (R §137)? To be sure, hypocrisy has its root in the same gesture of self-appointed righteousness that characterizes ‘true’ conscience. For, conscience’s claim of truth raises the issue of whether such “conscience” is “truthful or not.” And yet, herein lies also the possibility of the advance beyond fanaticism. But importantly, this is a possibility that is available only within a different and broader context, namely, within the intersubjective and objective perspective of ethical life (and in particular within the state). For, given that moral conscience defines its position on the basis of the formality of the good (and of the formula of duty for duty’s sake), and given that its ‘truthfulness’ hinges instead on the particularity of “the content of this supposed good,” it is only outside moral conscience and beyond the moral standpoint, namely, within the sphere of ethical life, that contents can first be introduced and evaluated, hence the ‘truthfulness’ of conscience can first be ascertained. Thus, in front of the claim of moral conscience, Hegel retorts that what constitutes right and duty has the objective form of ethical “laws and principles.” It is at this level then that conscience “is subject to judgment as to its truth and falsity.” It is only by being subject to the “judgment” of the higher ethical standpoint—and ultimately of the state—that subjective conscience can advance beyond the absolutism of abstract morality (R §137 Remark). The intervention of the king’s judgment at the end of Molière’s play expresses precisely the necessity of the transition to ethical life for the advancement beyond fanaticism and hypocrisy. Closed in the absolutism of its moral interiority, instead, subjective conscience does just the opposite: it appoints itself as the “power of judgment which determines solely within itself what is good in relation to a given content,” but truly it only dissolves or “evaporates (*verflüchtigt*) into itself all determinateness of right, duty, and existence” (R §138). From this point to the overturning of good into evil is just a short step.

It is clear that having to do with the constitution of practical subjectivity and with the structures of the will, Hegel's analysis in the sphere of Morality involves the higher logical form of the concept (and the moments of universality, particularity, individuality). However, with regard to the specific problem that presently concerns me, namely, the issue of the advancement and transformation in action—which is here, negatively, the way in which conscience refuses to gain determination for the idea of the good and the command of duty as they are declared absolute and unconditioned—what we have at this juncture are the structures of the advancement proper to the Logic of Being. Indeed, as Hegel claims in articulating the logic of “finitude” that makes the advancement within *Dasein*, “in the sphere of being the *self-determining* of the concept is only first *in itself*—and as such it is [the action of] transitioning (*ein Übergehen*)” (TW 5, 131). Now we have to examine the connection between the advancement of being in the structures of finitude and the failed advancement of moral conscience in the position of moral absolutism. At stake in both cases is the logical necessity and the practical unwillingness of gaining determination. For, determination is constitutive of finitude and is the enemy of all absolutist stances. Determination, at this level, is the advancement of the action that makes a transition—*Übergehen*.

As we have seen, the first advancement of the action in the sphere of Being is the determination of the structures of finitude. There are two undercurrents in the “development” (*Entwicklung*) of *Dasein*, the two undercurrents that the advancement inherits from the beginning (being, nothing): the act of gaining an “affirmative determination” (quality and something), but also the act of displaying a “negative determination.” This latter, in the advancement, is not simple negation but is “negation of negation,” hence, the movement in which the “something” is determined “to the point of the *Insichgehen*” (TW 5, 125). Indeed, what we have here are the positive and the negative moment of action, the disguise of which ultimately culminates in the figure of hypocrisy (R §140). At stake in the overall movement of finitude is the consolidation of a first vestigial form of self-identity. A form of proto-identity is first claimed by “something” in its separation from the “other,” but since on this still-too-indeterminate basis the other turns out to be indistinguishable from the something (or the self), the further distinction is drawn between *Ansichsein* and *Sein-für-Anderes*. The alleged distinctive selfsameness of “something” attempts to be preserved against the “other” by a retreat in an “in itself” supposedly untouched by the other and claimed fundamentally different from it. At the interface with the other, something and other may in fact be undistinguishable; the something, however, promises a

fundamental difference nested in the depths of its “in itself.” This *Ansichsein* is the same locus of interiority characterizing modern conscience (the place of its “ideal inwardness”: R §138 Remark). It is the indeterminate and indeed inscrutable place where subjectivity can claim its ‘absolute’ right over the other. And yet, the advancement of the determination of the finite shows that this claim is inevitably short-lived. For, the “in itself” is truly nothing and is meaningless unless what the something has distinctively “in it” (*an ihm*) is also, externally, “for other” (TW 5, 129). The failure to acknowledge this point (or this identity of *Ansichsein* and *Sein-für-Anderes*) is the reason why moral conscience remains stuck in its development, whereas the attempt to disguise this failed coincidence is the mark of hypocritical conscience. Hegel explicitly mentions the parallelism between the codependence of the structures of *Ansichsein* and *Sein-für-Anderes* in Being, the determinations of *Innerlichkeit* and *Ausserlichkeit* in Essence, and the forms of concept and reality in the Idea—the latter, significantly, expressing the moment of action’s realization in the objective world of spirit (TW 5, 130, 3). At stake is the same issue of gaining self-identity by moving away from indeterminateness. This move, however, is inescapably the fundamental gesture of redefining oneself in relation to the other—which is the very opposite of the retreat in an isolationist and absolutist *Ansich*. The point of this dialectic is that the claim that makes interiority absolute by closing it off to the other and to determinateness is an absolutistic way of avoiding the issue of advancing subjectivity beyond its undeveloped “in itself.” Such an undeveloped, indeterminate position, however, has no true value, no effective power, and certainly no reality. Not even the reality of the finite that is precisely the action of gaining determination in relation to an irreducible other to the point of becoming the other of itself. The absolutistic retreat into the *Ansich* is, instead, and at the most, the figure of the *Ding an sich*, which, it is now clear, responds to the same logic as the moral form of duty for duty’s sake or of a “good” that is placed in the sphere of the “unconditioned” but is as ineffectual and inconclusive as the bad infinite of the mere *Sollen*. In both cases, the crucial question: “*What?*”—alternatively, “*What* is duty?” or “*What* is the thing-in-itself?”—remains unanswered and indeed unanswerable. Hegel makes it clear that the question “*What?* (*Was?*)” is the chief question on which the process of determination, hence the advancing action hinges (*What* is the next step?). The dogmatic rigidity of the *Ansich* (the *Ding an sich*) forecloses the answer (or, alternatively, renders the answer, but to be sure already the question, meaningless) with the consequence that no advancement can be made (TW 5, 130, 1). Ultimately, Hegel recognizes

that “the thing-in-itself is the same as that Absolute of which one does not know anything else but that in it all is one” (TW 5, 130, 1). This Absolute is the pure indeterminateness of the infamous night in which all cows are black. In fact, this is the position of *Schwärmerei*, that fanatic enthusiasm that Kant intended to combat but to which his own absolutism ultimately falls prey. And yet, Hegel maintains that when the dialectical movement of the advancement is recognized (instead of being blocked) in the abstraction of the *Ansich*, then what we have is the *Darstellung* or the complete development of the “in itself” in its conceptual concreteness. And this, Hegel claims, is the logic itself (TW 5, 130) as the “advancement of the concept to its exposition (*Fortgang des Begriffs zu seiner Exposition*)” (TW 5, 131).

An important challenge to the absolutism of the “thing-in-itself” or of “duty for duty’s sake”—the absolutism that sets an unreachable truth and unquestionable good beyond all possible checks through and by the other—comes from the second moment of the dialectic of finitude. It is the challenge, for example, of Fichte’s idea of a *Bestimmung des Menschen* that intends to move beyond Kant’s intransigent formalism. In the second moment of finitude, the distinction between something and other deepens the internal and external dimensions of self-identity. As it is brought to bear, directly, on one’s behavior and attitudes, this is the moment of “Bestimmung, Beschaffenheit,” and their culmination, “Grenze” (TW 5, 132ff.). The “determination” or *Bestimmung* is, Hegel explains, the “affirmative determinateness” (*Bestimmtheit*) that constitutes one’s own identity. Now the “something” instead of fleeing determinateness, explicitly advocates one for itself, although it still places such determinateness in the inaccessible “in itself.” Determination appears as the internal *Ansichsein* that we cherish as something to which we “remain faithful” in an existence that sees us constantly and unavoidably entangled (*Verwicklung*) with the other, always compromising with the other. Although the other is still always determining us (and is indeed changing who/what we are), we consider our determination as something fixed, as that in which we “preserve” our inner integrity, remaining identical with ourselves (*Gleichheit mit sich*) against our changing environment. In our determination we proudly prove our value and make ourselves heard in our relation to the other—in our *Sein-für-Anderes* (TW 5, 132). However, the determination in which we choose to locate our identity (our human identity in opposition to animals, in the first place: TW 5, 132) is nothing more than a sort of empty ‘placeholder’ that we constantly need to fill with our action, is a mark we need to live up to. Determination is, to be sure, still abstract and empty if separated from action.

Under the title of “Bestimmung des Menschen” Fichte proposed a lofty ideal of human moral “vocation” whereby he countered Kant’s ‘impersonal’ formalism with the direct appeal to the moral determination of one’s individual will. This is indeed a challenge to Kant’s absolutism. However, Hegel’s dialectic uncovers the hidden hypocrisy that is still nested in a position such as Fichte’s. With the idea of man’s *Bestimmung* Fichte intended to lend concrete content and individual determination to Kant’s moral imperative, thereby tying the notion of freedom’s realization to the movement of a progressive extension of individuality and its limits. Following one’s moral vocation, man extends the domain of his individuality in the world.⁵⁰ Hegel suggests instead that too wide a gap still separates the notion of *Bestimmung* from that of freedom. What we call our inner vocation is nothing but a way of marking out our alleged identity by drawing a protective boundary between ourselves and the other, thereby reserving an empty place that our action should fill. The gap between the moral “ought” and the actuality of freedom is not closed by the arbitrary vocation that Fichte claims for each individual. We are still within the confines of moral conscience that insists on proclaiming itself “*wahrhaftes Gewissen*”—when instead it does not belong to it (but to the state) to decide (R §137 Remark). In fact, the Kantian gap seems more open than ever. Conscience is made far more arbitrary. Indeed, self-consciousness “is capable of making into its principle either the *universal in and for itself*, or the *arbitrariness of its own particularity*” (R §139).

Moreover, Hegel shows how the very notion of *Bestimmung*—vocation or determination—is not sufficient to define who/what we are. For to our determination is opposed our *Beschaffenheit*, namely, the external part of ourselves, that part of ourselves that we present to others and to the world. We may certainly (and hypocritically) decide not to count this aspect of ourselves toward identity, since it is subject to the influence of the other and can always change. Our *Beschaffenheit*, however, is still there despite our efforts to downplay it—it is still there: *daseiend*. In this side of ourselves, identity is compromised with difference, the self with the other, the ideal with the real. This part of ourselves may change and become completely other (TW 5, 133). Therefore, Hegel ironically concludes that our *Bestimmung*, if it wants to remain pure and fixed as what we claim it is, must remain “indifferent” to our *Beschaffenheit* (TW 5, 133). Hegel’s suggestion is that the external, changing side of the “something” ultimately threatens its inner determination to the point that the “something” is dissolved under the external pressure of the other even before its identity is fully consti-

tuted. This dissolution, however, is an essential moment of the advancement through which identity is established. Dialectically, to be something is to become other: ultimately, “determination is as such open to the relation to other” (TW 5, 134). At the level of ethical life, in our contemporary societies, we constantly experience this dialectic of determination and constitution, of inner vocation and external compromise. Ethnic “purity” and segregation become unmanageable in a world in which everyday life makes contact with the other inevitable. The advancement of the structures of finitude shows that the transition to ethical life has always already happened as negotiation with the other necessarily changes the self in its deepest constitution. Ultimately, in order to gain an identity of its own, the self must accept to negotiate a compromise with the other. Colonization dreams end up backfiring on the purity of the message that we intend to export and impose on others. In the process, we become the other of ourselves.

As the separation of inner vocation and external constitution vanishes, the difference between ourselves and the other becomes blurred: we no longer know where our “being” ends and where the other’s “being” begins. Thereby the challenge to the unquestioned absolute of the fanatic has been advanced to a further stage, to a new figure. For, at this point, we need a different strategy for signaling the point of distinction between the self and the other. The further stage of this process is the act of fixing a limit, a boundary or a border—*Grenze*—whereby that open relation to the other is repealed and the separation between something and the other is made into a “real” barrier. Two people such as Israeli Jews and Palestinians cannot be distinguished and really divided by their respective alleged “vocation.” For this ultimately translates in acts of violence that are indistinguishable in their results. “Vocation” is as absolutistic as an absolute “duty” and is also entirely arbitrary. Indeed, the dogmatic attempt to advocate a theological basis in justification of such vocation only underscores such arbitrariness. Thus, in order for the two peoples to be effectively separated, the ideality of the vocation yields to the reality of a material dividing boundary, of a wall erected in order to separate the two people. Against the confusing entanglement with the other, a boundary is drawn, a border declared.⁵¹ According to this logic, identity must gain some clear-cut limits in order to be “real.” The limit, however, dialectically expresses the “ideal” (TW 5, 136) coexistence of identity and difference, that is, the deeper contradictory character of the finite. The limit is the mark that is meant to make the separation—or the difference—between the something and the other a visible, hard one. The limit visibly tells where something ends, where its claims must yield

to the other's existence. The limit sets something "against" the other; it defines the sphere from which the other is excluded since its *Nichtsein*—its nonexistence—is posited.⁵² In the limit, the presence of the other is, at the same time, sanctioned and erased. The limit not only makes the something different from the other but sanctions this difference in the sphere of *Dasein* (it gives to such difference a place—albeit one without space): the limit is the place where the other cannot dwell nor exist but from which it should be expelled. And yet, this exclusion is precisely that which calls the other into existence and reaffirms its existence. Thus this exclusion is necessary to the identity or the subsistence of *both* the something and the other.

The limit has two sides. The border is a double-edged weapon. For, when considered from the other side of the border, the excluding something is itself an excluded other. The defensive border is truly a barrier that sanctions the finitude of one's being, namely, its not being admitted to the other side. Existence in the realm of the finite is always qualified as existence "within" or "without" the border (TW 5, 137).⁵³ Thereby, the limit is the 'place' in which an egalitarian, balancing "contradiction" is instituted.⁵⁴ It is the virtual place where "something and other *both are and are not*" (TW 5, 136). The limit is the "middle" and the (mediating) "in-between." Ultimately, only the limit exists in this space in-between: both the something and the other "cease to be." Thus, the limit or the border is the place where identity—far from being established—is instead *suspended*. Identity lies only in the promise of reaching "beyond" the limit, of having passed it (or transgressed it). And yet, the limit is the place where the contradictory predicament of a "common differentiation" (*gemeinschaftliche Unterschiedenheit*) is sanctioned; it is a meeting point where a differential "unity" is found. Herein "identity" becomes, for the first time, "double." Identity is properly "only in the limit" (TW 5, 136)—it exists only at the border, in the act of showing one's documents, in the act of "declaring" (*aussprechen*) what one's being is (TW 5, 137). Identity vanishes in its individual discreteness once the border is crossed, once the threat of the other or the possibility of being left "without" disappears. The limit dissolves the independent, separate identity of something and the other (and even that of their reciprocal relation, of their being one-for-the-other) and institutes a common identity—the shared moment of 'being-at-the-limit,' the shared experience of being 'at-the-border.'

In sum, the logical dialectic of finitude shows how the absolutism of the fanatic that holds on to an alleged Absolute beyond all determination and contact with otherness is challenged precisely by the unavoidable

necessity to find and accept determination in relation to the other. But it also shows that such a relation—whatever it may be: mere *Sein-für-Anderes*, *Beschaffenheit*, *Grenze*—leads the determination of the finite on to a position in which the “transition” to ethical life has already and necessarily happened. The advance beyond fanaticism is the “transition” to ethical life. Now within this realm new and specific problems of identity, new and specific forms of fanaticism, this time ‘collective’ fanaticism, emerge. But this is another part of the story. Let me now turn again to the *Philosophy of Right* to see how Hegel obtains the figure of modern hypocrisy from the inner development of the absolutism of moral conscience.

2.2. The Logic of Fanaticism: Advancing Despite Oneself— The Hypocrisy of Essence

We have seen how moral conscience advances between the two apparently identical positions of refusing to give determinacy to the form of duty, and of dissolving into itself—or bringing to “evaporation” (*verflüchtigt*) in the depths of its inwardness—“all determinateness of right, duty, and existence.” In the latter case, on the basis of an “absolute reflection” (R §138 Remark), conscience proclaims itself “the *judging power*” (*die urteilende Macht*) (R §139) uniquely positioned to decide which “contents” can be accepted as true and morally valid, ultimately, however, implying the “vanity” (*Eitelkeit*) of all contents on the basis of their utter arbitrariness. What we have here is the point in which Orgon’s naïve absolutism connects with Tartuffe’s hypocrisy. The line separating the good and the evil conscience, intransigent absolutism and radical relativism, the self-appointed righteousness of moral interiority and the reflected duplicity of the hypocrite is a thin one indeed.

At this point, Hegel shows how moral conscience *advances* by taking on the different figures of the evil reflected will, namely, hypocrisy and the “subjectivity that declares itself the Absolute” (R §140). The complexity that the figure of hypocritical conscience displays over naïve fanaticism, that is, first and foremost, its fundamental duplicity, is due to its reflected character. As I have claimed, its development is the advance of the logic of essence. Self-consciousness knows how to discover a “*positive aspect*” in its action, which is its concrete and positive end, and herein it locates the loftiness of “duty and admirable intention.” On the basis of this positive side, “self-consciousness is able to assert that its action is good both *for others* and *for itself*.” This is the more advanced step that this figure of consciousness displays if compared to the naïve fanatic, who is instead simply oblivious

to the determination of the good either in relation to himself or to others. The good is absolute, not determined in relation to something or someone, and should be done *for its own sake*. Indeed, Orgon does not hesitate to act against his own good and that of other family members. Now, however, self-consciousness through its self-reflection has gained awareness of the “universal character of the will,” hence is able to detect, in contrast to such universality, “the essential *negative* content of its action.” Hegel maintains that on the basis of this awareness, “to assert that this action is good for *others* is *hypocrisy*, and to assert that it is good for the self-consciousness *itself* is to go to the even greater extreme of *subjectivity that declares itself the Absolute*” (R §140). This complex figure, Hegel notices, is the “highest point” to which subjectivity has advanced within the standpoint of morality and is a specifically modern, or rather contemporary, phenomenon. Moreover, in insisting on the fact that the widespread phenomenon of hypocrisy receives, in his time, the support of philosophical doctrines (of all kinds of *Schwärmerei* and Kantian philosophy, in the first place), Hegel points to a sort of normalization of hypocrisy as a peculiar trait of his epoch. Hypocrisy is so diffuse it is not even discussed that much, certainly not as in earlier times (R §140 Remark: TW 7, 273f.).⁵⁵ Hypocrisy is the power to subvert and pervert (*verkehren*) all values by turning good into evil and evil into good (TW 7, 265): absolutism as radical relativism (and vice versa). This is the failed or negative advance—properly an impasse in the development of modern subjectivity—with which the movement of the sphere of morality culminates. It is the “movement from nothing to nothing and through it back to itself” that characterizes reflection in Essence (TW 6, 24). But this is also what leads, dialectically, to the true, systematically momentous advancement taking place away from morality in the “transition” to ethical life (R §141).

In Hegel's analysis, the figure of hypocrisy displays different moments. “Acting with a bad conscience,” namely, knowing the universal, willing the particular, and being fully aware of their discrepancy, is the first moment, but is not itself hypocrisy. “Hypocrisy includes in addition the formal determination of untruthfulness (*Unwahrheit*), whereby evil is in the first place represented *for others* as *good*.” Hypocrisy is the action of playing a part (or putting on a mask) in order to deceive. It implies the posturing attitude of positedness or *Gesetzsein*, the duplicity of which presupposes and requires an audience capable of being deceived. While the fanatic is egocentrically oriented and simply denies his relation to others (they are swallowed up in the all-consuming indistinctness of his absolute), the hypocrite in his

duplicitous or reflected conscience always addresses an audience, needs the other as the addressee of his untruthfulness—even to the point of making himself into this other. Indeed, Hegel recognizes that to the hypocritical attitude belongs an aspect of fundamental self-deceit: the evil conscience makes up “good reasons” and rational, allegedly ‘objective’ arguments as means “of justifying *for himself* the evil he does” (TW 7, 268). The perversion of evil and falsity is itself reflected back into conscience: the hypocrite is prey to his own deceit and illusion.⁵⁶ He *is* entirely the *Schein* he creates—the latter being, in effect, his entirely negative essence. Hypocritical subjectivity deceives itself by taking its subjective reasons for objective grounds. In addition, Hegel notices that in the hands of the hypocrite even the acknowledgment of one’s error has the consequence of making error irrelevant (TW 7, 275f.). As we have seen, this is a powerful strategy of Tartuffe: “to err is human” (TW 7, 276) is, indeed, how Tartuffe construes his way out once he is unmasked in his clumsy seduction attempt.

At stake in the progression outlined by Hegel is, crucially, the issue of (moral) authority. Herein the individual’s conviction trumps all other authorities—the most qualified theologian, god, the state (TW 7, 275). And when “every subject is immediately accorded the honor of providing the abstract good with a content” (TW 7, 269) or to decide what is “essential” in intentions (TW 7, 270), the result is the anarchy of manifold individual good intentions and convictions all absolutized as last authorities to which the universal abstract good is brought back but ultimately all set in irreducible conflict with each other (TW 7, 270, 276). As hypocrisy meets fanaticism yet again, the lack of an intersubjective ethical context in which to unmask the deceit and in which actual actions (and not just intentions and subjective convictions) can be judged (in an act of objective, principled *Beurteilen* and *Richten*: TW 7, 274) only perpetrates the illusion and blocks, as it were, the advancement beyond these figures. Morality cannot go farther than this point.

The absolutist subjectivity of modern times culminates, significantly, in the figure of irony. Herein Hegel mentions Plato and Socratic irony, but only in order to immediately distance it from the modern way of action he is considering (which rather goes back to his contemporaries Solger and Schlegel). For, most importantly, Plato uses irony in relation to Socrates’s defense of the idea of truth and justice, which are solidly held in their objectivity against the sophistry and relativism of his ancient contemporaries. Irony, however, is a way (almost a method) of “treating consciousness, not the idea itself” (TW 7, 277). I will not dwell on this topic here. Suffice it to

say that irony is the same self-centered negative attitude of absolutistic subjectivity that, recognizing only the action of an all-powerful subject, in the end completely dissolves all values and truth in the vacuity and emptiness (*Eitelkeit*) of mere self-enjoyment (TW 7, 278f.). The important systematic point is that the only possible true advancement in the realization of freedom staged in the *Philosophy of Right* takes place immediately after the figure of fanatic, absolutistic, hypocritical moral subjectivity has been exhausted in all its modern incarnations. Both for freedom and for consciousness the true advance is made only by the action of overcoming the impasse or the dead end constituted by this culmination of moral conscience. In order to be “the substantial universal of freedom,” the good must be determined objectively or in actuality—and not only in and by conscience. But conscience must accept its objective determination just as well (R §141). Both sides—the good and conscience—are now united in the need to gain this broader dimension of recognized objective and indeed intersubjective validity and actualized and self-actualizing freedom, which is the sphere of ethical life, the level of the concept's free action (R §141 Remark).

2.3. The Logic of Fanaticism: Advancing Through the Crisis—Judging

Both the naïve fanatic and the duplicitous hypocrite close the belief-action gap, namely, the gap (and the delay in decision-making) separating the belief or the moral command based on a set of beliefs, and the willingness to act upon that belief or command.⁵⁷ The fanatic immediately (and impatiently) acts on his absolutistic convictions—with the immediacy and indeterminateness characterizing the way in which the action of being advances (in this way accomplishing the opposite of what he claims, i.e., willing the absolute but doing in fact the conditioned particular). The hypocrite acknowledges the difference separating the universal and the particular but deceptively (for others as well as for himself) conflates it in his action so as to dissolve (or “evaporate”) all moral distinctions. This is the stance of *Gesetzsein* in which posturing engulfs in its negativity beliefs as well as acts (“from nothing to nothing”). If my action is good because my beliefs make it good (R §140 Remark: TW 7, 274), then there is no way in which my beliefs can ever be found mistaken—neither before nor after action takes place. Close-mindedness (and single-mindedness) characterizes both figures, and close-mindedness is the attitude that closing the belief-action gap sets itself beyond any possible falsification. In both cases, I suggested, action as well as consciousness are blocked in their inner development. Although the

fanatic impatiently rushes into action, the action does not truly advance. It cannot advance because the pause essential to all advancement—the gap or the delay separating belief and action—is erased. Indeed, the discrepancy between belief and action is the mark of our “fallibility,” that is, of our finitude. It goes hand in hand with the recognition of our incapacity to live up entirely to our ideals, that is, with the recognition of the fact that, all action being particular and determined, determination cannot be avoided.⁵⁸ The fanatic, by contrast, does not recognize and does not accept his fallibility—his action, claimed as immediately instantiating his absolutely held belief (as well as his belief in an Absolute), is the action of the finite that pretends to be infinite but only acts as the “bad infinite” with an inconclusive repetition of an unrealizable *Sollen*.⁵⁹ In such repetition or in such an unreal *Sollen*, however, there is no advancement. The belief that is held as absolutely valid (and absolutely commanded or, alternatively, commanded by the Absolute or by God) can never be found mistaken, can never be falsified. Indeed, “from the fanatic’s perspective, the delay principle makes no sense.”⁶⁰ This is Orgon’s blindness—to himself and his own action as well as to the world. But it is also the culmination of the hypocritical consciousness, the subjectivity that claims itself absolute and rejects even the intimation of fallibility: the hypocrite justifies his own opportunism with a relativistic posture that complements the one of the absolutist. Even the claim “to err is human” (TW 7, 276), when pronounced by Tartuffe, is an absolutism rather than acknowledgment of a mistake.

As we have seen, action (and consciousness) advances beyond fanaticism once the claim of pure morality (of moral or religious enthusiasm or *Schwärmerei*) makes the transition into the objective, intersubjective, institutional world of spirit’s ethical life. Herein absolutism is necessarily checked, challenged, and undermined by an objective, shared reality that individual conscience cannot ignore—by the concrete universal of ethical and juridical laws and principles that replaces the abstraction of the absolute moral good (R §141). But absolutism is also checked and dismantled by the innumerable conflicts that arise once the actions of many individuals intersect. At the same time, morality is reframed, contextualized, and brought to a compromise within the objective framework of practical laws and principles. This is ultimately Hegel’s systematic critique of Kantian moral formalism: duty for duty’s sake is not a formula *for action*. Moreover, duty always has a content that is an *ethical* content (not an arbitrarily selected individual belief). Certainly, this does not mean that fanaticism is defied once and for all when the transition to ethical life is accomplished.

For, fanaticism may (and does) very well arise again within the sphere of ethical life. Herein, however, it necessarily displays a different figure: it becomes, for one thing, a collective or group phenomenon, perhaps even a national one. Accordingly, for this type of fanaticism an ethical (political, juridical, institutional) 'cure' is also required.⁶¹ However, if we bring the belief-action gap into focus, we can see that there is another way in which the advancement beyond fanaticism can be construed. This is the perspective that can make us understand how thinking's advancement in the Logic of the Concept sanctions a progress in the synchronic structure of the logical *Fortgang* through Being, Essence, the Concept, and eventually clarifies in what sense Hegel suggests that the sphere of ethical life being the realm of freedom's actualization should be best understood on the basis of the Logic of the Concept (R §141 Remark).

The moment of stasis and suspended pause that separates belief from action allowing reconsideration of the validity of the belief in relation to the tenability of the action, is the place occupied by judgment. Now this gap is necessary for action to truly advance. The pause or "stasis" in the action, however, is a moment of "crisis." And this is the (self-)critical moment where the truth—of one's beliefs, of possible as well as accomplished actions, and one's very identity—is first allowed to come to light. In the suspension of the crisis the critical action of judgment takes place. This is revealed by the etymological proximity of κρίσις and κρίνω. As in the case of illness in ancient medicine, the 'crisis' indicates the crucial stage in which the advance in the course of the disease is decided: either the patient recovers, getting better from that point on, or she dies, getting progressively or suddenly worse. But as we have seen in the opening of the chapter, the crisis is also that decisive middle moment, *nel cammin di nostra vita*, from which the action of Dante's *Commedia* takes off in its otherworldly journey. Judgment, however, requires a mind-set that is the opposite of the fanatic's: we have learned this from Dorine and Clèante in Molière's *Tartuffe*. Judgment requires open-mindedness and patience; it requires one's openness to compromise. Recall Hegel's insistence on the importance of "patience" when at stake is the dialectical "work of the negative"—the patience that belongs to the speculative concept against the impatience of intellectual intuition.⁶² Judgment requires the willingness to dwell in the middle, in the belief-action gap,⁶³ and to wait for the (right) moment in which the next step in the action can be envisioned and undertaken. For, this step, just like in the course of an illness, is an immanent step in (and of) the advancing process itself. It cannot be forced on it by an external intervention. Let me

now illustrate the features of this last stage of Hegel's idea of the advancing action—the level of the Concept—through an example.

Plato's *Symposium* opens with the intriguing account of Socrates's unusual habits delivered by Aristodemus, and it culminates with Alcibiades's remarkable story regarding Socrates's strange behavior during the military campaign of Potidaea. Upon meeting Socrates all dressed up⁶⁴ on his way to Agathon's banquet, Aristodemus is asked to come along to Agathon's house. He accepts, a bit embarrassed at the thought of showing up uninvited, and makes clear that he wants to arrive in Socrates's company so as to indicate that he has been invited, after all, by Socrates himself. On the way to Agathon's, however, Socrates becomes absorbed in his own thoughts and falls behind his companion. Aristodemus repeatedly waits for him, but Socrates encourages him to just go ahead alone. This puts Aristodemus in a "ridiculous position" when he arrives, all by himself, at Agathon's house. He shows up indeed uninvited, as there is still no sign of Socrates. Now everybody at Agathon's is waiting and looking for him. This perplexing situation goes on until a servant discovers Socrates calmly standing on the neighbor's porch with no intention to leave. While Agathon insists on summoning Socrates inside, Aristodemus explains this behavior as a habit against which all persuasion is vain: "occasionally," Aristodemus says, "he turns aside, anywhere at random, and there he stands."⁶⁵ As nothing can be done to bring Socrates in, dinner starts without him. Socrates is clearly traveling on a parallel road that intersects with what seems the straightforward road-plot of the dialogue only tangentially or, as we soon discover, it intersects with it precisely *in the middle*. Socrates's path—physically as well as mentally—is not the preordered, taken-for-granted linear road that leads from a given starting point to the final destination. Socrates's advance is meandering and disruptive, has its own time and its own space as it follows a flow entirely of its own. Eventually, Socrates joins the banquet. He comes "after what, for him, was no great delay, as the others were only half-way through dinner" (*Symposium*, 175c). Socrates arrives in the middle—and it is from this middle that the argument of the dialogue takes its departure.

Toward the end of the *Symposium*, Alcibiades offers another famous example of Socrates's strange habits. Socrates is serving in the Athenian army during the campaign at Potidaea. And this is how Alcibiades depicts him in one occasion: "Immersed in some problem at dawn, he stood still in the same spot considering it; and when he found it a tough one, he would not give it up but stood there trying." As a crowd of curious fellow soldiers gathers, puzzled by Socrates's behavior, he continues to stand still

in the same place all night until another dawn comes and the sun rises; then he walks away, after having offered a prayer to the sun (*Symposium*, 220c–d). What is Socrates doing in this stillness? Why this standing still in the same place?

In his book *A Case for Irony*, Jonathan Lear offers an unusual reading of Alcibiades's anecdote of Socrates at Potidaea, which Christine Korsgaard considers an outright betrayal and a complete "re-writing" of Plato's story. The usual interpretation, followed instead by Korsgaard, is that Socrates stands still because he is occupied with some theoretical problem (perhaps a highly abstract mathematical problem) and is not "giving it up."⁶⁶ She contends that in his perseverance in the solution of such a problem, despite being in the midst of the military camp and in the night before a crucial battle, Socrates displays the capacity for concentration and utter "self-possession" proper to the true philosopher. He does not let external forces (be it the incumbent battle, the weather, the approaching night, his companions staring at him, etc.) influence his behavior, which is entirely determined from within. Lear claims that Korsgaard's reading is ultimately Alcibiades's own understanding of Socrates's behavior, and his point is that "Alcibiades just doesn't get it." "There is a sense in which what Alcibiades says is true," concedes Lear. "Socrates *is* thinking about *a* problem; but Alcibiades completely misses what that truth is"⁶⁷—he completely misses the nature of the problem at stake. For Lear this is an important point, because it is what makes of the anecdote a perfect example of Platonic irony—the irony, which most interpreters, by sticking to Alcibiades's understanding, also fundamentally miss. Crucially, on the standard interpretation, Socrates's coming to a halt and standing still in the midst of the military camp is an utterly contingent detail, a mere curiosity with no philosophical significance (for, sure enough, a person can very well be absorbed in thought and walk at the same time). By contrast, Lear draws to the center Socrates's complete stillness. On his view, herein lies the true significance of the story. And in this he is, I believe, absolutely right. Socrates's stillness *is* the central *philosophical* point of the story. Lear maintains that "Socrates' coming to a halt is a necessary outcome and manifestation of the situation he is in; Socrates's thinking is practical thinking: it is directly focused on himself and what he will do. *It literally concerns the next step he will take*"—it concerns, in the perspective that interests me here, the crucial problem of the advancement, of how one ought to move on from where one presently stands. Socrates is standing still not because he is too busy thinking, but because he *cannot walk*, not knowing what his next step should be. The problem here is

the practical, literal problem of taking the next step—of moving out of his stillness and physically advancing in space. Thus, Lear concludes, his “standing still is the form that his knowing that he does not know takes” in the practical sphere.⁶⁸

Now recall how the true advancement is made according to the second moment of the absolute method: not by striving toward an external goal (striving belongs to the beginning, not to the advancement), not in the restless fleeing the emptiness of the beginning or the contradictory predicament in which one finds oneself: advancement is made only by attending to one’s present state—by attending to the pure logical determinations “in and for themselves”—by listening to what things “in and for themselves” have to say, by enduring the contradiction that they immanently reveal, and by carrying it through to the last consequences. In other words, only by staying where one is does one truly move on. Stasis is, dialectically, the condition of all true advancement—even more properly, however, it is itself the moment of true advancement. Stasis, Thucydides famously reminds us, is a deeply contradictory predicament: it is both the crisis of the process, in which everything comes to a standstill, and the revolutionary moment that subverts everything within the process, setting everything in motion. This is the methodological structure of all movements of immanent self-transformation.

Thus, I want to push Lear’s insistence on the philosophical relevance of Socrates’s stillness a step further. On the basis of what we have seen so far, my suggestion is that Socrates’s stillness is not only the actual embodiment and the performance of the practical *problem* of advancing but is also its very *solution*. Socrates’s stillness is the physical embodiment of the crisis he is in. But this crisis is also the place in which judgment takes place, thereby leading out of the crisis—to the advancement beyond it. It is *by standing still* that Socrates first becomes able to take the next step and move on (and, eventually, displays the most courageous behavior in the battle of Potidaea). Again, coming to a halt, standing still, and listening to the conflicting possibilities contained in that stillness is precisely how one moves on—it is the true “method” or the “road” for advancing. The stillness that interrupts the flow of movement is what carries Socrates on to his next step—it is what makes movement an immanent process of self-transformation and not an accidental searching about; it is what lends to movement its properly dynamic cipher and does so dialectically or by way of its opposite. Ultimately, in the narrative of the *Symposium*, it is with his stillness that Socrates steps into the circle of Eros. This is the real

point of Alcibiades's praise of Socrates, which, in line with all the preceding discourses and in particular following Diotima's, is the final praise of Eros. To pursue self-transformation Eros must not be assumed as an instrument or means to some other goal—it must be viewed as an end in itself. This is the meaning of Socrates's dwelling in stillness: his behavior does not indicate a transitory state, there only to be overcome; dialectically, stillness is the very place from which and in which true transformation can occur. To transform oneself one must sustain the demand of the advancement: one must consent on being carried away (and estranged) from oneself toward otherness in the process that Eros instigates. That is, one must consent on coming reflectively to a halt, interrogating the silence and the possibility that surround us, accepting the contradiction embodied in our very predicament. In effect, in doing so we do perform a practical contradiction: we stand still and halt movement in order to move on. Eros carries us away by freezing us into stillness and leaves us deeply transformed—this is the recurring description of Eros in Sappho and in the early lyrical poets. Plato turns this description into a living paradigm of philosophical self-possession and self-transformation. Existentially, however, the contradictory predicament of the erotic advancement signals a crucial moment of crisis. Socrates is an exemplar of self-possession *precisely because* he regularly experiences crises, disruptions, and moments of conflict.⁶⁹ Ultimately, the crisis brought forth by Eros, the demon of the middle, is crucial in order to achieve the unity of the self, or, in Diotima's words, “to bind the whole into one.”⁷⁰

Socrates's story is a clear example of what it means to advance according to the lesson given by the pure thinking that has immanently progressed up to the end of Hegel's logic. Herein the true advance is the *Fortgang* of the concept caught in the middle moment of its critical split, namely, judgment. *Urteil* sanctions the concept's crisis but is also the crucial moment in which the process of realization first gets going. Judgment is the true action of advancing, whereby the “subject” is pulled out of the inward yet meaningless *Ansichsein* it reclaimed in Being, and the unreal *Ding-an-sich* is overcome in the true, reconstituted reality of the concept (TW 6, 307)—a reality that is indeed “re-constituted” (*wiederhergestellt*: TW 6, 309, 3) after the concept has been split. Judgment as the movement of the concept's advance is both the split and the reconstitution of the unity of the concept. Moreover, the advancement is both the forward movement to further determination and the backward movement that finally gives a ground to the self (TW 6, 570). This double dynamic tension generates the stillness of the in-between and marks the peculiar dialectical character of the advancement.

But before coming to my conclusion I want to dwell briefly on another case of advancement through the stillness of a crisis—another example that we find in the Greek world, which in effect may have recognized and cherished this predicament more than our contemporary world. In his pamphlet *Quomodo quis suos in virtute sentiat profectus*, Plutarch addresses the problem of how one can be and become conscious and aware of her advance in the quest for virtue. Against the Stoics, Plutarch defends the claim that virtue is never given or attained whole and perfected but is instead a process that progressively advances through stages. From this it follows that not the wise man alone is virtuous. Moreover, Plutarch maintains that this advancement can be measured by the consciousness that the subject can gain on her own progress by considering a series of factors in her life. The essay is dedicated to discuss the factors or signs from which the advancement can be measured. One of these factors emerges by considering the occasions of perplexity, errant thought, and vacillation that the students of philosophy encounter at the beginning of their commitment to the philosophical life. Significantly, at stake for Plutarch is the difficulty of the predicament of being-in-the-middle, that is, the predicament of the advancement in its most proper Hegelian sense. This is the condition of those “who have left behind the land which they know and are not yet in sight of the land to which they are sailing” (*Moralia*, 77d–e). Plutarch illustrates this predicament with a story about Diogenes of Sinope at the beginning of his philosophical career. While the Athenians were celebrating a holiday with public banquets, theater performances, and informal gatherings happily protracted all night long, “Diogenes, huddled up in a corner trying to sleep, fell into some very disturbing and disheartening reflections how he from no compulsion had entered upon a toilsome and strange mode of life, and as a result of his own act he was now sitting” without taking part in the common celebrations. It is clearly a situation of crisis—a crisis that isolates Diogenes or that plunges him even deeper in his isolation. What is the way out of this crisis? Just to stay still and see what happens in the small corner in which he has retreated. As Diogenes is entertaining these thoughts, “a mouse, it is said, crept up and busied itself with the crumbs of his bread.” And this is the “turning point” or *metabolē* of the crisis. As this happens, Diogenes “once more recovered his spirits, and said to himself as though rebuking himself for cowardice, ‘What are you saying, Diogenes? Your leavings make a feast for this creature, but as for you, a man of birth and breeding, just because you cannot be getting drunk over there, reclining on soft and flowery couches, do you bewail and lament your lot?’” (*Moralia*, 77f–78a). What shakes the philosopher’s conscience

out of the crisis and makes him move on and advance in his commitment to philosophy is his willingness to dwell in the discomfiting stillness of his crisis (instead of being distracted by the ongoing festivities, for example), and his capacity to listen to what the stasis he is in can bring to him. It is in the openness of this still space that the entirely accidental and indeed hardly noticeable intervention of the mouse gains a pivotal meaning—and induces judgment. And judgment makes things move on. Diogenes's words to himself *are* the true advancement.

3. Transforming the Advancement

We have now to take stock of where the long preceding analysis has finally led us. In this chapter, we have confronted a series of 'cases' or figures that instantiate the differential logic of the advancing action—or, alternatively, in the negative, of the action that is blocked in its advance. The cases discussed with the help of Moliere's *Tartuffe* and of Plato's *Symposium* offer a concrete exemplification of the typology of the advancing action that the three spheres of Hegel's logic—Being, Essence, the Concept—articulate in their basic, fundamental structure. While the "absolute method" that concludes the logic tells us what all advancing actions have in *common* precisely to the extent that they are advancing actions, the synchronic comparison between the advancement according to the Logic of Being, of Essence, and of the Concept is meant to bring to the forefront the *differences* that separate the types of *Fortgang* presented respectively in the three logical spheres.

With regard to the transformation that the structure of the advancement has displayed in these three logical figures, we can notice, first, that advance is made only when *determination* occurs, and determination is what radically *transforms* us. The advancement is a deep and radical act of self-transformation through determination. Identity does not preexist such transformation but is rather precisely its result. In the case of Being, determination is resisted and blocked: the naïve fanatic indiscriminately rejects determination, which would destroy his Absolute. And yet, determination inexorably occurs because such is the nature of the finite—the fanatic either succumbs to his fanaticism or is 'cured,' in which case he is turned into the "other of himself." Fanaticism is dialectically a self-defeating position as it cannot escape determination. In the case of Essence, the unmasking of the hypocrite implies running through all the possibilities of his deceitful action (this is the alleged "power" of absolute subjectivity), and the negativity of

self-destruction is the essence that needs to be fully exhausted before the real conversion or transition can take place. This is a momentous *metabolé* to a radically different context. Only in the Concept is transformation truly a becoming-what-one-is: advance takes place by staying where one already is. And yet the transformation that this stillness—and stasis—implies is deep. It is the solution of the subject's crisis. And the solution is, again, determination. It is the determination of freedom in its actualization; it is the act of gaining orientation and direction in one's movement forward but is also the act of gaining grounding in one's movement backward into oneself. In this latter case, the false inwardness of the hypocrite—truly inscrutable and indeterminate—becomes clear and fully determinate.

Second, advancement implies the *confrontation with otherness and with others*. In the cases of Being and Essence the close-mindedness of the fanatic-absolutist and the single-mindedness with which the hypocrite pursues his interests and enjoyment blocks the confrontation (let alone the recognition) of the other. And yet the other is there, and is, even unacknowledged, the source of determination. In both cases, the advancement is made by moving beyond one's absolute, isolationist self toward the other. Eventually, this is the movement back to oneself *as* "other." At this stage, the other is either feared as a threat to be pushed away or seen as an instrument for the pursuit of one's ends, with no value in itself, to be used and colonized but never recognized. In the Concept we have an apparently reverse situation. The self as the concept is the organic unity of its moments. The externality and foreignness of the other has been overcome; the connection of the self to the other is recognized and is precisely what constitutes the concept's unity. But this unity must be split again and change itself in order to advance beyond the tranquil sameness of the concept's moments. Otherness must be recreated in order for the next step to be undertaken. And this is the function of judgment. Judgment splits the unity of the concept and produces a new, indeed, an advanced unity. Ultimately, what we have here is Hegel's crucial thesis that in order to be meaningfully "the good" the abstract and formal moral good must be contextualized and actualized in the intersubjective and institutional context of ethical life. The advancement of the concept is the "transition" to ethical life. This is Socrates's move out of his stillness in the morning of the battle of Potidaea.

Finally, the last lesson that we can gain from the comparison of the three strategies of pursuing the advancement leads us to a closer look at the mind-set at stake respectively in the three cases. As stated earlier: the close-mindedness and single-mindedness of the fanatic and hypocrite block one's

growth and development. But Hegel's dialectic shows that these are, truly, untenable and short-lived attitudes because they are ultimately self-defying. The reality that they refuse to face and acknowledge will eventually catch up to them. Open-mindedness, by contrast, does not need the display (and the posturing) of doctrine and lofty ideas. "The truly pious," says Clèante to Orgon, "are not those who make the biggest show." They are the ones who simply can judge and tell the difference "between hypocrisy and true religion," between the mask and the face itself, between appearance and reality, the shadow and the substance, base coin and true coin (*Tartuffe*, I, 5, 118). Open-mindedness is indeed, in a very Kantian way, the capacity to judge—*Urteilkraft* as *erweiterte Denkungsart* or, quite simply (and yet not so simply), as *sensus communis*.⁷¹

Appendix: "Living in the Interregnum"

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—
 Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l'entre deux guerres*—
 Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
 Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
 Because one has only learnt to get the better words
 For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
 One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
 Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate

—T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, East Coker, V

In the previous chapter, I have referred to the action that advances or the middle moment of the method of Hegel's logic as the "crisis" of the unfolding action. This crisis is a moment of acute contradiction and conflict that implies a "stasis" in the movement. And yet, at the same time, the crisis sanctions the "turning point" (the *Wendepunkt* or *metabole*: TW 6, 564) of the story that crystallizes around the method. Dialectically, it is precisely the standstill in the movement that produces the true advance by creating the space for judgment, and thereby for the overcoming of the crisis. Stasis is itself a contradictory predicament: it is the moment of suspension and gathering from which judgment arises, and it is the moment of implosion and collapse of the universal, its radical split.¹ I shall also indicate this crisis-stasis as the predicament of "living in the interregnum."² Now I want

to dwell on this famous and often-invoked formulation, which takes our analysis back to the general problem of historical actuality raised at the beginning of this work. Among the central questions that I have claimed Hegel's logic of action can help us address is, on the one hand, the issue of understanding the historical transformations under way in our present time, and on the other hand the connected problem of how we can change and transform the ways in which we think and act in our world. Recall that our initial problem was a problem of historical immanence: How can transformation be detected in moments of crisis given that we live in such moments, given that we are immersed in and part of the crisis itself, given that our conceptual apparatus is deeply rooted in it, that is, is the 'ideology' of the present? How can we become conscious of the situations in which a turning point in the movement of historical change takes place if the distance and detachment of an observation standpoint is lacking? Can true judgment—hence a fundamental change in the way we think—arise in the middle of the crisis and lead us out of it, advancing beyond it? I shall address these questions by first shedding some light on the life in the interregnum, on the predicament of being-in-the-middle.

I have suggested that if we follow the indication of Hegel's method the issue takes on a different form than what these questions seem *prima facie* to entail. For the possibility of the advancement lies in the "patience"—and indeed the "courage"—that makes us capable of enduring the standstill of the stasis (TW 3, 24), in the capacity to dwell in the conflict and contradiction that animates the interregnum, not in the frantic search for a way out of the standstill, not in the attempt to flee the discomfort of the crisis. Indeed, the attitude that avoids contradiction—whether by negating it, by ignoring or repressing it, or by normalizing it—is always an absolutist attitude. In fact, the absolutism that characterizes all forms of fanaticism and fundamentalism is ultimately the negation of the possibility of conflict, and this, in turn, is the negation of the possibility of advancing. If there is only one true norm *and this is valid absolutely* then there can be no true conflict as there can be no alternative norm that can meaningfully contradict it.³ In this case, however, there is also no true transformation but only a repetition of the same absolute. By contrast, the act of acknowledging in a self-critical stance the reality of conflict is already the first condition of the advancement. Summoning the patience and the courage to dwell in it is the second condition. As Slavoj Žižek puts it: "There are situations when the only truly 'practical' thing to do is to resist the temptation to engage immediately and to 'wait and see' by means of a patient, critical analysis."⁴

It would be easy to underestimate the problem by claiming that the resistance to change, hence the incapacity to make the advance, only concerns the extreme fanatics, that is, those who by no means accept a different opinion, make their own position into an absolute unchanging value, and the like, and to retort that these fanatics are rare and that the norm is certainly never fanaticism itself. However, there is an aspect in which the norm (or normality) is in fact already a sort of dangerous historical 'absolutism'—the absolutism of the present, I shall call it, and we are all complicit in this. Antonio Gramsci aptly put this point as follows:

Il fatto [. . .] a cui non si bada è questo; che i modi di vita appaiono a chi li vive come assoluti, come 'naturali,' così come si dice, e che è già una grandissima cosa il mostrarne la 'storicità,' il dimostrare che essi sono giustificati in quanto esistono certe condizioni, ma mutate queste non sono più giustificati, ma 'irrazionali.'⁵

This "natural" absolutism of the present is the absolutism of what Hegel calls *das Bekannte*—what is obvious and under everyone's eyes but for this very reason generally not truly known and recognized (*das Erkannte*) (TW 3, 35). It constitutes the 'universal' as the pervasive, dominant dimension in which everything in the contemporary world is inscribed for consciousness (even that which remains unconscious—and this universal often does remain unconscious). This is the natural absolutism of the contemporary universal. But this universal has a dynamic structure; it is a *dynamic universal*. And its dynamism already implies the necessity of overcoming the absolutism 'naturally' nested within it. If the universal encounters a crisis, if it is apparently torn apart and even dissolved by the crisis, the crisis is not its end but a necessary moment of its dynamic advancement and transformation. To discover this, however, is not easy within the position of immanence proper to the present. The function of the method (or, for Gramsci, of the organic intellectual class)⁶ then is to bring to light the advancement implied in the crisis, the necessity of the transition (in reality and in consciousness) from *das Bekannte* to *das Erkannte*.

Gramsci sees the natural absolutism of the present as a consequence of the naïve position of immanence: "ways of life" appear "absolute" to whoever is immersed in them because and as long as she is immersed in them. This position is characterized by the utter immediacy that constitutes its apparent naturalness. Herein immanence means also to occupy a sort of

totalizing blind spot—a place in which no other ways of life can be actually seen or even imagined or thought of besides one's own. For this reason, the present way of life counts as the only absolute one—the only actual and possible way of life. It is this immediacy and naturalness that is shaken in situations of historical crisis, giving visibility to possible or actual alternatives—to cultural clashes and conflicts—in reality as well as in thinking. Gramsci points to a first “momentous” way out of the absolutism of the present (“è già una grandissima cosa”), namely, the act of recognizing the “historicity” of the forms of life otherwise declared absolute. For these forms “are justified because there exist certain conditions,” which are always and necessarily historical, changing conditions—and this means quite simply that those forms of life are not absolute but relative to or dependent on specific conditions. It is to these conditions that the present ways of life owe their justification, their validity, and even normativity over the subjects that practice them and endorse them so fully and unconditionally as to see no alternative to them. On these changing conditions hinges the “consensus” of the masses to the ruling class. In fact, absolutism and fundamentalism, which we have seen are attitudes that negate change and resist the advancement, ultimately amount to embracing an ahistorical position—the ahistoricity of an essentialist static universal, of alleged essences and original foundations removed from change and impenetrable to critique.⁷ The absolutism of the present responds to the same logic. It follows, however, that as those conditions change, as they do sooner or later change because of their historicity, the accepted justification for those present ways of life no longer holds. At this point, the absolute loses its validity and becomes “irrational”—or better, the attitude of holding on to its changelessness and of refusing to advance becomes irrational. This critique of absolutism and fundamentalism through the claim of history—or through the historical dynamism of the universal—is a position that Gramsci shares with Hegel. On Hegel's view, Gramsci's universal that has become “irrational” is the “dead positive” that no longer has a grip on people's lives and no longer is truly alive, actual, present—or *vernünftig*, as it were. The absolutism of the present—of the universal represented by the current forms of life, social practices, and culture—meets its crisis in the moment of historical transition in which the conditions of its existence and justification change. The present form of life remains apparently the same, resisting change. Yet as its conditions are changing or have already changed, that way of life is emptied of meaning and validity from within, often hosting opposite and conflicting customs and practices. Crisis is the name of the discrepancy between

the fixity of a form of life and the transformation of its conditions, that is, the transformation of the context or the broader universal from which that form of life receives its meaning and its power. This is the moment in which the universal is no longer hegemonic.

Gramsci has introduced the concept of “interregnum” to express this situation of crisis, the dynamism of Hegelian “transition” in which historical transformation and irrational immutability contradictorily coexist, in which change happens and advance is made by driving to the extreme the conflict within the stubbornly persisting and static present forms of life. The interregnum is the predicament of being-in-the-middle, the paradigmatic moment of the action that advances by refusing to advance. The concept of interregnum has consistently demonstrated its diagnostic function with regard to historical crises throughout the twentieth century up to the present. This is Gramsci's famous definition of the crisis-interregnum as the condition of being-in-the-middle of historical transformations: “La crisi consiste appunto nel fatto che il vecchio muore e il nuovo non può nascere: in questo interregno si verificano I fenomeni morbosi più svariati.”⁸ The interregnum is a condition of historical and social pathology; a moment of standstill that stretches between the old and the new; the point in which the ethical contradiction becomes real, that is, is really felt and lived; the moment in which the universal is caught in the contradiction of its dynamic self-transformation. But what is life in the interregnum?

Long before Gramsci, Thucydides developed the concept of stasis as a diagnostic “model” or “method” to be used by the historian to individuate the occurrence of crises—in the *polis* as well as in other social and political configurations and forms of human organization. In book 3 of his *History*, Thucydides uses the concept of stasis to reconstruct, among other particular cases, the paradigmatic stasis of Corcyra—the first stasis occurring during the Peloponnesian War (427 BC).⁹ However, this concept for him is much broader, and as a generalized model is ultimately meant to designate the entire Peloponnesian War as an internal utterly (self-)destructive conflict. In fact, stasis differs from *polemos*.¹⁰ Ultimately, the stasis represented by the Peloponnesian conflict is the turning point of Greek history as reconstructed from Thucydides's present. With the concept of stasis Thucydides addresses the dialectical issue plaguing ancient definitions of stasis—the issue that embodies, in turn, the logical paradox or rather the contradiction of change widely discussed in early Greek philosophy. For one thing, in the condition of stasis the entity in which the condition occurs is and is not at the same time. The entity in question exists as the subject in

which the internal war or pathology takes place but also ceases to exist as the entity it is precisely in the moment in which stasis manifests itself as such. Moreover, Thucydides's use of the model of stasis directly addresses the issue of historical immanence that interests me here. For, the occurrence of stasis, diagnosed on the basis of the symptoms displayed by the political whole, can truly be confirmed or proven true only *after* the conflict is over, not while the conflict is taking place. Indeed, the concept of stasis belongs to Thucydides's historical *methodology*; it is a hermeneutic device, not just an individual factual occurrence or event described by the historian (say, Corcyra in 427 BC). The "idea" or form expressed by the concept of stasis is the structure underlying the actions that "happen and always will happen while human nature remains the same, but which are severer or milder, and different in their manifestations, according as the variations in circumstances present themselves in each case" (III.81.2).¹¹ As structure of collective action, stasis is a conceptual model that allows the historian to detect similar cases under varying empirical conditions. What are then the methodological, diagnostic features of stasis as a generalized model to be used by the historian mindful of the "variations in circumstances" characterizing each individual case?

In the most general sense, stasis is the state of impasse in which opposed forces are radicalized and driven to the extreme with no other objective than to cancel each other out (although even this objective loses its relevance as stasis progresses). It is indeed a state of "excess of savagery," as Thucydides puts it (III.81.1)—the emphasis being clearly set on the *excess*. It has been noted that construing his idea of stasis as a pathology Thucydides does not follow ancient views of health (of the individual as well as the political body) as harmony and balance of multiple factors, and of disease as the rule of one element or force over all others—a common view that can be found, for example, in Alcmaeon of Croton, probably known to Thucydides, but dominant also in Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Stasis is the moment of immanent, internal, and internally produced implosion of the organic whole or universal, the corruption of its essential elements, namely, the *nomoi*—laws, institutions, customs.¹² Thucydides's account brings to light the "revolution" or the inversion of values, as it were, that produces the internal transformation and sometimes the destruction of the *polis*. The moral, ethical, and juridical fabric of the whole is undermined by the fact that everything—family ties, moral values, religious and cultural practices, even language and basic emotions and behaviors—remain apparently the same and yet are radically perverted by taking on an utterly arbitrary and

often opposite meaning as before. This erosion of the basic rules and values of human interaction is ultimately what drives the excess of savagery to which the opposed parties fall prey. Stasis is a state in which no determination is valid because all determinations are or may be valid at any time and in any circumstance and for whoever is upholding them. Arbitrariness has free rein. Absolutism equals radical relativism—or, with Hegel's diagnosis of the perversions, this time, of modern conscience, "hypocrisy" goes hand in hand with the "absolutism of subjectivity" in making all determination as such irrelevant (R §140 Remark). In this situation no advance is possible—no true determination can be gained, no rational (even merely self-interested) objective attained, no honest confrontation, no compromise or conflict resolution reached. Judgment is impossible but becomes also irrelevant, while the extremes of emotion and passion rule undisturbed.¹³ In fact, contradiction being normalized or becoming so diffused as to penetrate everything seems to be made impotent. Under these conditions, as Gramsci puts it, "the new cannot be born." This is the standstill of stasis. Too much, properly everything, is in flux for true, that is, determinate and directed, movement forward to occur. Indeed, the organic forces able to direct the advance from within seem absent. And yet, dialectically, this standstill is the condition of historical change.

The use of language to which Thucydides turns his keen eye reflects this account of stasis. And hand in hand with language goes moral behavior. "The ordinary acceptance of words in their relation to things was changed as men thought fit" (III.82.4). In this way, the meaning and value of actions, speech, customs, family relations, religious and legal practices are utterly perverted. "Reckless audacity came to be regarded as courageous loyalty to party, prudent hesitation as specious cowardice, moderation as a cloak for unmanly weakness [. . .]. Frantic impulsiveness was accounted a true man's part, but caution in deliberation a specious pretext for shrinking. The hot-headed man was always trusted, his opponent suspected" (III.82.4–5). Ultimately, for Thucydides, stasis is a state of mind, an individual and collective mind-set that by profoundly modifying people's actions ultimately transforms the nature of the universal, that is, the collective agent that is the *polis*. Stasis invests the *logoi* and *erga* that define the actors of this history. Under the condition of stasis, human behavior changes its meaning, actions no longer follow any rule or arbitrarily follow conveniently made up rules, and this despite the fact that the old rules still seem to remain in place (III.82.7); actions produce unforeseeable consequences, words become unreliable in their signification despite their being used in apparently the

same way. Thereby the universal of communal life and interaction is maintained but reconfigured in a perverse way, that is, in a way in which the whole no longer functions as a social whole and individuals no longer pursue rational self-interested ends (III.84.2–3). Indeed, as Gramsci suggests, the old forms of life are still there but become “irrational.” Under these conditions the universal collapses. This is stasis. Social practices such as oaths and promises are still exchanged, and yet since their very structure and purpose is rendered contradictory their ethical value is null. “If in any case oaths of reconciliation were exchanged, for the moment only were they binding, since each side had given them merely to meet the emergency, having at the time no other resource” (III.82.7). Importantly, in this regard, the stasis that Thucydides portrays in the case of Corcyra differs from the institutional chaos produced by the plague of Athens (430 BC).¹⁴ The latter is a situation in which social practices, laws, and norms are simply abandoned and entirely disappear as the epidemic’s victims have no strength or will to follow them. Stasis, instead, is a situation in which those institutions do remain in place, but their function and meaning is utterly distorted, so that it is this perversion or inversion that ultimately destroys them. People still exchange oaths and promises—yet what promises become (and what the social structure becomes in which such ‘promises’ are exchanged) under the condition of stasis is really the issue.

Thucydides’s position here resonates deeply with Hegel’s famous critique of Kant’s discussion of promising as example of the imperative of morality. Significantly, at stake in this critique is the crucial transition *Moralität-Sittlichkeit*, and Hegel’s diagnosis of the blocked development of Kant’s “moral standpoint” as the standpoint that remaining closed in its purely moral absolutism, refuses to “make the transition to the concept of ethical life” (R §135 Remark), that is, ultimately refuses to acknowledge its debt toward the intersubjectively constituted universal. To put the argument in simplified form: On Kant’s view, the act of false promising is *morally* wrong because the maxim of meeting an emergency by making a promise with the intention of getting out of it at a future time cannot be universalized. For, to universalize this maxim means to render the very concept of promising logically contradictory and practically untenable as on this premise no one would ever accept promises any longer, that is, promising would become meaningless.¹⁵ On Hegel’s view, by contrast, the contradiction and practical untenability to which the concept of promising is thereby reduced is displayed only once the practice of false promising in emergency situations is recognized as taking place not at the level of abstract morality but within

the ethical context of *Sittlichkeit*. For, the ethical universal frames all human practices and interactions lending to them the meaning they actually have. No human practice and interaction has true meaning (and moral validity) in its absoluteness, that is, in isolation from the social universal. In this sense, the context of ethical life is the necessary presupposition or the “concrete universal” within which alone moral norms (as well as abstract juridical norms) make sense, that is, have an actual effect or efficacy in reality. There is nothing contradictory in false promising as such (or in its abstract concept); what renders the concept practically unacceptable (or unenforceable) is only the fact that promising is an ethical and social practice that binds individuals in a community of rules and values. It is only on this *ethical* basis that Kant's conclusion follows. The subjective prudential maxim of getting out of promises when in distress contradicts the *ethical* institution of promising (not promising as abstract moral norm). Thucydides's account of stasis shows precisely what form the ethical contradiction takes. In line with Hegel's position, Thucydides's point is that individual and social behavior in the pathological state of stasis disintegrates the *ethical* whole by perverting the meaning of its practices. Since customs and laws have no independent existence outside of the ethical whole (i.e., are not carriers of abstract moral values), the contradiction that is brought into them does not call them directly out of existence. The contradiction has *real manifestations*. These constitute the pathological reality of stasis, the reality of dysfunctional ethical institutions. Although individual action still takes place undisturbed, and institutions and conventions still apparently hold, the whole is no longer what it previously was because speech, actions, norms, and conventions take on an utterly perverted significance. This is precisely the internal transformation that the ethical whole undergoes in times of stasis. Thucydides's is not a moral (or moralistic) point; it is an ethical and political point (in the sense of Hegel's *Moralität-Sittlichkeit* distinction).

But Thucydides's analysis offers another example that, confirming the same Hegelian, that is, ethical bent of the concept of stasis, can be used as a critique of Kant's purely moral discussion of imperfect duties to others.¹⁶ “Men do not hesitate, when they seek to avenge themselves upon others, to abrogate in advance the common principles observed in such cases—those principles upon which depends every man's own hope of salvation should he himself be overtaken by misfortune—thus failing to leave them in force against the time when perchance a man in peril shall have need of some of them” (III.84.3). Arbitrariness rules in the state of stasis. Institutions and principles may be upheld in a distorted way or may be entirely abrogated

depending on the individual's whim. However, in point of fact, people do act against their own long-term interest, which makes the irrationality of this state. In this case, in the name of revenge, men invalidate those principles and protections that they may at a later point need for their own survival. The contradiction in the will, whereby the individual (in his subjective maxim) abrogates a principle that he cannot rationally will to universally abrogate—the contradiction that makes the maxim immoral according to Kant or that makes it “impossible to will”¹⁷ that its principle holds universally—is a very real contradiction displayed in real actions with ethical import. It is, however, an *ethical* contradiction, that is, a contradiction affecting the reality and activity of the ethical whole, not a contradiction in an abstract concept valid absolutely in its detached purity. It is a contradiction that results in the excess of blind revenge defining mutual relations among individuals in the situation of stasis, not in an impossibility of the morally determined will (the impossibility to rationally will such an action).

In sum, Thucydides's presentation of stasis as a methodological concept of historical narrative confirms that the ethical universal changes by going through the radical internal crisis—at once a destruction and a radical reconfiguration—brought forth by extremism. In the crisis or split that is stasis all action, individual and collective, of democrats as well as oligarchs, is driven to extremism. Crisis-stasis is, dialectically, a point of dramatic standstill, the opposite of change, and the situation of radical flux in which everything moves with no direction. It is, however, the situation in which the ethical whole is transformed from within. For this reason, stasis is the structural condition of historical change. Importantly, unlike Plato and Aristotle, who think of stasis on the basis of their conception of the *polis* but also exclusively in relation to the *polis*, Thucydides does not define stasis by the entity that undergoes it but by analyzing the structure of the actions—*logoi* and *erga*—that determine the agent, the individual and collective agents in the situation of internal conflict indicated by the generalized model of stasis. Action for Thucydides as well as for Hegel makes the agent and not vice versa. The universal is the dynamic universal of action, not the substantial universal of a presupposed agent. Moreover, the model or the logic of stasis is not a logic of domination but a logic of extremism and immanent division. Extremism produces change by inducing internal self-destruction in the organism that suffers the radicalization of fanaticism. The latter can manifest itself alternatively as resistance to change (absolutism) or as the standstill in which the functioning of customs, laws, and institutions is blocked. The result is the same, namely, stasis. Dialectically the true advance

needs to confront the implosion and the painful split produced by contradiction. This is the condition of judgment. Ultimately, and more broadly, in Thucydides's view this is the cognitive function of history, the lesson that war offers to posterity and to all times.¹⁸

Let us now turn from Thucydides's stasis to Gramsci's "interregnum."¹⁹ The context of Gramsci's introduction of this concept is the discussion of a crisis—the "modern crisis" that for Gramsci, writing in the late 1920s and early 1930s Italy, follows the collapse of society in the aftermath of World War I. Within this crisis, the interregnum expresses the stalled situation of indeterminacy in which the old is barely kept alive and the transition to the new seems blocked. The interregnum is a pathological in-between state. At stake are the "ways of life" of the present—the ways of life or the ways of acting and thinking that being precariously suspended between the old and the new, the past and the future, the old and the young generations, are fundamentally emptied out of meaning and actual efficacy. This is the case both for the ruling class, which more than ever must resort to violence and coercion to maintain its grip on power, and for the masses, which no longer sustaining the ruling class with their "consensus," ultimately do not recognize those ways of life as their own (the masses "no longer believe what they previously used to believe"). The "modern crisis," Gramsci suggests, is a crisis of hegemony or a "crisis of authority." It signals a historical moment in which the social, political, ideological change under way is not taken up by the intellectuals and is not organically channeled by a recognized and validated authority. By consequence, the crisis cannot receive its "historically normal solution."²⁰ The solution to the crisis is instead "blocked." Since the war has produced a radical "rupture [. . .] between the popular masses and the dominant ideologies," the former no longer grant the latter their consensus, so that the only means for the ruling class to impose their ideology is "by the simple exercise of force." This, however, underscores the "crisis of authority" that defines the interregnum, not the way out of it. The phenomenon of fascism is the pathology that confirms for Gramsci the persistence of the present crisis.

The interregnum is the point of implosion of the present. The unavoidable historical change brought forth by the war, not being organically taken up in consciousness by the intellectual class, and not being enforced and enacted by legitimate organic forces or authorized powers capable of "leading"—and not simply "ruling" or "dominating" by violence—turns the present into a condition of indeterminacy in which its manifold latent tendencies radicalize to various kinds of extremism. It's not that change

does not happen. In the aftermath of World War I change has in fact happened on a massive scale. But it is a change that in the quagmire of the interregnum paradoxically does not change anything and certainly does not advance the present out of the crisis toward the new.²¹ This is the static predicament of the interregnum. This is the nature of extremism, which for Gramsci is exactly the opposite of hegemony. Extremism in general is the pathology of the interregnum. Just like in Thucydides's model of stasis, in Gramsci's interregnum the struggle of competing extremisms "attacks the structure of the old class like a dissolving cancer, weakening and putrefying it. It assumes morbid forms of mysticism, sensualism, moral indifference, pathological degenerations. The old structure does not provide and is unable to satisfy the new needs."²² In this way, the pathology of extremism also expresses the hopeless exasperation of the young generation against the old—the interregnum voices here the frustration of the "generational gap" dividing the ruling class itself. The impossibility of an organic "transition" between the old and the young generation radicalizes the young into the extremes of mysticism and sensualism—moral indifference being only a different expression of the same phenomenon. On Gramsci's assessment, the "death of the old ideologies" along with the "physical dejection" and exhaustion experienced in the aftermath of the war, "will lead, in the long run, to widespread skepticism." Herein lies the common root of the radicalization undergone by the different forces of society. In addition to the cultural phenomena of "mysticism, sensualism, moral indifference,"²³ in the realm of economy we have "the single-minded pursuit of the pure economic fact" such as profit but also radical views such as the one advocating "slavery as a modern instrument of economic policy" (Giuseppe Rensi's). In the political sphere, we are presented with "cynical" positions, and among all with Mussolini's fascism. More generally, dictatorship both in the economic and political sphere is a consequence of the lack of hegemony, yet another expression of the pathology of the interregnum. On Gramsci's view, however, dictatorship characterizes all periods of deep social and political transformation. In this sense, it betrays the advance dialectically nested in the crisis of the interregnum. And yet, for him, fascism is still an expression of the crisis, since fascism is unable to create the new "ethical phase" necessary to lead out of the crisis itself.

To be sure, Gramsci's concept of interregnum, unlike Thucydides's stasis, is programmatically projected toward the future, to the transition that needs to happen in order for the new to emerge. It is also a concept that arises out of Gramsci's deep interest first and foremost for the cultural

and intellectual requirements of revolutionary change. In Gramsci's Marxism the political and economic conditions follow. The connection he establishes between the crisis of the interregnum and the constitution of organic hegemony as the true historical advance, addresses precisely the issue of revolutionary change. The way out of the crisis requires the change underlying but stalled in the present to be brought to the self-critical consciousness of the masses in order to become effective, and this, in turn, requires the leadership of the intellectual class—that leadership that is lacking in the interregnum.²⁴ Ultimately, for Gramsci, the action of advancing is measured by the capacity of the new culture to succeed and successfully (or organically) replace the old. Dialectically, such advance arises out of—and requires dwelling in—its negative, namely, the condition of the interregnum and is prepared by it.

Just as Thucydides's stasis, Gramsci's interregnum is a diagnostic concept with broader methodological validity. It is first employed in order to understand the epochal historical change brought about in Italy by the end of World War I and leading up to Mussolini's fascism—Gramsci's historical present—but it is also used, more generally, to develop a new Marxist model of revolutionary change. Gramsci's concept has been recently taken up by Zygmunt Bauman as key to the understanding of our own contemporary present—of our twenty-first-century multiple economic, political, social, environmental crises.²⁵ Bauman recognizes his debt to Gramsci,²⁶ and he underscores the way in which Gramsci has changed the meaning of the concept of interregnum first employed by the ancient Roman historian Tito Livio and current in the tradition of Roman law. From designating the time of suspension of law separating the succession of two sovereigns, the interregnum comes to indicate a certain “way of life”—the way of life of the crisis. Thereby the concept becomes a crucial tool for a critical sociological analysis. Now Bauman updates in his turn the meaning of the interregnum when at stake is our globalized world—a world of global and corporate economy and global financial crises, a world dominated by the separation of power and politics, exasperated by the dissolution of the territorial nation-state, a present of unending war on terror. Herein I shall only mention those points of Bauman's wide-ranging analysis that, resonating with my reconstruction of the predicament of being-in-the-middle as the crisis that determines the movement of the advancement and the immanent transformation of the dynamic universal, add some contemporary features to the idea of “living in the interregnum.”

As for his predecessors, for Bauman the interregnum is a time of deep crisis and uncertainty. In the suspension of the interregnum what is unseen,

yet under everyone's eyes (Hegel's *das Bekannte*), gains visibility (and is first known, *das Erkannte*) in the moment in which, hit by contradiction and sudden change, is about to disappear. For this thought Bauman appeals to Hegel's image of the Owl of Minerva, which expresses the retrospective glance of philosophical comprehension. Philosophical understanding comes only when a shape of the world is about to vanish, and this is the threshold separating past and future. In order to grasp the present—and even more so, a present of crisis—thinking must start from that result which is the movement of the present itself. The interregnum of our contemporary present is a time in which governance and sovereignty stall: “the rulers no longer *can* rule, the ruled no longer *wish* to be ruled,”²⁷ contends Bauman, echoing Lenin and Gramsci. But the interregnum is also characterized by a fundamental imbalance—this is, yet again, the phenomenon of radicalization to the extremes. As politics is no longer anchored in the nation-state and its institutions, neither is power. Sovereignty has lost its center and with it its efficacy. Power and politics go to the opposite extremes. Power is global, ubiquitous and pervasive, but also concentrated as economic power in the hand of corporate capital. Politics narrows its focus and is fundamentally local, nationalism is resurgent.

Leaving Bauman's detailed analysis aside, I want to concentrate on his characterization of life in the interregnum at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Bauman stresses, in particular, three connected aspects. Living in the interregnum, we are all disoriented and haunted by *ignorance*: we do not know what to do; we do not know how to do it or to whom to turn in order to get it done. The stakes are too high anyway, and way too vague (at issue are objectives such as ‘fixing the state of the world’). The centers of power are epistemologically opaque even though—or perhaps precisely because—ubiquitous. Connected to this pervasive, disorienting ignorance is a paralyzing sense of *impotence*. Even if we knew what to do, we would have no power to do it—and in any case, we don't trust any of the powers that be to be willing or capable of doing it. Action seems to have no efficacy. Bauman's position here comes close to Gramsci's diagnosis of skeptical and cynical attitudes as typical of the interregnum mentality. Gramsci's idea of (moral as well as political) “indifference” is another consequence of this sense of impotence. If nothing can be done, why should we even care? Finally, life in the interregnum is characterized for Bauman by a loss of self-confidence and a feeling of *inadequacy*. Connected to the epistemic ignorance and the practical impotence accompanying any project, the feeling of inadequacy arises from simply acknowledging that nothing truly changes,

that transformation is blocked, and action has no efficacy—no determinate direction, no foreseeable and controllable consequences, and no accountability for these consequences. In all respects, however, by acknowledging the static stalling of the present, the interregnum brings to light precisely the deepest need for change and transformation. And this is, dialectically, the moment of the advancement in its immanent structural and historical necessity.

I have previously noticed that while for Thucydides the concept of stasis has a methodological diagnostic function but not a prognostic one, for Gramsci the concept of interregnum is projected toward the future and to the structure of the advance brought forth by revolution. Bauman's appropriates the concept of interregnum, making it into the catalyst of a twofold contradictory—or indeed dialectical—tendency. On the one hand, he holds a fundamentally pessimistic view of the present, the comprehension of which the sociologist attempts by focusing, for example, on the most destitute strata of society.²⁸ In this regard, our interregnum (in fact a multiple set of crises) appears as one of the worst humanity has encountered so far. On the other hand, however, inheriting Gramsci's projection toward the future, Bauman sees the interregnum on the ground of its indeterminacy as a locus of hope and possibility—the place in which a possible utopianism can take root and “activate” the advancing movement of the present.²⁹ In this way, Bauman's critical use of the concept gives to the advancement nested in the interregnum a new direction. Indeed, in all the cases analyzed, to diagnose a stasis or an *interregnum* is a fundamentally *critical* gesture on the side of the thinking observer placed in the position of the present—be it the ancient historian of the Peloponnesian War, the philosopher placed in the dramatic first Italian *dopoguerra*, the sociologist in the midst of our twenty-first-century multiple crises.

At this point, before reaching my conclusion—and in order to reach it—I want to take up our central question one last time. How does it feel to “live in the interregnum”? This time it is Nadine Gordimer who will be called upon to further help us articulate the connection between the issue of comprehending the present time as a time of crisis and revolution, life in the interregnum, and the problem of moving on or advancing from where we presently uncomfortably stand, that is, in the interregnum. But beyond this, she also helps us advance our thinking of this connection in the direction of a creative transfiguration of the interregnum itself. Such creative transfiguration is the act of telling its story—the creative act of the writer as a storyteller. The epigraph of Gordimer's 1981 novel *July's People* is

a quote from Gramsci: “The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms.” *July’s People* is the story of the interregnum. Gordimer returns on the topic in the thematic 1982 essay “Living in the Interregnum” in which she explores her present—in a first approximation: South Africa at the beginning of the 1980s—as a situation of interregnum. This time she adopts a different narrative form than in *July’s People*, namely, the essay. It is, however, a peculiar type of essay—a broken essay, an interrupted essay, in which thinking does not flow but seems to stall as it constantly hits obstacles, until it finally moves on, in its conclusion, to a position of hope.

Relevant in Gordimer’s exploration beyond the positions we have discussed so far is the novel standpoint and the personal perspective she discloses. As for Gramsci and Thucydides, for Gordimer the idea of interregnum is a methodological key for the understanding of the present, but it is also, more generally, the key for the comprehension of a universal predicament concerning the movement of history, its revolutions, and the constitution and transformation of modern societies and human interactions. In addition, the interregnum takes on for her an important programmatic validity as it voices the necessity of a new form of critical writing, of a new connection between art and society. Accordingly, she intimates that South Africa in the 1980s should be seen as exemplary in its particular connection to the Western world,³⁰ exemplary perhaps even of the human condition and of humanity in the most general sense. Again, the interregnum displays a truly universal validity. We are *all*—and *always* and *everywhere*—in the interregnum, which consequently cannot be discounted by saying: it is only *there*; it was *then*; it regards *them* (or just *others*). Unlike the cases discussed earlier, however, Gordimer’s focus is deeply personal. The interregnum is presented from the outset as a “state of being,” a state of constant “interaction” between the existential and experiential factuality of her personal life’s events, on the one hand, and the “theoretical flow” of its attempted conceptualization, on the other. At the level of the narrative reconstruction of the interregnum, this is a state of “disruption” and “interruption” of the alleged coherent conceptualization of the present by its lived personal experience.³¹ This important feature of the interregnum is immediately embodied in the form of the essay, which goes back and forth with apparently abrupt transitions or rather jolts from the lucid reflection to the personal narrative mode. Interregnum is the literary form of this essay.

From the outset, Gordimer introduces the society in which she lives as shaken by “the force of revolutionary change.” Revolution is not in the

future (as for Gramsci); it is the very dimension of the present. The image she conjures up is that of a “demonic dance—and accurate, not romantic” (similar to or different from Hegel’s Bacchanalian revel?), “an image of actions springing from emotion, knocking deliberation aside.”³² Herein Gordimer is close to Thucydides: action in the interregnum-stasis-revolution is swept away by passion and emotion, with hardly any space for judgment and deliberation. As Gramsci suggests, the interregnum is the time of transition in which the old is dying and the new is not yet born (or, “cannot yet be born”).³³ In this case, what has reached the inevitable end of its historical development is “nineteenth-century colonialism”—this is the old that dying, “should finally come to its end.” To be sure, the old institutions are still in place and yet, since the time of the black uprisings of the mid-seventies, “the past has begun rapidly to drop out of sight, even for those who would have liked to go on living in it.”³⁴ The social and existential disconnect separating the old institutions of European colonialism from the living present is rendered in Gramscian terms: “Historical coordinates don’t fit life any longer; new ones, where they exist, have couplings not to the rulers, but to the ruled.”³⁵ Indeed, whatever the new “coordinates” are they are not yet really replacing the old ones as they do not have the hegemonic force that can be conferred to them only by the ruling organic class, which is presently lacking. Importantly, however, the new has its roots (or its embryonic shoots) in the life of the ruled, while another segment of society still holds on to the old colonial forms of life. But Gordimer’s account of this interregnum is more complex. If the fact that European colonialism is dying can be easily diagnosed, it is much harder to see that in South Africa its structures persist because supported by Western capitalism and, yes, by the values of Western democracy.³⁶ This is the more provocative claim that underlies Gordimer’s account of life in the interregnum.

In good Gramscian fashion, the interregnum is a transitional time. It is a time of disconnect and radical clash between consciousness and social institutions, between the old European colonialism, the present of Western capitalism and liberal democracy, and the embryonic form of a postcolonial society to come (in fact not yet on the horizon). But it is also the disconnect, more acute than ever, between the different strata of an implacably divided society. Moreover, like Thucydides, Gordimer captures in language the essential cipher of the interregnum—the language used therein and the language in which the transition at stake is best captured. The previous era, still woefully permeating life in the interregnum in its social, political, economic, cultural institutions, is concentrated in a word, historically and

geographically specific but also beyond all times and places in its designating “the ugliest creation of man.” This word is *apartheid*, “the ultimate term for every manifestation, over the ages, in many countries, of race prejudice. Every country could see its semblances there; and most people.”³⁷ At stake in the interregnum is life with apartheid when apartheid is dying but does not want to admit its own unavoidable death. This is the model lesson that Gordimer takes to all people and to all times.

There is a crucial methodological issue at the center of Gordimer’s reflections that the authors discussed earlier do not seem to tackle as decisively as she does. It is a problem of standpoint, a version of the problem of immanence that interests me here. How can we speak of life in the interregnum while living in it, how can we tell its story, that is, from which standpoint, with which voice? And is there even a choice?³⁸ Importantly, even if there is no choice there must be an awareness of the problem. ‘Stand-point’ is the point in which the movement seems to come to where it stands, to its still-stand: stasis. Thucydides’s stasis. It is a point of observation in the middle of the flux of events and action and speech, a point that brings the flux to a stand by disrupting it (hence transitioning abruptly from essayistic reflection to personal narrative), that sees things only from one side (or in one perspective) and that in order to *see* them must bring the movement in which everything (itself included) is implicated to a halt. To be in the interregnum is both to be stuck in contradiction and to be in “a place of shifting ground.”³⁹ Stillness and “demonic dance.” The interregnum is the point of implosion of the crisis—but it is also a *critical* point of observation, the point in which critique and judgment are formed. It is the point in which advance and transformation take place. Herein Gordimer’s methodological choice becomes significant. The essay is construed, as mentioned earlier, as the interaction and the reciprocal disruption that tie together personal experience and conceptual understanding. Now this interaction has to face “a peculiarly South African taboo.” And this is the fact that “[i]n the official South African consciousness, the ego is white: it has always seen all South Africa as ordered around it. Even the ego that seeks to abdicate this alienation does so in an assumption of its own salvation that in itself expresses ego and alienation.” White consciousness as such is inexorably a standpoint. But this standpoint is properly no standpoint because it is the only one (the only existing one and the only possible one under the condition of apartheid)—all alternatives are foreclosed. The present reality—South Africa—is entirely organized around it. We are, yet again, in the position of absolutism. Such absolutism is indeed a form of alienation, an existential,

epistemological, political distortion of (white) consciousness that invests everything and its opposite. No matter what the awareness achieved, no matter what the political sympathies, alienation cannot be shaken off—even the attempt to abdicate such alienation is an act that perpetrates it along with the privilege of white consciousness, the possibility of its “salvation” (“when the apartheid regime goes,” that is).⁴⁰ Moreover, when at stake is the social function of the writer or artist—the artist being the locus of the “awareness” of the present—the work of white writers does not go beyond the function of producing the “Aristotelian effect,” that is, “a catharsis of white guilt, for writer and reader.”⁴¹ And “Aristotelian catharsis” remains the function of black writers as well: in this case, the function of “relieving black self-pity” and victimization.⁴² Now this cathartic function of art, itself an expression of white power, is what brings all creative activity to a maiming paralysis.

Now this impasse produced by the absolutism of white consciousness is ultimately the stand-point of the interregnum and the stand-still of the crisis. Faced with this impasse, Gordimer attempts to take the force out of the position of white consciousness by fully embracing it. The idea is that by reducing it to the punctuality of the personal, the absoluteness—and absolutism—of white power will inexorably crumble. By destroying “the privilege of privacy” and reducing the (white) standpoint to her own personal experience, Gordimer destroys the universalist pretensions of white absolutism. Thus, she declares, “I have to offer you myself as my most closely observed specimen from the interregnum.”⁴³ Gordimer is not just the observer here. In her own life she becomes a “specimen” of the observed interregnum. But importantly, she is its most concrete instance *as a writer*.⁴⁴ “A white; a dissident white; a white writer.” And the writer in her view is the “interpreter” both “to South Africa and to the world, of a society in struggle,”⁴⁵ i.e., the interpreter of the interregnum. In this function, the white writer embodies the difficult in-between predicament, which embodies the moral and aesthetic responsibility of the interregnum. “The white writer has to make a decision whether to remain responsible to the dying white order—and even as dissident, if [s]he goes no further than that position [s]he remains *negatively* within the white order—or to declare [herself] positively as answerable to the order struggling to be born.”⁴⁶ This is the complexity that inhabits Gordimer as “specimen from the interregnum.” At issue are now not only political and moral questions but also questions of aesthetics and art.

From the personal standpoint of Gordimer, the dissident-white-writer, life in the interregnum entails the program—but truly the funda-

mental hope and “faith”—of “structuring society humanly” in the future, after apartheid, from a standpoint that is no longer that of white power because the white perspective has been transformed from within. The distinction here is important: the old structures and institutions of apartheid and white power are dead or dying; there is no hope attached to them, no transformation is possible. White consciousness, by contrast, may be transformed—or rather self-transformed; and herein is the locus of hope. At stake is, crucially, the problem of how we can change and transform the ways in which we think and act in the postapartheid world. For, clearly, “it is not a matter of blacks taking over white institutions”⁴⁷ (this would still be extremism, only of a different sign, and no true transformation: just like replacing “communist bosses” with “capitalist bosses,” or vice versa, perpetrates exactly the same crisis).⁴⁸ Instead, it is a matter “of conceiving of institutions [. . .] that reflect a societal structure vastly different from that built to the specification of white power and privilege.” But how the interregnum transforms the collective universal hinges on how we change ourselves, that is, on how the whites of former South Africa instead of thinking either of plans to run away or of physical and economic survival in a “black state,” stay put in the interregnum and dwell on the task of a radical self-redefinition and self-reinvention. Thus, “whites of former South Africa will have to redefine themselves in a new collective life within new structures.” And notice that this time the task is spelled out, taking a different (and “complementary”) viewpoint into account: “in the eyes of the black majority.”⁴⁹ Whites will be expected to actively support the new society. Their actions, however, “while complementary to those of blacks, must be different from the blacks.” Importantly, the roles are not scripted here. They must be entirely reinvented. “Whites are expected to find their own forms of struggle, which can only sometimes coincide with those of blacks.”⁵⁰ But the change needed cuts deeper and more personally. Indeed, the “interregnum is not only between two social orders but also between two identities, one known and discarded, the other unknown and undetermined.”⁵¹ Gordimer is aware, following Marx, that what must be changed is not restricted to a higher way of thinking—of judging and categorizing and structuring hierarchies—but is also more basically a way of perceiving, of *seeing* the human reality that surrounds us. For, seeing and perceiving are not merely neutral ‘natural’ acts. “The weird ordering of the collective life, in South Africa, has slipped its special contact lens into the eyes of whites; we actually see blacks differently, which includes not seeing, not noticing their unnatural absence.”⁵² But this radical change

in perception can be produced only by one's individual self. And it is to the point of this change—to the feeling of its implacable necessity, to the hope in its possibility, and to the understanding of the direction in which it must be guided—that living in the interregnum takes Gordimer. “We have to believe in our ability to find new perceptions, and our ability to judge their truth.”⁵³ This fragile belief is key to life in the interregnum, if the interregnum is to be the turning point from which advancement is made. The alternative is a frightening moral void, a historical death zone in which the advancement is entirely foreclosed. This is the idea that Western capitalism has nothing to offer except the rejection of it, the idea that there is nothing beyond the confrontation of the two extremisms of communism and capitalism.⁵⁴ This is the notion that Gordimer the writer most strongly rejects.

It is important to stress that the function of the interregnum as the state of being-in-the-middle—between the old dying apartheid regime and the not-yet-born new order—is not the function of producing the transition from one world to its inverted opposite, that is, from white power and privilege to black power. The pathology of the interregnum renders a clear-cut inversion of values (moral, aesthetic, political) impossible. In the interregnum, contradiction affects all parties and all “segments” of society. Indeed, “there are contradictions within the black liberation struggle itself,” and those are not just contradictions in ideological and political positions; they are moral contradictions arising from the “moral confusion” that defines life in the interregnum.⁵⁵ It is the utter confusion of the interregnum that requires and leads to total reinvention. On this point, Gordimer refers directly to Hegel. And not only with regard to the contradiction that characterizes the interregnum. More properly, at issue is the advancement out of the radical vacuum that is the imploded present. How can one conjure the energy to move on in the direction of a radical transformation? What can—or should—this transformation be, given that the interregnum is a chaos in which the structures of collective life are collapsing? “The state of interregnum is a state of Hegel's disintegrated consciousness, of contradiction. It is from its internal friction that energy somehow must be struck, for us whites; energy to break the vacuum of which we are subconsciously aware, for however hated and shameful the collective life of apartheid and its structures has been for us, there is, now, the unadmitted fear of being without structures.”⁵⁶ But they are also aesthetic contradictions affecting both white and black writers, albeit in opposite (and complementary) ways. To name only the central one, while “[t]he black writer is ‘in history’ and

its values threaten to force out the transcendent ones of art,” the white writer “as writer and South African, does not know his place ‘in history’ at this stage, in this time.”⁵⁷ The black writer must invent her own way to enter the art form and the recognized values of aesthetics; the white writer must invent her path into history and her personal contribution to the struggle of the interregnum. Herein lies the advancement from life in the interregnum. Gordimer’s personal advancement in this respect is presented as follows: “I can only report that the way to begin entering history out of a dying white regime is through setbacks, encouragements and rebuffs from others, and frequent disappointments in oneself.”⁵⁸



Let me sum up my reflections so far. With the help of authorities as different as Thucydides, Gramsci, Bauman, and Gordimer, I have explored “life in the interregnum” as the dialectical moment of stasis and standstill but also of radical flux and instability that characterizes the point of immanent transformation of a universal thought in a Hegelian way as the fundamentally dynamic structure of action. My central claim has been that the interregnum is methodologically necessary for the true advancement of the dynamic universal. I have brought in different voices to show how the advancement in and through the crisis is made, how the creation and recreation of the universal—the social, political, aesthetic universal—in and through the interregnum takes place. I want to stay with Gordimer in drawing my very brief conclusion at this point. “We must continue to be tormented by the ideal,”⁵⁹ says Gordimer. The interregnum is our inescapable ‘torment,’ but it is also the “ideal” that drives us on. This is not a Kantian ideal projected in the future, though, precisely because it is our *present* torment, the interregnum that is always with us is the necessary condition of all advancing action.

Chapter 6

Endings

We have circled and circled till we have arrived home again, we two,
We have voided all but freedom and all but our own joy.

—Walt Whitman, “We Two, How Long
We Were Fool’d,” *Leaves of Grass*

And in books it was the last page
I preferred to all the others—
When the hero and the heroine
Are no longer interesting.

—Anna Achmatova, “Concerning Poetry,”
November 25, 1943, Tashkent

“But could you tell me, what is so terrible about stepping off the end of a story? Let us look more closely at this moment that gathers at the place called the end. Up until this time, you have been fairly successful at holding back your tears, and suddenly you feel brokenhearted. [. . .] [T]here is a moment of uncovering, and of covering, which happens very fast and you seem to be losing track of something. It is almost as if you hear a key turn in the lock. Which side of the door are you on? You do not know. Which side am I on? It is up to me to tell you—at least, that is what other brave, wise and upright men have done in a similar position. For example, Sokrates”—see *Phaedo* 118.¹ All stories end. They must end in order to be stories. And then sometimes we need stories in order to end. Through the act of ending, the writer pushes the reader off the story, while she herself steps out of it. Where to, though? After the sustained attention that one has bestowed on the story’s development, the end feels like a terrible letdown—to be sure, not the end itself but the necessity, implicit in the end, of having to step

off the story, of having to let go of it. And this unpleasant yet unavoidable necessity does belong to the end after all. The end arrives suddenly even though one should have been aware of it from the beginning, even though each single moment of the story's unfolding should have somehow prepared us for it. Ending always exceeds the consciousness one may have of it as well as the consciousness of each single moment that has led up to it and is accompanied by a feeling of disorientation. The end seems to be—and is often expressed as—a place and a time, a point in space and time. But it is, most likely, the end of place and time, since as ending happens we are beyond (before or after) them both. Or maybe not. Maybe what ends is only a *certain* place and time, not place and time tout court. For there always seem to be two sides to the end—and to the act of ending. Ending is a threshold, like death or life—or like a doorframe. Indeed, it all depends on which side of the door one is. Especially as one hears the key turn in the lock. How can we know on what side of the door we stand? Who can tell us? And what is the difference anyway? Maybe to answer these questions is precisely the story's function and aim—its intended 'end.'

This is certainly the lesson of Socrates's 'end' as recounted by Crito and by Plato (in whose narrations, however, Socrates's end is not the story's end). "The man who had administered the poison laid his hands on him and after a while examined his feet and legs, then pinched his foot hard and asked if he felt it. Sokrates said 'No.' And after that, his thighs; and passing upward in this way he showed us that he was growing cold and rigid. And again he touched him and said that when it reached his heart he would be gone. The coldness by now was almost to the middle of his body and he [. . .] said (what was his last utterance) 'Krito, we owe a cock to Asklepios: pay it back and don't forget.' 'That,' said Krito, 'will be done, but now see if you have anything else you want to say.' Sokrates made no further answer. Some time went by; he stirred. The man uncovered him and his eyes were fixed. When Krito saw this, he closed his mouth and eyes (Plato, *Phaedo*, 118)."²² The end approaches slowly but happens fast, or so we think—we, external observers, Socrates's friends. It seems to follow the logic of the old paradox of the heap or the baldhead. Where is the limit, the end in which or after which the dramatic change occurs? At what point in the process of gradual subtraction or addition does something end—a life, an action, an utterance, a thought or a sensation? Is the end in the advancing coldness of the body finally reaching the heart, in the last words uttered before the silence, in the last stirring of the body before the eyes' fixity? We always expect more, a last word, a last gesture, and are caught off guard by the

unfulfilled expectation—like Crito, who glossing over Socrates's request (his last utterance), insists: the cock to Asclepius, fine, but “now see if you have anything else you want to say.” He seems to miss the point entirely. Indeed, what he misses is the end.

But can we really tell when something ends, and does it really end? And what if it doesn't? “A cock to Asklepios: What a courtly gesture it is with which Sokrates ushers his guests out into the evening air, pointing the way for them (they have had quite a bit to drink).” Socrates's end is truly the act of pointing the way for us—pointing the way into the night to someone who has had too much to drink and is by consequence confused and disoriented, even though unaware of his confusion and disorientation. We know what that gesture is meant to suggest: perhaps what ends is not life but death? Maybe the end is a new and true beginning? Maybe the end does not follow but precedes the beginning—and this is perhaps the meaning of the whole story. Indeed, do not forget to sacrifice a cock to Asclepius; do not forget to pay back. To be sure, this is the same gesture with which the writer ends her story. By making the end, the writer gives something to the reader. “Not the mysterious, intimate and consoling data you would have wished, but something to go on with [. . .]. It is simply the fact, as you go down the stairs and walk in dark streets, as you see forms [. . .], as you begin imagination, as you look at every mark, simply the fact of my eyes on your back.”³ The end of the story does not seem to belong to the story and does not seem to be what one expects from it. It is not the final episode, the resolution we have been waiting for. The end leaves the story behind and follows, rather, the reader—out of the story, on to something else entirely. The end now belongs to the reader as the writer's token, no longer to the story since it defies or exceeds what the reader expects from the story. In the end, a sort of substitution takes place: looking back at the beginning, the reader wanted something from the story and is left with something else, projected forward instead, something that does not belong to that story: Socrates pointing the way into the night to his drunken friends. The end is a mark of provenance, something akin to an origin that follows the reader with a life of its own but is also, at the same time, a prospective commitment. But this is yet another story.

What, then, is the act of ending? The end takes on different figures as the movement of ending comprises the act of approaching the end (how does the advance turn into the end proper?), as well as the act of decidedly making the end—the act of signing off, writing down or speaking out that *finis* that seals it all, the act of stepping into the final decision, of draw-

ing the ultimate conclusion. Furthermore, it covers the hesitation, risk, and uncertainty connected to all these processes, the temptation to delay and postpone the end or to avoid it altogether, just as the opposite impulse to rush prematurely toward it, to get done with it once and for all. How does one know how and when or where to stop? But the movement of ending also addresses the connected transition that inevitably leads *beyond* the end, in which case the question concerns what may come *after* it. And what if, on the other hand, there is no end, if no end takes place (but only an everlasting postponement or an infinite repetition of the same, a circle turning back to itself, a line stretched on with no end, images, and hopes of eternity)? What is the action that does not end—the action that cannot or does not want to end? Indeed, the end always has to contend with the ‘dead end’ and the ‘open ended.’

These are some of the issues that I address in this chapter, taking on the methodological question of the end raised by Hegel in the conclusion of the logic, following its embodiment in different logical figures, and showing their fulfillment in real forms and modes of action. To stress that there are multiple logical figures of the action that ends means that ending is not one (one form), different only according to what it is that ends (or different only according to its content)—that is, for example, life, the world, history, art, a natural species, a culture. Formally or logically, the act of ending displays a differential typology in which fundamentally different modalities of action are displayed. Our task is now to articulate such a typology in some detail.

1. Logical Endings: The Two Perspectives

Hegel's general position with regard to the ‘end’ is only apparently clear in a well-known and often-quoted, yet perhaps not sufficiently pondered passage of the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* where the problem of the end is connected to the problem of the beginning when at stake is the issue of the Absolute. In fact, what appears as Hegel's relatively straightforward answer to a contemporary metaphysical debate turns out to be the introduction of a complicated question of no easy solution. “The truth is the whole. The whole, however, is only the essence completing itself through its development (*das durch seine Entwicklung sich vollendende Wesen*).” The end occurs when the process of self-completion in which the substance-subject (which for Hegel is the “essence”) engages, eventually fulfills its task, that is, when

the whole is complete or established precisely as the whole. Ending is an act of completion—*Voll-endung*. And yet, importantly, the end as the self-completing movement of essence is not the having-been-completed of the development of the whole, is not the point in which completion is a past, accomplished deed but is rather the action caught in the present participle, the ongoing, self-completing movement of essence—*sich vollendendes Wesen*. Ending is a process; it does not happen in an instant or in a point. The problem of the end, just as the problem of the beginning (and, in a different way, of the advancement), is the chief issue of discursivity and of this alone. Intuition (be it sensible or intellectual) is consumed in a flash in which no beginning and no ending properly take place. Ending concerns an action that is not ‘complete’ (or whole) from the outset but is rather, dynamically, what it is only in and through the process of successive self-completion. This said, in order to avoid the impression that this position articulates an issue entirely different from what the contemporary debate deems the central question of philosophy, Hegel reaches out to the traditional discussion concerning “the Absolute.” Accordingly, he adapts the current terminology (Schelling’s in particular) to this idea of the self-completing essence as follows: “This much must be said of the absolute, that it is essentially *result*; that first and only at the *end* (*am Ende*) it is what it is in truth” (TW 3, 24). As we have seen, Hegel rejects the position that places the absolute as the (metaphysical and epistemological) origin and beginning. And he also denies that arbitrary interruptions of the self-realization process as well as hypostatizations of not-yet-completed positions can yield anything truly absolute. The true absolute, Hegel forcefully claims, is rather result and end; whatever the absolute is, it is what it is in its truth (namely, properly ‘absolute’) *first and only at the end*. (A more advanced position here would be the claim: the absolute is absolute only in the act of making the end.) This, however, is not so much the solution of a traditional problem as the introduction of a puzzling new issue. For one thing, the assumption that ‘being the result’ and ‘being the end’ are more or less identical determinations does not make the issue any clearer. But the immediate concern is that the connection between the absolute and the end is perplexing no matter which side of the issue one considers. How is the end to be understood when the absolute is positioned in it (and identified with it)? And on the other hand, what is the absolute that makes the end? What is the ‘ending absolute’—or shall we assume that being-in/at-the-end is not the same as the act of ending (the absolute makes the end but does not itself end—which runs counter to the idea of the self-completing essence being

the whole)? To be sure, the idea of an ending absolute seems quite paradoxical—as paradoxical as the idea that the absolute makes the beginning is instead intuitively acceptable. Indeed, it is a common sense assumption that what is result (as product or effect) is less perfect or absolute than what is original, that what ends are finite things, not the Absolute. Aware of this, Hegel immediately adds that, “as contradictory as it might seem that the absolute is to be comprehended essentially as a result, even a little reflection will put this mere semblance of contradiction in its rightful place” (TW 3, 24f.). The “little reflection” Hegel proposes, however, only rules out that the absolute may be the (abstract) beginning of a process, which by itself does not yet warrant the conclusion that it must then be its end and end result. In this connection, Hegel’s solution of the problem of the end is the idea of circularity that brings the end back to the beginning. The end is reached when the return to the beginning is achieved. At this point, the end is the (self-)actualized inner “purpose” already contained, abstractly, in the beginning. Accordingly, in the end the beginning is no longer abstract but finally fulfilled. (But is this the *same* beginning?) Thereby the issue of the end is connected to reason’s practical purposive activity (*Vernunft* is “*das zweckmässige Tun*”: TW 3, 26). *Voll-endung* is the actual realization of the initial purpose (its mere *Ansich*). In an Aristotelian fashion, the end is actualized *Zweck*. However, as actuality comes before potentiality, we must conclude that the end comes before the beginning. Far from exhausting the problem, this argument opens up new issues of its own. It is not clear where this leaves the absolute that makes the end; and why it is the absolute that should make the end. Moreover, while the idea of the end as *Zweck* is backed by a long-standing tradition and easily accounts for circularity, there seem to be forms of ending that do not require teleology. And even maintaining the connection between the idea of the circular return to the beginning and the purpose’s realization, the question of the end remains: When is the purpose fulfilled or alternatively when do we go back to the beginning? Clearly, one cannot answer one question with the other.⁴ Indeed, that there is much more to the end than the circular return to the beginning becomes evident in the chapter “Absolute Knowing” that seals the *Phenomenology* and from which the transition to the Logic is made.⁵

It is only in the conclusion of the logic—at its very end, as it were—that the problem of the end is directly taken up in its broadest form as a problem of method. Herein thinking the end and making the end are one and the same act: thinking makes the end by addressing the action of ending, and reciprocally, the act of thinking the end brings the science of

logic to its conclusion. Thereby, the metaphysical and theological issue of the end (and of the absolute as the end) is transformed into the methodological problem concerning the action of ending—the end becomes the final moment of the “absolute method.” Just as Hegel’s decision to address the problem of the beginning methodologically fundamentally transforms the metaphysical and theological issue of origin into the immanent problem of the beginning action, so does the thematization of the end as the conclusive moment of the method transform the metaphysical and eschatological issue of the end (“the end of all things,” “the end of all time,” as Kant puts it) into a question that regarding the very structure of action is constitutive of, hence immanent within, the development of action itself and does not point to an end that transcends it. Only this new, methodological question is compatible with the intra-historical nature of human agency.

The last moment of the method brings to light the form that all ending actions have in common, the form of ending taken “in and for itself,” independently of what (or who) it is that ends (both subjectively and objectively). In this regard, the thematization of the end is analogous to that of the beginning and the advancement: at stake is the formal structure of the action taken in its absoluteness, as it were, or in its intransitive character. However, Hegel argues that unlike the two preceding moments, which exclusively concern the *form* of the action, the end indicates the action in which the *content* is first introduced into the methodological account. This introduction takes place in a way that is fundamentally different than what the immanent progression and derivation of the logical determinations (precisely as logical content) has achieved throughout the process. At this point, the content brought to bear on the action of ending is the “result” of the movement of the *method* itself (TW 6, 567), not of the foregoing logical development, that is: only here is the content recognized as the content of *the beginning*, the content of *the advancing* and *ending action* (and not as the content of Being, Essence, the Concept). At stake, in short, is the content of *the method*, hence the logical content heretofore immanently derived insofar as it is now reconfigured and reclaimed by the method in its ending movement. Recall that it is only at the level of the method that the ongoing logical process can be reconstructed according to beginning, middle, end as it attains the unitary form of the logic’s story.⁶ As the method is mythos, that is, the movement in which the immanent performance of the logical action coalesces into the articulation of a unitary story, the act of ending brings all the previously enacted logical contents to the forefront and rearranges them so that the end obtains. To be sure, given

that what is at issue in the method is the articulation of the “infinite” or “absolute form” of pure thinking (TW 6, 550, 551, respectively)—namely, the unity and reciprocal implication of form and content—the content is present in all moments of the method. And yet, in the actions of beginning and advancing the content does not make a difference to the form that the action of beginning takes “in and for itself” (methodologically, beginning as such is ‘indifferent’ to what it is, specifically, that begins). In the case of the end, by contrast, the content “for the first time enters the circle of consideration” (TW 6, 567): the content now does make a difference to the way in which the end is made (or not made). The content, which is now a proven “result” from the preceding account of the method (i.e., from the beginning and advancement), is necessary at this point in order to make the end, or to make a difference to the action that ends. The end is the moment of the final decision and accountability in which form alone—even “absolute form”—is not sufficient. Herein the content is ultimately and necessarily involved as well. If it is only in the end that the accounts can be settled, it is because only at this point the action is complete *in all respects*. This gives Hegel yet another strong argument against Kant’s moral formalism. If the end is *Schluss* and *Ent-schluss*, decision cannot happen on the basis of form alone, the content is integral to the decision, one with the form.

Through the moment of the end, Hegel announces, “the method expands itself to a system” (TW 6, 567). It is here that the unity of the story first emerges. The function of the system, which in its circularity is the distinctive form of the ending action, is precisely to join together all the previous methodological moments. Hence the emergence of the syllogism of the method: the end is *Schluss*. The end is the action that reconnects (and thereby mediates) both to the beginning, which it fulfills, and to the advancement, which it follows. Now the end achieves this connection not only formally but by taking the content necessarily into consideration. It is clear then that in the method the circularity of the end is not a simple and straightforward return to the beginning. Indeed, if the end does in effect *go back formally* to the beginning, it may at the same time *advance* in the act of providing a different *content* for the beginning. The act of ending is the formal gesture whereby the content that makes (or rather has made) the beginning and to which now the end *goes back* (in order precisely for the end to be made), is actually *pushed forward*, that is, is shown capable of leading to the end of the movement, whereby it is proven or “deduced” (TW 6, 567). In fact, the alternative is either the ‘dead end’ of a beginning incapable of moving on, or the infinite open-ended progression that knows

no conclusion. In other words, just as the failure to make the end is the proof of an untenable beginning, the action of ending is the deduction and 'truth' of the beginning, that is, is the proof of the successful beginning. In this way, it is first in the end that all beginnings and advancements become fully accountable for what they are (or pretend to be). The end is the point of apparent stillness generated by the act of joining two intersecting currents: one is the retrospective movement of grounding the beginning—the end is a “rückwärtsgehendes” process; the other is its prospective further determination—the end is itself advancement, is movement “vorwärts” (TW 6, 569, 570). Thus, requiring the reenactment of both the beginning and the advancement with regard to the content, the end appears as the most complex structure among the method's moments, the action in which all other actions are finally joined together and coimplicated. In the end, the content of the beginning action, namely *Sein*, immediate precisely because it is the beginning, is taken up as the *content* of a different action, namely, the act of ending—pure, immediate *Sein* is now “erfülltes Sein” (TW 6, 572)—being that is now mediated and filled with content, being that the end finally *fulfills* precisely *as being*. Logically, the action of conclusive “mediation” as fulfillment and *Erfüllung*, that is, as the act of filling (the middle) with content, is *Schluss* (TW 6, 400, 401).

Importantly, the end does not simply go back to the beginning in a too easy notion of circularity. The end also follows the advancement (and is its implication); it is the advancement toward the end that makes the end, as it were. Aristotle points here to the moment of $\lambda\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ in the tragedy's action, the untying or unraveling of the complex sequence of events that leads to the conclusion, the “denouement” that stretches from “the beginning of the transformation” brought forth by the turning point or climax of the middle, “till the end.”⁷ Yet, the movement of the end is formally and methodologically different from the advancement: it is the end *of the advancement*. In this way, the end is also the proof of the success of the advancement, the sign that the advancement has fulfilled its trajectory and now resolves into the act of ending (instead of being stuck in a ‘dead end,’ for example). Ultimately, the end confirms that both the beginning and the advancing actions are indeed, methodologically, what they are, namely, real beginnings and advancements of discursive thinking. The end fulfills them both. Recall Aristotle's account, which defines the three moments of the action's whole in their obtaining from each other. In contrast to the beginning, “which does not itself follow necessarily from something else, but after which a further event or process naturally occurs,” the “end (τελευτη) is

that which naturally occurs, whether necessarily or usually, after a preceding event but need not be followed by anything else.”⁸ Two are the conditions of the end: first, its following immanently (or naturally) after a preceding event; second, its being self-contained and concluded, its not being *in need* of anything else for its completion—a condition that, significantly, still leaves open the possibility for something else to follow the end. The possibility that something may follow the end does not contradict its being the end. Thus, the end is conditioned *a parte ante* but fully self-sufficient (or, with Hegel, self-completing and complete) *a parte post*.

The structure of the end, which connects to both the beginning and the advancement and thereby reconfigures them as part of the unitary story (or system) of the logic, reveals the complex meaning of the circularity proper to Hegel's method. It is a circularity that does not deliver a final Absolute (absolute is attribute of the method and nothing more) and, most importantly, is not immune from possible failure. Indeed, the action of ending can very well be deployed by “external reflection” (or “begriffslose Reflexion”: TW 6, 567) to which the “absolute method” is explicitly contrasted (TW 6, 567f.). In this case, as much as all external reflection cares for is the end result, the true end fails to be made. In the hands of external reflection, the act of ending turns into a progression, *ins Un-endliche*—an inconclusive postponement that is unable to sanction the end, an infinite reiteration that is, in fact, the unsuccessful advancement of an infinite repetition, an advancement that does not advance, an end that is unable to make the end, a dead end. Alternatively, however, external reflection may attempt to make an arbitrary, suicidal end by abruptly halting the advancing process before its completion. This, however, is no true end but only the action that falls back to the fanatic absolutization of a one-sided, incomplete position explored in the previous chapter. Ultimately, this is the constant illusion and temptation of finite thinking. Dialectically, it is the finite, to which the end constitutively belongs—*das Endliche*—that either cannot make the true end or labors only to avoid it (indefinitely postponing or rushing into it). The true infinite by contrast—*das Un-endliche*—is the action that successfully makes the end and is infinite precisely in mastering the end. If we recall that in Hegel's logic it is the action that constitutes the agent (and not vice versa), it becomes clear that what defines something as finite is precisely the incapacity or unwillingness to make the end, not some presupposed ontological feature. While the finite perishes due to its unending action, the infinite is first constituted by the self-concluded action of ending. As

we shall see, this dialectical inversion is crucial to Hegel's account of the movement of ending throughout the logic.

Hegel's methodological examination of the ending action in the conclusion of the logic raises a final relevant issue. We have seen that, dialectically, the beginning action is endowed with the impulse (*Trieb*) to go on, and that the advancing action is the action that in order to move on comes to the standstill of a stasis. Similarly, the question of the end concerns whether the action that ends the logical process (and that ends it in its wholeness) is itself a process or rather the opposite of a process, its cessation, as it were. What is the *movement* of the end—in contrast to the beginning; or is the end, rather, a *point of stillness*—and, in this case, how is the stillness of the end different from the stasis of the advancement?

After the end of the logic is achieved, the method tells us to turn back to the beginning and revisit the entire story again, this time, however, in a different perspective. It is only now, upon this second reading, that we can discern thinking's beginnings, its different modes of advancing, and finally the ways in which the end is variously attempted and achieved. While in the account of the method at stake is the general, formal character of the action of making the end, that is, that which is *common* to all endings as such, this new perspective—coming after the method, as it were—discloses that in which the actions successively deployed by thinking in order to make the end logically *differ*. At stake, in other words, are the various logical figures of the action of ending taken, this time, *in their difference*. Now, such a difference first comes to light as the endings are confronted synchronically with each other. The synchronic rearrangement of the logical plot, suggested by the method itself,⁹ disrupts and interrupts the succession produced by the first, immanent presentation of the logic, and allows for the *transformation* that the action of ending undergoes throughout the different logical spheres to emerge. As we have seen in the previous two chapters, Hegel himself attempts this synchronic reading at various points in his logical exposition. Here is a case for the end.

In the first book of the objective logic abstract *being* was presented as *passing over* (*übergehend*) into *Dasein*, but also as *going back* (*zurückgehend*) into *essence*. In the second book essence *shows itself* (*zeigt sich*) as determining itself as *ground*, thereby stepping into *existence* and realizing itself as *substance*, but again *going back* (*zurückgeht*) into the *concept*. Of the concept, we have

now first shown that it determines itself as *objectivity*. (TW 6, 402—my emphasis)

We are at the point in which the “Subjectivity” of the Subjective Logic or Logic of the Concept has reached its conclusion after having gone through the different syllogistic figures. The *Schluss* of subjectivity leads to “objectivity.” At this level of the development of the concept, Hegel pauses to offer a synchronic reading of what he now takes as homologous transitions in the spheres of Being and Essence of the Objective Logic. At stake is the issue of how the advancement within Being and Essence respectively leads to the end by enacting a movement that specifically generates the correspondent of the concept’s “objectivity.” Hegel starts out by articulating the different modalities in which the advancement is made, respectively, in Being and Essence, then turns to the ways in which the end obtains; in both cases, the mode of action (advancing and ending) is fleshed out by referring to the forms assumed by what, viewed from the level of the Concept, is the correspondent objectivity. Displaying a seeming lack of autonomy, abstract *Sein*, Hegel argues, “was presented (*wurde dargestellt*)” in its specific way of *transitioning* (*übergehend*) into *Dasein*, “but also as *going back* (*zurückgehend*) into essence.” As far as the movement of being is concerned, the advancement is made by the act of *Übergehen*, while the end is specifically *Zurückgehen*—going or turning back. Both actions imply a form of (proto-) objectivity, namely, respectively, *Dasein*, to which being “transitions,” and *Wesen*, to which being “goes back.” Importantly, only the former belongs to being; the end, obtained by the act of turning back, leads being to something that is no longer being but altogether different from being, namely, “essence.” Yet, considering the standpoint that Hegel assumes in this passage, that is, the end of the concept’s subjectivity and the move to objectivity, *Dasein* and *Wesen* are figures of the same content (they are both forms of proto-objectivity),¹⁰ although the actions from which they obtain are different: advancing as *Übergehen*, ending as *Zurückgehen*. In the second logical sphere, essence specifically “shows itself.” It makes the advancement in an act of self-determination (*sich Bestimmen*) whereas the end takes place, yet again, as the movement of *Zurückgehen*. This time, the proto-objectivity implied by these actions is, respectively, *Grund* from which essence further steps into *Existenz* and realizes itself as *substance*, and the *concept*, to which essence “again” (*wieder*) “goes back.” While the objectivity that accompanies the advancement of essence belongs to the sphere of Essence (ground, existence, substance), the act of ‘going back’ with which the end is made

generates a structure that belongs to the successive sphere: no longer Essence but the Concept. In Being and Essence, the act of turning back with which the end is made leads to something that is logically entirely other than that which makes the end—being goes back to essence, essence goes back to the concept. This is a crucial difference between the action of advancing and that of ending. The act whereby being and essence end is and is not part of the story of being and essence—somehow, ending is the act whereby being and essence step off their own story. It is, however, their own act. Now, while this may be accepted as rather unproblematic, the fact that ending is *both* the act of stepping off being and essence *and* a *Zurückgehen* needs, to say the least, further elucidation. For how can the end be both?

After considering the modalities of development of being and essence, Hegel's synchronic reconstruction turns to the concept, that is, to the movement that separates the end of the concept's subjectivity from its objectivity. And the issue here is apparently clear enough: "the concept determines itself to objectivity." Although the act of self-determination is common to essence and the concept—it is the way of their advancement—Hegel underscores what is distinctive of the concept at this juncture: "It should be obvious that this latter transition [i.e., to objectivity] is essentially the same as the *Schluss* from the concept" made by the traditional ontological proof (TW 6, 402). The "transition" to objectivity is a syllogism/conclusion—the same, he suggests, followed by the ontological proof. Hegel, however, fundamentally changes the meaning and structure of that proof. While the latter (and Kant's critique thereof) construes the transition as the inference from the concept (of God) to something entirely different, namely, being—whereby *Sein* and *Dasein* are positioned "outside of the concept," as it were (TW 6, 404)—Hegel argues that in this *Schluss* the concept 'goes back' to itself, not to something other and different. And besides, *Sein*, *Dasein*, *Existenz* belong to being and essence, not to the concept. Unlike being and essence that achieve their end by "going back" to an utterly different sphere (this is precisely what ending means in their case), in the movement to objectivity the concept remains with and within itself. In other words, the point of Hegel's synchronic reconstruction of the movement of being, essence, the concept with regard to objectivity is that, at this juncture, no end is properly reached for the concept yet. Rather, the transition to "objectivity" is only the concept's first step toward the end. Indeed, the end of the Subjective Logic as a whole (which is also, at the same time, the end of the logic as the first systematic sphere and the enactment of the methodological end) does entail a transition to objectivity that is, this time, the movement to

something radically other than the concept, namely, the nonlogical objectivity and exteriority of nature. The end, in this case, is the act of a final "Ent-schluss" (TW 6, 573). This, however, is not the act of the subjective concept but of the concept that through objectivity has realized itself to "idea." In other words, in the case of the concept, the end is a two-step or two-phase action as the concept's objectivity is approached twice, once in the movement of "objectivity" in which the ends of being and essence are reenacted, the other at the level of the Idea, in which the final end is made. In the first step, being and essence are reenacted but also corrected in the transition to objectivity (in the appropriation and transformation of the *Schluss* that is the ontological proof). In the second step, instead, the end is properly made by the act of going back to being as "erfülltes Sein" (TW 6, 572), which is nature. I shall address this last episode of the logical movement later. For the moment, I want to stress that the way Hegel construes the movement of the concept to objectivity by setting it synchronically in relation to the way in which being and essence make the end by 'going back' to something other than themselves, says something important with regard to how he thinks of the action of ending across the logical spheres. Recall that the point of the synchronic (re-)reading of the logic is to bring to light the difference in the ways the end is made.

In introducing the last division of the Logic of the Concept, the "Idea," Hegel claims that the concept that through objectivity "has truly attained its reality" is the "absolute judgment whose subject distinguishes itself as self-referring negative unity from its objectivity." This confirms that objectivity is not the end of the concept's process of self-determination but only the end of the *merely subjective* concept. Now, in the self-differentiation of the "absolute judgment," subjectivity presents the sides of being "self-directed purpose and impulse (*Selbstzweck und Trieb*)" (TW 6, 466); objectivity, on the other hand, displays the moment of "exteriority," and is, most generally, "the side of finitude, alteration, and appearance." The finitude that lies on the side of objectivity is the reason why the movement of the concept has not yet reached its conclusion, the reason why subjectivity is *Trieb* to self-realization and the concept still has to actualize itself to "idea." In fact, the end is sanctioned by the action that puts an end to the finitude characterizing the concept's objectivity, thereby disclosing the objectivity proper to the idea. The "side of finitude [. . .] perishes by *going back* into the negative unity of the concept." Finitude meets its *Untergang* in the act of *Zurückgehen*—of going back into the negativity that "is the concept itself" (TW 6, 467).

It seems then that *Zurückgehen*—the act of turning back or going back—captures the action of ending *in all three logical spheres*: Being, Essence, the Concept, end by going back to something that is ultimately different from the objectivity that constitutes them in their progressive determination. Herein we meet the peculiarity of the end in contrast to the beginning and the advancement, namely, the notion that in the case of the end it is the *content* that makes the difference in the way the end is achieved. In other words, while being, essence, and the concept all end by the act of ‘going back,’ this action is different according to the content mobilized respectively in the three logical spheres. We shall examine this issue in the next three sections. We should dwell, however, on one last point, namely, on the puzzling way in which Hegel indicates the formal action of ending as a “going back.” Since the *Phenomenology*, the methodological appeal to the circularity built into the act of going back seems an easy way of sanctioning the end of the process. The end is the act that goes back to the beginning. Upon further reflection, however, if the end implies the movement whereby what is gone back to is a different and truly other sphere of action (being to essence, essence to the concept, the concept/idea to the objectivity of nature), the gesture of turning back becomes much more problematic. Take being. How can being end by going back to something that was never there in the first place, namely, to essence? For, if it was there, then being is not the beginning, but if it wasn’t, then in what sense is the movement properly a “going back”? And the *Zurückgehen* with which essence and the concept end is no less problematic.

1.1. Ending Being, an Infinite Postponement: Going Back by Becoming Essence

“Being is the abstract indifference (*abstrakte Gleichgültigkeit*), and when this indifference is to be thought by itself (*für sich*) as being, the abstract expression ‘*Indifferenz*’ has been used” (TW 5, 445). As the entire movement of being reaches its conclusion, being as a whole is summoned back in the characterization of its conclusive figure. Hegel announces that insofar as being’s action, which the development of “measure” has revealed to be “abstract *Gleichgültigkeit*,” is now taken and thought “for itself,” it deserves the designation of *Indifferenz*. Whatever being does, at this point, is done with indifference, or rather, more radically, *is* the action of Indifference or indifferentness itself since being is *thoroughgoing Indifferenz*, “*absolute Indifferenz*.” It is not just the pretension of not being touched by this or

that determination, which is a positive act of abstraction, and it is also not the balance and equilibrium of different claims declared equally valid (*gleich gültig*) or lacking all difference, which, generically, is only abstract *Gleichgültigkeit*. Taken in its wholeness, being is instead radical, dead indifference, the erasure of all difference or rather, properly, the regression to a condition in which no difference and determinateness is “as yet” allowed to emerge, to make a difference, as it were. Indeed, Hegel underlines that the expression *Indifferenz* signifies the position “in which there is not supposed to be *as yet* any kind of determinateness (*an der noch keine Art von Bestimmtheit sein soll*)” (TW 5, 445—my emphasis): in other words, being as sheer undifferentiated indeterminateness. The fact that being as *Indifferenz* refers to an action that programmatically positions itself as coming *before* all determinateness is even allowed to surface—or as any kind of determinateness (be it qualitative, quantitative, or concerning measure) is *as yet still to come*—signals that this figure of being’s action, although obtained as the end result of the foregoing process, is the action whereby being finally makes the end. For, as we have seen, methodologically ending implies *Zurückgehen*, the act of turning back or re-turning. However, while making the end is the act of going back, the ‘whereto’ of that *Zurückgehen* is not specified. To be sure, being is indifferent to that as well. It must be if its indifference is to be absolute. This posture, however, seems rather gratuitous here, since in the case of Being taken as the first systematic sphere there aren’t many alternatives open to that going back: nothing precedes being.

Indeed, the indifference in which all kinds of determinateness is “as yet” still not there (or should not be there) is immediately recognizable in its proximity to the immediate “being, pure being,—with no further determination (*ohne alle weitere Bestimmung*)” with which being makes—or rather made—the beginning (TW 5, 82). This warrants the notion that by presenting itself as the action of absolute indifference, being ‘goes back’ *to the beginning*, to its own beginning action, and thereby puts itself in the position of making the end. Straightforward circularity. Except that being’s final absolute indifference is quite a different action than being’s initial indeterminateness. This latter is being’s very first *determination* (to be utterly indeterminate is what being *is* in the beginning); absolute indifference, by contrast, appears to be the “negation of all determinateness of being” (TW 5, 445f.). Being goes back, then, but not exactly to the beginning (not to *its* beginning). The end is *not* the beginning (of being) after all, and the end’s circularity is not so straightforward. In fact, in making the end being is the indifferent act of becoming essence, or rather, the act of letting

essence first become (“Das Werden des Wesens”: TW 5, 445). Thus, it seems that within the sphere of Being the action of making the end ultimately involves a ‘trick.’ The indifference that brings being back in order to make the end proves to be an illusory act of *going back*. For there seems to be nowhere being can go back to. And in any case, as absolute indifference, being is indifferent to that as well; nothing makes a difference to it. This is the dialectical ‘trick’ of being’s ending action, which is, to be sure, the double movement Hegel announces in the absolute method: turning *back* is a moving *forward* (TW 6, 569f.)—a ‘trick,’ then, only in the hands of being, truthful instead when viewed from the standpoint of the method. As we are projected *forward* to the announced “Becoming of Essence” (TW 5, 445), what we get is the act of going *back* to an “absolute indifference” that passes for the initial indeterminateness of pure being but is, instead, quite a different movement. To be sure, the way in which being is now indifferent to all determinateness has, at this point, declared itself ‘indifferent’—whether because no determination is there as yet, or because none of the foregoing determinations matter, all this is equally indifferent. Thus, although being must turn back in order to end, the turning back is truly an illusion. It is, however, essence’s illusion; to being it makes really no difference. Hence, for it, it is not even an illusion; it is, quite simply, what the totality of being in its final action properly is. And this is being’s *end*. But what if, additionally, being were to go back *to itself*? In this case, can being still be indifferent, or what does it take for it to maintain its absolute indifference? Would this move require being’s indifference to its own indifference (an indifference that invests being in its entirety)? And what is the end of indifference itself? This is the question faced by being’s *libertas indifferentiae*. What is it that can break the tie of that indifference, producing its dialectical *Aufhebung*, as it were, and releasing essence from being? The inner movement of absolute indifference will take on precisely these questions.

In referring to the currency of the term *Indifferenz* in the contemporary discussion, Hegel has Schelling in mind.¹¹ Schelling conceived of his Absolute as the *Indifferenz* of subject and object, the ideal and the real, as the Absolute Indifference that entails the possibility of both subject and object, the ideal and the real, without being determinately any one of them. As indifference, the Absolute is the origin of all distinctions, the undifferentiated potential ground that precedes all actual forms, the dynamic chaotic merging of everything, the “göttliche Wirrnis” in which all dimensions of reality converge even prior to their emerging.¹² Hegel’s polemic point here is crucial and repeats the argument we have seen him making several times

since his Jena essays and the *Phenomenology*. Indifference is not an origin and is not a beginning but is the end. For, in indifference everything ends as being as such ends; nothing can emerge out of—or indeed begin from—Absolute Indifference. Indifference is the very action that ends, and it is such an action taken in its totality (indifference thought “for itself as being”: TW 5, 445), not an attribute of such an action or an accidental state accompanying it. Indifference is the logical figure in which being’s action absolutely ends. Now, whether such an end is something akin to a ‘creation’ is the further question—the question that will be settled only in the conclusion of the logic with the absolute idea’s ending action. In his later work, *Die Weltalter*, Schelling draws further implications from his early metaphysical notion of indifference in connection, this time, with the problem of human freedom. In *Die Weltalter*, Schelling thinks of Absolute Indifference as the form of primordial freedom, as the non- and pre-subjective, void and inert indifference that is absolute freedom, itself pure unactualized potentiality, the abyss of an *Ungrund*.¹³ These later reflections are relevant if not directly for Hegel, who continues to refer to Schelling’s Jena *Identitätsphilosophie*, certainly for the broader context in which we shall develop the logical figure of indifference as being’s modality of making the end.

Hegel underscores that *Indifferenz* already describes being’s action at the level of “quantity.” “Pure quantity” is the moment in which being’s indifference first becomes manifest. Indifference is the cipher of being’s quantitative action. Herein, not quality but magnitude determines what the action is. Quantitative determination, though, is constitutively “indifferent determination” (TW 5, 210). This is, however, a relative indifference as it is predicated on two conditions. The indifference of pure quantity, Hegel claims, is its “being capable of and open to any determinations, provided that these are *external* to it and that quantity itself *does not have any connection* with them originating in it” (TW 5, 445—my emphasis). This is, in effect, a form of indifference relatively easy to display. It is indifference to determinations that ultimately do not touch being in what it is (it is, after all, not that difficult to be indifferent to what is merely external and has no relation to ourselves; not that difficult to value the same whatever is equally unconnected to us). But quantity’s indifference (the *Indifferenz* of quantitative *Gleichgültigkeit*) is also logically distinct from “absolute indifference” to the extent that it is openness to (any) determination, or indeed “determinability,” not the “negation of all determinateness of being” (TW 5, 445f.), which characterizes instead being’s absolutely indifferent action. In contrast to quantity’s relative and conditioned indifference, absolute indifference is

the position that being attains only at the end; it is indifference achieved as a result—as the utterly negative attitude toward everything indiscriminately: quality, quantity, measure, insofar as all these forms of determination are now plunged into being's negative, indeed in-different "simple unity" coming in it to their end (TW 5, 446). Since absolute indifference marks the end of their making a difference to what being is as a whole, it seems to erase all the gains achieved so far by the movement of being's successive determination. In this way, however, as much as absolute indifference reclaims precedence over "all kinds of determinateness," it proves itself a fully mediated position, a result.

The reference to quantity's *relative* indifference is important because it discloses the central problem for which *absolute* indifference is meant to provide the final solution at this conclusive stage of being's development. At stake is the general problem that dominates the entire sphere of Being, the issue that characterizes the struggle of finitude, in all its forms of existence, against itself, against its own constitutive determination. Taken as the chief issue finally addressed by absolute indifference, this is now the question of how the end can be made to that which is constitutively set to run an infinite regress or progress, namely, to that which is set to defy the end by aiming, rather, at the unending, self-perpetuating action of what is consequently only a "bad," still-finite infinite. How can the end be made to that which is constituted by the very act of ending and yet is incapable of fulfilling this act? This is, most generally, the contradiction at the heart of the finite.

In addressing the problem of finitude with regard to its first qualitative appearance in the sphere of *Dasein*, Hegel frames it in terms of the "mourning" that accompanies all finite things. The "mourning of finitude (*Trauer der Endlichkeit*)"—the mourning that finitude itself is, and the mourning of finitude's destiny—is that to which absolute indifference puts a final end. Starting from the first qualitative characterization of the action of the finite, the movement of being is the successive attempt to escape its necessary and constitutive destiny, namely, the end. Qualitatively, the culminating determination of the finite, the pervasive determination of all the actions constitutive of its being and inseparable from it, is its being destined to ruin—its *Bestimmung zum Untergange*. The finite has nothing, no "affirmative being" that exists "distinct (*unterschieden*) from its determination to ruin," untouched by it. Heidegger would agree, translating this as the "being-toward-death" of *Dasein*. The finite is precisely this, *zu seinem Ende bestimmt zu sein*—and Hegel adds, "aber nur zu seinem

Ende" (TW 5, 140).¹⁴ Maybe that is what is so scary and unacceptable: "only to its end"—the end and nothing more, nothing beyond the end. It is, therefore, against this destiny or rather determination-vocation (*Bestimmung*), against this immediate identification of the finite's being with its End—*End-lichkeit*—that the finite consistently acts, but also unsuccessfully acts. The end cannot be avoided since after all that's exactly what finitude is. The end can only be postponed, indefinitely and infinitely postponed (or, which is ultimately the same, rushed into, too fast and prematurely). While *End-lichkeit*, in its very being, is constituted by the *finis* or termination that finishes it (this is indeed its one and only determination), it is either unable or unwilling to end, to accept its own being, live and act according to it, thereby bringing its own being to completion, that is, to the end—*Voll-endung*. Since *Endlichkeit* lacks the courage to make the end, it survives in the illusory progress of a bad unending infinite. The unending (in)finite, however, is still always finite (it is, in fact, even more so). By contrast, the truly infinite—*Un-endliches*—achieves the completion that is the end of finitude as such precisely by embracing and fulfilling the end (not suffering *Untergang*, not aiming at something more beyond the end, but actively making the end).

In the sphere of quantity, finitude's problem is essentially the same. Although the course of action, this time, is quantitative in its determination (what confers existence to the action is its quantity or magnitude), being's predicament remains fundamentally unchanged: only by reaching its end, that is, by actively making the end, is the finite truly infinite—yet the finite is constitutively set against its own end. Within quantity, however, being finds a strategy to counter the being-toward-the-end proper of finitude, a way of coping with the "determination to the end," which it is otherwise unable to shake off. Being declares itself "indifferent" to it—*gleichgültig*—thereby apparently separating itself from it. If we render ourselves, as the "quantum" does, indifferent to that which constitutes our limit, then the limit is truly no limit since it really makes no difference to our being. Thus, by declaring itself indifferent, being can pretend not to be touched by the limit, that is, by its end. And in this way, it goes on. Since this strategy was not available to quality because of its immediate identity with being, it constitutes the first "difference" between quality and quantity. "Quality is the first, immediate determinateness. Quantity is the determinateness that *has become indifferent to being*; a limit which is just as much no limit (*eine Grenze, die ebensowohl keine ist*)" (TW 5, 209—my emphasis). This, however, proves to be a losing strategy after all: the limit *is* limit and end, no matter

how indifferent being may pretend to be toward it; indifference turns out to be yet another excuse or justification for the repetitious postponement of the end that now is only quantitatively reinforced and justified. The progress in infinity emerges yet again, and the “infinite quantum” ends up breaking that indifference and reverting back to quality. In fact, the limit does matter to being—to quantitative just as to qualitative being. Thus, eventually, quantity’s *Gleichgültigkeit* and relative *Indifferenz* yields to the cleverer compromise brought forth by measure.

Measure is the relation of quality and quantity in which the quantum sheds its indifference, and the limit that resides in it finally *does make a difference*—a difference to being’s defining quality, a difference to being’s reaching and accepting its end. In measure, the quantitative limit is no longer indifferent. Within the quantitative range defined by measure, the quantum is now recognized as responsible for the end of a certain being’s existence, for the end of that quality which makes something be what it specifically is.¹⁵ Measure matters; it is not indifferent. “The something (*Etwas*) is not indifferent to this magnitude, as if, were the latter to alter, it would remain the same; rather, the alteration of the magnitude alters its quality.” Quantitative indifference no longer works for the “specifying quantum.” The end must be faced because the end comes when quantitative alteration reaches the limit. Directly showing the inconsistency of the indifference assumed by the pure quantum (TW 5, 209), Hegel claims: “As measure, the quantum has ceased to be a limit which is none (*Grenze zu sein, die keine ist*); it is from now on the determination of a thing, so that, were the latter to exceed or fall short of this quantum, it would perish (*zugrunde ginge*)” (TW 5, 395). And yet, the infinite regress or progress surfaces again. The end is hard to accept, even within measure. The limit turns out to be always questionable, apparently such that can always be pushed a step further, gradually and almost insensibly. Until it no longer can. We are always waiting for a last word, a last gesture. Until nothing more comes. And at this point, the end arrives, “suddenly.” Transformation occurs, dialectically, in a process that is *both* gradual, through progressive “repetition” of the same (“Allmählichkeit” and “Widerholung”—TW 5, 396, 397, respectively), and sudden, utterly unexpected. Hegel notices that the ancient paradoxes of “the bald” and “the heap” (TW 5, 397) capture the dialectical *truth* of this predicament. They express the illogical hope that even measure can be defeated, the end yet again postponed, and they show how that hope is ultimately groundless. Thereby, those paradoxes entail the truth of immediate measure, the dialectical coexistence of the gradual and

the unexpected, the repetition of the same and the emergence of the new, of positive being and its demise or *Untergang*. Although the movement of measure proves that mere quantitative *Gleichgültigkeit* cannot defeat the end, indifference as such is not left behind once and for all. It persists within measure as the balancing act of quality and quantity, just as the infinite regress persists in the multiplication of series over series of measures. And yet, in the conclusion of the development of measure, a dialectical reversal reveals that indifference, far from being a strategy to avoid the end, is instead the only successful action that finally *makes the end*. This is the function of “absolute indifference” as conclusion of the Logic of Being. Dialectically, taken in its absoluteness, that is, thought through and enacted in its completion (i.e., to the end), indifference proves to be not a way to postpone, delay, and impossibly defeat the end, but truly the only way in which being ultimately does make the end, thereby escaping (because overcoming) its destiny of indefinite postponement. Absolute indifference is the action that ends Being as a whole by leading on to (or rather ‘back to’) the “transition to essence” (TW 5, 456). Properly, absolute indifference is the in-action—or the absolutely negative action—of being whereby essence first becomes. It is the action/in-action whereby being *lets essence become*.

“The absolute indifference is the last determination of being, before the latter becomes essence; *but it does not attain essence*” (TW 5, 456—my emphasis). Absolute indifference is the “last” determination that brings being to the end. It is the action whereby being finally makes the end, overcoming the infinite regress—be it the qualitative, the quantitative, or the one that invests measure. Now the end is the act of being’s *becoming essence*. And yet, Hegel insists that absolute indifference “does not attain essence.” It stands, rather, at the threshold between being and essence by creating the negative space of a gap, an intermission in which only “becoming” and “transition” seem to take place (titles: TW 5, 445, 456, respectively). Absolute indifference is the movement of a becoming and a transition that occur in an indifferent, apparently inert and dead void. This last figure “shows that it still belongs to the sphere of Being because it is still determined as indifferent, and therefore difference is external to it, quantitative.” At this stage, the indifference that permeates the movement of being becoming essence or of essence’s becoming (TW 5, 456, 445, respectively) is still a mark of *being’s* action. It betrays the attempt to create a kind of externality and separation between being and its conclusive end. Indifference is still “determined as indifferent,” that is, is a posture that indifference must insist on maintaining. The fact that absolute indifference renders (and maintains) itself indiffer-

ent by considering “difference” as “external” and other is the sign that it is *being’s* final action, not yet essence’s action. Absolute indifference “does not attain essence.” For, at this conclusive stage, difference is unequivocally there no matter how indifferent indifference pretends to be toward it. This opens the space for the very last action of absolute indifference, the action whereby indifference turns negatively against itself and fulfills the act of its own *Aufhebung*. This is the last step necessary to exhaust all the potential of indifference, the step that finally leads being *back to itself* and lets essence become.

The act whereby indifference posits difference as external in order to be utterly indifferent to it can also be expressed, Hegel notices, by saying that it is “external reflection” that hijacks the working of indifference at this point: “it is external reflection which insists (*dabei stehenbleibt*) that specific determinations, whether in themselves or in the absolute, *are one and the same*—that their difference is only an indifferent one, not a difference in itself” (TW 456). External reflection surreptitiously replaces being in its action, simply repeating one of the strategies that being has employed in quantity and measure. In so doing, external reflection prevents indifference from being really absolute: it is the Absolute that is declared, instead, that in which all determinations “are one and the same.” This is, yet again, Schelling’s indifferent identical Absolute—a failed beginning that is, just as much, also a failed end. In other words, this conclusive movement reveals that absolute indifference is ultimately not a position that can be taken seriously to its last consequences without reflection’s insistence in referencing an unquestionable Absolute, and without reflection’s distancing gesture—or the “externality”—that coming from reflection is meant to preserve indifference untouched, or, indeed, absolute. In order for indifference to act in a really absolute way, by contrast, “reflection” must be brought to bear on its very action; indifference must erase all externality and penetrate into the unity of being itself. Being must prove to be absolutely indifferent in all respects, including toward itself. Reflection must become the very movement of indifference, indifference that turns against itself by acting indifferently toward itself (and not merely toward differences declared ‘external’), so that, by confronting its own self and by being utterly repelled by its own indifference, being becomes truly another—that is, essence. Absolute indifference must become reflected and internalized or indeed radicalized indifference. Instead of *being declared* indifferent by (external) reflection (i.e., such that *for reflection* all is the same), difference must show itself indifferent by being indifferently enacted within the unity that being at this point is. Reflected

indifference must now become “the very determination of the difference of that unity—a unity which would then prove itself to be the absolute negativity, *the unity's indifference towards itself, towards its own indifference no less than towards otherness (Gleichgültigkeit gegen sich selbst, gegen ihre eigene Gleichgültigkeit, ebensosehr als gegen das Anderssein)*” (TW 5, 456—my emphasis). Only under this condition, namely, to be turned *entirely against itself* (and not just against difference and otherness), is indifference the final act of *Sich-Aufheben* that brings being to its full completion, hence to its complete overcoming in essence. Now, the action expressing utter indifference toward oneself insofar as the self is nothing but absolute indifference ultimately destroys the self in an act of self-repulsion, the action that truly ends being: “the incompatibility (*Unverträglichkeit*) of itself with itself, the repelling (*Abstoßen*) of itself from itself” (TW 5, 456). Self-referred indifference is self-defeating: it leads being back to itself, exposes its self-loathing and self-repulsion (on the ground of its radical indifference), but this produces, dialectically, the movement whereby being is entirely overcome in the act of “infinite self-rejoining (*unendliches Zusammengehen mit sich*).” This is really the end—the end of being as such and the end of all infinite progress (in being).¹⁶ What rejoins with itself is no longer being but essence. “And so is being determined as essence—being which, through the sublation of being, is simple being with itself” (TW 5, 457). Absolute indifference finishes being (and finishes it off) and lets essence become.

1.2. Ending Essence: Reclaiming One's Own End (Before and Against the Concept)

Essence makes its end posthumously, beyond and after itself, in the Concept. Essence ends on the other side of essence since its end can be ascertained only once the concept emerges in its own right in its own sphere. And herein essence (just as being) is properly no longer essence: it is a “moment” of the concept's own “becoming.” Once it has “gone back” into the “unity” of the concept, essence (just as being) no longer retains the “determinateness” of essence (TW 6, 245). Indeed, if methodologically the action of ending is the movement of *Zurückgehen*, as in the case of being, the ‘whereto’ of that “going back” is more complex than it initially appears. In the face of it, one would assume that it is a going back *to the beginning*. However, the synchronic methodological passage examined earlier entails a different suggestion: essence shows itself, in the end, as “going back (*zurückgeht*) *into the concept*” (TW 6, 402). The concept confirms this: *Begriff* first emerges as

the “unity” and *Grundlage* to which essence goes back (TW 6, 245). To be sure, this return back is less problematic than it was in the case of being, for which essence was not there to begin with. For the concept’s presence alongside with essence, as a premonition at least, is announced several times within the development of essence. It should not come as a surprise, then, that it is finally presented as that to which essence goes back, hence as its end. The problematic issue herein consists rather in the fact that the concept is also the one that properly goes back (to itself) in essence’s end. The action of going back seems to pertain not to essence (which is supposed to end) but to the concept: the concept, after all, is the “subject” to the agency of which essence as “substance” necessarily yields (TW 6, 249).

Thus, as the concept takes the action of ending out of essence’s hands, depriving essence of this crucial moment of agency, essence is dead set on reclaiming this act as its own, on making an end on its own terms, independently of the concept. This is clear to essence from the very outset. It is made clear already by the systematic position this sphere occupies within the logical development as a whole. “Essence is placed between being and the concept, and constitutes their middle (*die Mitte derselben*), and its movement is the transition (*Übergang*) of being into the concept” (TW 6, 15f.). Essence’s action of ending is shaped by this systematic ‘middleness’ between being and the concept. Its end is already a beginning, its beginning is already an end. More importantly, the end point seems set for essence from the beginning and is set, apparently, independently of essence: it is all about reaching the *concept*; it is all about *being* reaching the concept. The movement thereby described seems to erase essence’s agency: it is either *being that transitions* into the concept passing through essence, or the *concept that becomes* through essence (TW 6, 16, 245, respectively). It seems that in this story essence is after all less essential than it thinks. Being ends up in the concept, essence only bridges the gap. Essence’s end, accordingly, is framed as the end of the transition or the end of the journey: it is the point where being finally attains the concept, which is both essence’s end result and its goal. Essence’s “middle” position is, to be sure, an uncomfortable one, hinting as it is at its subsidiary character between being and the concept. But it is also a Janus-faced position strategically rife with possibilities since it allows essence a purview that extends simultaneously in both directions, that is, backward toward being and forward toward the concept—the same duplicity of directions that according to the “absolute method” informs the action of ending as a going back that always pushes forward. In this way, essence is well prepared against the concept when at stake is the action of

making *its own end before* the concept, that is, before the concept steps in to put an end to its movement thereby undermining essence's agency. Essence is in the position of knowing how and when exactly to anticipate the concept with the sleight of hand whereby it proceeds to shape its own end, preventing the concept from taking the upper hand and imposing its end to essence ('end' here both in the sense of conclusion and in the sense of *telos*). Or perhaps not really preventing this from happening so much as delaying its happening.

Resulting from being as "being's complete return into itself" (TW 6, 14), essence is the absolute "unity" the determination of which remains enclosed within itself and is accordingly "neither becoming nor transition" (although essence as a whole is being's "transition" to the concept: TW 6, 16), just as its "determinations are neither an other as other nor relations to other" but are instead endowed with independence and self-sufficiency, at least within the unity of essence. They are *Selbständige*, although only to the extent that "they are in unity with each other" (TW 6, 15). This unity, however, is constitutively split—and then split again—by the action of reflection, which expresses the fundamental negativity of essence throughout its development.¹⁷ This general structure already implies that something like the infinite progress or regress met within being, and characterizing the nature of finitude, does not work within the constitutively unitary, self-enclosed structure of essence. Which does not mean that the infinite postponement of the end or the attitude toward the limit that the regress expresses is not to be met within essence. It only means that such attitude is now fundamentally or essentially modified (by essence's reflection). At the beginning, "absolute essence" bears all the consequences of the action of being's "absolute indifference." Essence is in the beginning what being is/was in the end (although—or precisely because—essence is also the "first negation of being" as a whole: TW 6, 16), namely, the act of "repelling itself from itself (*Abstossen seiner von sich*) or indifference toward itself (*Gleichgültigkeit gegen sich*)." This time, however, such action is enclosed within the unity of essence. Thus, essence begins by directly facing itself: as the result of being's absolute indifference, essence "setzt [. . .] sich somit sich selbst gegenüber." In its self-referred and reflected character, indifference is essence's general, pervasive character. "Essence *as a whole* is what quantity was in the sphere of Being: absolute indifference to the limit (*gegen die Grenze*)" (TW 6, 15). Just as quantity, essence is a middle, an intermediary. Its chief determination "as a whole" or the generalized character of its action is "the absolute indifference to/against the limit." This character will

inform essence's end as well. In quantity, "indifference" is being's attempt to counter a limit that, in order to be countered, must be held in "immediate external" distance from being, and this despite the fact that the limit is instead "necessary" and truly discriminating with regard to the subsistence or destruction of things (which is the truth brought to light by measure). In essence, by contrast, the determination that constitutes the limit is not an immediate; it is instead what essence *posits as a limit*: the limit *is* not; "it is *posited* only through essence itself" (TW 6, 15). Consequently, the limit does not sanction the demise (*Untergang*) of things (or of finitude) but rather expresses their interconnectedness within the whole of essence's indifferent unity, namely, their independence insofar as "they are in unity with each other." Whatever is—all action and anything subsisting as enclosed by limits—is only within essence and through essence as *posited* by essence, hence "not free but only in relation to its unity" (TW 6, 15)—not free in its existence and not free from essence's indifferent action. The indifference of essence is measured by this act of *positing* that toward which essence acts, in turn, with utter indifference—letting it be, as it were, what it essentially is. Now it is in relation to this general framework, which establishes what essence properly is and does given its origin from being, that the end follows as the action that essence has to take into its own hands against the concept that is set as the purported end of its movement. Essence must end *before* the concept intervenes; essence must counter the general end goal set for its sphere (namely, the concept) with *its own end*.

Hegel characterizes the movement of this sphere most generally as the act whereby essence progressively confers *Dasein* to its own determinations so as "to become the *unendliches Fürsichsein* that it is in itself." Now this is precisely what the "concept" is. As essence reaches its end goal it "becomes the *concept*" (TW 6, 16). There is no safe distance between the completion of essence and the concept—nothing like the gap separating "absolute indifference" as "the last determination of being" from essence, which that determination explicitly "does not reach" (TW 5, 456). This lack of distance from the concept is the problem that essence faces in making the end, *its own end*. Since the concept arises as that which puts an end to essence by replacing it, essence is deprived of the right to this final, concluding action. Indeed, the "subject," which the concept purports to be from the outset, takes agency away from "substance." This is precisely what the subject is supposed to do as subject. Yielding to the concept-subject, essence-substance from its part does not properly end—it may well be eternal (unlike being's finitude). It is nonetheless alternatively replaced, enhanced, refuted,

downgraded to “moment” of the concept—deprived of its final action all the same. (Recall the awkward formulation of the *Phenomenology*, “everything hangs on apprehending and expressing the truth *not* as substance *but also equally* as subject (*nicht als Substanz, sondern ebensosehr als Subjekt*).” Substance is indeed outright negated: “not as substance,” but then not really negated but rather included in the higher truth of the subject; it is the subject that acts in its stead (TW 3, 27—my emphasis).¹⁸ This loss of agency, however, is what essence cannot accept. Thus, essence is set on making its own end after all—against the concept’s plan, against its end goal. Essence’s anti-teleological end stages the revenge of substance over the subject. It turns out to be a failed revenge—an action that has history (philosophy’s history) against itself, but an action worthy of attempting nonetheless.

“*The concept is the absolute* as it is absolutely, or in and for itself, in its *Dasein*” (TW 6, 16—my emphasis). *Der Begriff ist das Absolute*: this is an important hint for essence to follow when at stake is the act of ending independently of the concept. Essence must posit itself as the absolute—*instead of the concept, before the concept* (which is a different act than positing itself as the *same* absolute that the concept is). Thus: essence is the absolute. If it manages to do this, essence will have made its own end (and in this way, will have ‘gone back’ to the concept on its own accord). The problem is that “the *Dasein* which essence gives to itself is *not yet Dasein* as it is in and for itself but as essence *gives* it to itself or as *posited*, and hence still distinct from the *Dasein* of the concept” (TW 6, 16—my emphasis on “not yet”). This is an important hint as well, as it signals what essence has to correct in order to posit itself (or to pose) as the absolute in a plausible, in fact, in a final way. Or perhaps the problem is all in that positing activity, which most generally and ‘essentially’ characterizes essence’s action. Be that as it may, the next issue for essence concerns the point in which it should start acting in order to make the end. The answer comes once the dialectic of “inner” and “outer” has run its course and the transition to the last moment of essence, *Wirklichkeit*, is accomplished. Herein, taking up the considerations presented in the opening of the sphere of Essence, Hegel signals the first emergence of the concept’s universality. “The movement of essence is in general the *coming to be of the concept* (*das Werden zum Begriffe*, the becoming toward the concept). In the relation of inner and outer the essential moment of the concept comes on stage, namely, that its determinations are so posited in negative unity that each not only is its other immediately, but is also the totality of the whole” (TW 6, 182). In the concept, this totality is *das Allgemeine*. This is also the *Grundlage* which,

Hegel notices, is not yet present in the relation of inner and outer (TW 6, 182) but “as indifferent identity” and “reflected unity” constitutes the underlying structure leading to and developed by “actuality” (TW 6, 183). As *Wirklichkeit*, essence is the completion and unification of the splits and dualisms characterizing the reality of appearance, the act that brings their content back to one and the same, identical formal basis (“eine identische Grundlage”: TW 6, 186). It is at this point that essence attempts its sleight of hand and begins to make its end, a premature end but an end nonetheless (this is the *lusis* of essence’s story, Aristotle would suggest). From the outset it is clear: essence has to posit the absolute in its actuality. What emerges already from the completion of the relation of inner/outer is that even without having to get to the full-fledged concept of “god”—god as *Geist*, as it were, and even as *absoluter Geist*—god can be presented as the “abstract absolute” or, properly, as “nature” (TW 6, 184). In other words, there is some space to maneuver for essence here, even before getting to the concept. And essence rises to the occasion. *Deus sive natura* may be a plausible alternative to God-*absoluter Geist*.

The movement of Actuality is essence’s attempt to make the end by presenting the absolute that essence itself—not the concept—is in and through the act of its own *Auslegung*. Everything hinges on the nature and the modality of this “ex-position” because it is the action of exposing that ultimately constitutes the absolute as a plausible end by “showing what the absolute is” (TW 6, 197). The conclusive action of essence unfolds through a series of self-correcting stages. Importantly, in making its end, essence follows in being’s aftermath but also anticipates the strategy according to which the end is made by the “absolute idea.” The appeal to the modality of the *Art und Weise*, which is the “measure” but also the “method” ultimately deciding of the validity of all actions and all things (of their survival or demise) is as crucial for essence at this conclusive stage as it was for being and will be for the concept-idea. Measure, Mode, Method are all successive ways to make the end.

Anticipating and in fact replacing the emergence of the concept as a “third” after being and essence (TW 6, 245), essence cleverly introduces the absolute in an ambiguous way so as to create the impression that what we have here is a final proto-third that leaves essence behind—and yet is still essence, not the concept. “The absolute is not just *being*, nor even *essence* (*nicht nur das Sein, noch auch das Wesen*)” (TW 6, 187). Not just being, of course, but “nor even essence”? In effect, the absolute is also ‘not just essence’ but the end of essence, essence ending, hence something different

than what essence has been heretofore, different in regard to how essence has heretofore acted (i.e., different in the mode or modality of action). The absolute is the absolute identity and totality of its determinations: it is both “absolute form” indifferent to its manifold content, and “absolute content” indifferent to its unifying form. The “solid,” “substantial,” and unitary identity (“gediegene Identität”: TW 6, 188) of the absolute is itself “absolute” in a sense that anticipates the concept and yet falls short of the concept. It is a totality such that “each of its parts is itself the whole or each determinateness is the totality,” just as each moment of the concept is both “a determination of the concept” and “the whole concept” (TW 6, 273). In the identical totality of the absolute, however, all difference has vanished: the absolute form is accordingly “only simple self-identity,” from which it follows that unlike the conceptual whole “the absolute does not *determine* itself” (TW 6, 188). The chief “determination” of the absolute is to be “absolute identity”: in it all manifoldness, all dualisms (the world-in-itself and the phenomenal world, inner and outer, and so on) have been overcome. The absolute’s “solid identity” (TW 6, 187, 188) is the identity of a monistic in-different absolute. Its action is neither a “becoming” nor a “reflective determining” nor the act of *Sich-Aussern*—these forms characterize either being or essence up to this point. The absolute is an apparent ‘third,’ different from all that. In fact, all action (of both being and essence) seems to come to an end in the absolute. The absolute is sheer *Abgrund*. It is explicitly not the “beginning” but the “end” of all things (TW 6, 190). This is essence’s first proposal, its first attempt to an end, which echoes, in point of fact, the position of “absolute indifference” as being’s ending action. Here we have the “negative *Auslegung*” of the absolute. All “action” (*Tun*) of reflection (which is essence’s most proper action) is finally overcome “in the absolute.” To be sure, it is difficult to accommodate “the movement of reflection” in relation to this solid, identical absolute. This is the fracture that essence has to heal in order to persuasively put an end to its movement with the figure of the absolute. For, reflection “is the *beyond* of the manifold differences and determinations and of their movement, a beyond that lies *at the back* of the absolute.” Reflection “takes up” those differences and at the same time determines their “going under,” their demise (*Untergehen*) in the absolute by acting, seemingly, instead of the absolute (TW 6, 189). Reflection is “beyond” the differences (is “the beyond”—*Jenseits*) but is also positioned “at the back” of the absolute. Reflection is still too much of a *deus ex machina* for this absolute to conclusively work as the end of essence.

However, another strategy is open to essence at this point, one that promises to be more successful. “In its true presentation (*Darstellung*), this exposition [of the absolute] is the preceding whole of the logical movement of the spheres of *Being and Essence*” (TW 6, 189). Presented in this way, the absolute is truly the immanent end resulting from—and sealing up—the preceding movement as a whole. No tricky “beyond” or “behind the back” connects the movement of being and essence to the absolute. The absolute is rather “drawn out” of the preceding whole of the logic as its necessary conclusion. This is true not only formally but also with regard to the “content,” which is neither imposed contingently from without nor plunged by external reflection into the absolute as an empty *Abgrund*. The content has instead developed according to its own “internal necessity” as “being’s own becoming and as the reflection of essence,” and thereby, in the end, “*has returned into the absolute as into its ground (in das Absolute als in seinen Grund zurückgegangen ist)*” (TW 6, 189—my emphasis). The “becoming” of being and the “reflection” of essence are presented (or disguised) as the true, positive *Darstellung* of the absolute. Obtained in this way, the absolute seems indeed to make quite an adequate end for the sphere of Essence as a whole: it is the necessary and immanent end result of the entire preceding logical movement; it is the ultimate *Grund* to which such movement “has gone back” in a final act of *Zurückgehen* (not simply *Abgrund* in which all difference is dissolved). In sum, as a way of making the end of essence, the absolute seems to work just as well as the concept does. Indeed, if one compares this passage with the initial introduction of the concept at the beginning of the Subjective Logic, the strategy employed by essence with the presentation of the absolute becomes clear in its striking similarity to the concept. The *Begriff*, Hegel argues, is that which has “being and essence” as “moments of its becoming,” is the “*Grundlage* and truth” of those moments, and constitutes the “identity” and “unity in which they are gone back (*zurückgegangen sind*)” (TW 6, 245). Essence attempts to make (or to anticipate) its own end by constructing an absolute that mimics the structure of the concept by fulfilling all its initial conditions, that is, by displaying all the traits that connect the concept to the conclusion of essence: as the concept, essence’s absolute is the becoming of being and essence, their ground, and the result or end to which they go back. The absolute, not the concept, is the end of essence. This is essence’s stance at this point.

The absolute is not only the *Abgrund* in which all manifoldness, difference, and determination vanishes and “goes under.” The absolute is “their

Abgrund but also [. . .] their *Grund*" (TW 6, 189). The *Auslegung* of the absolute has, therefore, a "positive side" as well. Dialectically, the very act whereby "the finite founders (*zugrunde geht*)" in the absolute is proof or "demonstrates (*beweist*) that its nature is to be referred to the absolute, or to contain the absolute within itself" (TW 6, 189). The finite comes to an end in the absolute; this very act, however, is the mark of its eternity, its absoluteness, its ultimate identity with the absolute itself. This is indeed essence's solution of the problem of finitude that has plagued being first, and then essence's reflection in the constant splits and dualisms that only now seem to find a convincing closure in the absolute's monistic identity. By ending in the absolute, the finite does not end but is eternal. The finite contains the absolute in which it comes to its end (*untergeht* and *zugrundegeht*). In its indifferent identity of *Abgrund-Grund* the absolute destroys finitude but also contains it as ultimately identical with itself. *Deus sive natura*. The absolute is 'the end of all things' but also their subsistence; it is, at once, their destruction and their positive essence. The absolute confers them actuality not, to be sure, in their manifold differences but in their immediate identity with itself. The absolute is the perfectly and incessantly identical activity of production and destruction, or the pure repetition in which no manifold, no otherness (hence no change) takes place.

The essential structure of *Schein* and the action of shining through play a crucial role in determining the absolute's relation with the finite. Finitude is *Schein*—illusory and negative appearance, to be sure, but also that in which the absolute "shines (*scheint*)" through. Finite things, nature's manifold phenomena, are not just "nothing." They are "reflection, relation to the absolute." They *are* (positively) *Schein* "insofar as the absolute shines in them," insofar as the absolute finds in them its expression and "exposition" (TW 6, 190). Here, however, essence's hesitation in making an end that may be too radical comes to light—a hesitation that complements finitude's constitutive difficulty in accepting its own end, and ultimately (and mistakenly) surrenders to it. Essence does not dare to push the negation of the finite to the end. In fact, the positive exposition of the absolute "*halts the finite just before its disappearing*" and considers it "an expression and a copy of the absolute" (TW 6, 190—my emphasis). And yet, the end of the finite cannot be avoided. The price essence pays for this hesitation is a loss of agency on the side of the absolute. The finite ends all the same but due to its own logic rather than to the action of the absolute. Dialectically, it is precisely the act of halting the end by turning the finite into an allegedly positive *Schein*—expression and copy of the absolute—that sanctions the

fact that the finite ultimately “ends in total vanishing (*endigt in gänzlichendes Verschwinden*).” For, the finite retains no difference from the absolute: it is allegedly the perfectly transparent “medium” through which the absolute shines, but the ‘medium’ is then completely and irreducibly “absorbed by that which shines through it” (TW 6, 190). The finite is destroyed by its being put in the position of “medium” meant to save it from destruction and to express the absolute’s eternity. The finite is destroyed by the absolute’s act of shining through it, but is also kept alive, halted at the threshold of its disappearing because it is that which contains the absolute, that through which the absolute is expressed and ex-posed. *Deus sive natura* is turned therefore into a perfectly identical, eternally repetitive action—the determination and destruction in which everything stays the same, utterly identical in the indifference of the absolute *Grund-Abgrund*, the finite expression of the absolute, the absolute expressed in the finite.

The “absolute action (*absolutes Tun*)” of this absolute is presented as the “end” of all things (*ihre Ende*), that in which everything finally “goes back (*zurückgeht*)” (TW 6, 190). This, however, is not the true end of essence since the act of going back cannot move forward beyond an absolutely repetitive identity, which is what the end as moment of the method instead prescribes. There is no beginning—no new beginning after (and from) this end—only the incessant repetition or a beginning forced arbitrarily by “external reflection” (TW 6, 190). It follows that both the exposition of the absolute and the absolute itself must be recognized as *ein Unvollkommenes*. Essence is clearly not yet ready to make the end; it is not yet complete. The absolute is not the end or is not “das Absolut-Absolute”—the repetition signaling the stalled predicament of essence at this point (TW 6, 190). Essence must go on and attempt another, more plausible, more complete and definitive end—an end that entails not only the movement of ‘going back’ but also the action of ‘advancing forward’ to a new beginning (to the concept, as it were). Thus, essence downsizes the identical absolute first to “absolute attribute” (TW 6, 191) and then to mere “Art und Weise” or “mode” (TW 6, 192f.). And it tries again to make the end.

This time, however, the action of ending follows a different strategy. The absolute first expressed in and through the finite as its “medium,” then downsized to not absolutely absolute attribute and mode is “expression” but also externalization of the (true) absolute (TW 6, 192). *Ausserung* and *Entäusserung* are ultimately the modalities of its absolutely identical unity, the convergence point of its negative and positive *Auslegung*. Now essence attempts to make the end capitalizing on the implications of this action of

expression-externalization. The end is made by dialectically acting in what appears the opposite modality to the identical absolute, that is, according to its utter externality. The “mode” is *das Ausersichsein des Absoluten*, the absolute’s alienation, its “loss of itself in the changeability and contingency of being; its having passed over into its opposite without turning back into itself, the manifoldness of form and content determinations that lacks totality” (TW 6, 193). The end, this time, is the loss or rather self-loss of the absolute, its self-alienation, and utter disintegration—with no “turning back.” The end, this time, is not the end of all finite things but far more radically the end of the absolute itself. This is an important strategy in which essence anticipates the final decision with which the absolute idea makes its end by embracing the radical exteriority of nature, thereby putting an end to the logic as a whole. By revealing, with another repetition, the disintegration of the absolute in the “most external exteriority (*die äusserste Äusserlichkeit*),” nature is the end of the absolute. And yet, it functions as the end because it is *posited* as such an extreme exteriority *by the absolute*. The exteriority, which is the mode, is still exteriority *of the absolute*. It is properly the act that confirms (or truly posits) the “absolute identity” of the absolute, its “indifferent identity” (TW 6, 193, 194, respectively). In the mode, then, the absolute ‘returns to itself.’ There is, however, no escape from identity, which is now repeated and repeated, indifferently, again. In the mode the absolute determines itself but does not determine itself as “an other (*ein Anderes*)”; it only reproduces—and then shows—that “which it already *is*.” In this case, then, exteriority is the absolute’s action of “manifesting itself” (TW 6, 194, 201). The absolute has not come to an end after all.

What remains for essence at this point is a variation of this attempt at an end executed by moving from mode to modality (TW 6, 201). The memory of being’s end in Measure is useful for essence here. Measure was already framed in terms of mode and modality by being (TW 5, 388, 390). At stake is the blind “necessity,” the “destiny,” the “Nemesis” that decides of the limit of all existence and all action by ultimately assigning the necessary, non-negotiable end of all things (TW 5, 390). Essence’s final attempt at a closure of its overall movement—the final attempt that will lead essence to the concept—takes up being’s hint and reinforces it within the structure of “actuality” that being was still lacking (TW 6, 201). In the action of “absolute necessity,” essence “goes back” to being, thereby beginning the movement of its end. As “the form of the absolute,” absolute necessity has left the thought of the absolute behind and is defined, instead, as the “unity of being and essence” (TW 6, 215), thereby proposing itself as the

conclusive result of the preceding movement. Absolute necessity is “blind” and entirely self-enclosed (“verschlossen”: TW 6, 216); in it all *Scheinen* and all reflection comes to an end. Differences, however, are present in a new modality unknown heretofore to essence: they are “free actualities” as they neither refer to each other as reflexes or semblances nor stand in relation at all. They are, instead, “self-grounded” in their internal necessity, hence “free” in their actuality and as such “manifesting only themselves.” This point of convergence of necessity and (proto) freedom is the beginning of essence’s true end. The freedom of absolute necessity is a blind, light-averse, and self-enclosed freedom, purely and radically negative but also in-different in its blindness.¹⁹ It is the freedom that finally sets the accounts of being and essence—of being with essence and essence with being. In its necessity, actuality displays this freedom just as its otherness does—“freies Anderssein” is the figure complementing the “freie Wirklichkeiten” (TW 6, 216). Both are now disentangled from their dependence on the absolute that previously undermined their subsistence, a subsistence that first and only at this point is true actuality (not *Schein* or *Reflex* or manifestation or even the exteriority of the absolute). Now necessity “has let go free” its determinations as “absolutely actual” (*frei als absolut wirkliche entliess*), while from its part it has receded back into itself in the movement of an *absolute Ruckkehr*. Essence’s action, at this point, is entirely unprecedented. Essence no longer posits and no longer reflects, no longer shines or manifests itself in something other or even in itself. It abandons entirely the binary logic that has dominated even its self-exposition in the monistic absolute. Essence now “lets go free” its own actuality as absolute necessity. Truly, essence finally lets go of itself and lets itself go. And this is the act that makes the true end. Essence only holds on to a “mark” that it impresses on the actualities as it lets them go free—a last reminder that it is essence, not the concept, that still acts here. The mark is the distinctive “content” of those actualities, the “witness to essence’s right” over them, the power that presides over their perishing—over the fulfillment of their essential end (TW 6, 217). Necessity joins freedom both in the act whereby essence ends in letting actuality go free, and in the act in which necessity brings those free actualities to their end.

1.3. The Idea, Ending: Knowing When to Stop

The concept ends twice or makes its end in two steps. Its first *Schluss* is the action that puts an end to the concept’s subjectivity by completing it through the entire spectrum of syllogistic figures and then determining the

transition to objectivity. The second end is the decisive one. Its protagonist is the idea into which the concept has realized itself gaining the full-fledged form of objective truth. The action whereby the idea ends is also the action that brings the overall story of the logic to its conclusion. This end, we have seen, is the "absolute method." The idea makes the end by thinking about and enacting the end as the final moment of the method that has led all the way up to the absolute idea itself. Herein the story told and the story performed and lived finally converge. This is the most comprehensive way of ending by returning back—*Zurückgehen*. What remains, however, is one last step—the last gesture and the last word—*beyond* the method whereby the idea closes the story of the logic and looks simultaneously backward and forward, not adding anything to the logic's story yet leaving something crucial for thinking to go on with, this time outside and independently of the logical idea but still, somehow, within the movement and the reality of the idea. In undertaking this last action, thinking will discover that it is no longer *logical* thinking. The last step is properly the action that by freeing thinking from the story of the logic puts it in the condition of beginning a new life and a new action beyond the logic itself. At stake is the way logical thinking puts an end—and this time a final end—to the action that has characterized it as logical thinking throughout the previous process. What does it mean for logical thinking to end acting as *logical* thinking, and how is this conclusive action performed? What does thinking that is no longer logical thinking do? Significantly, the moment in which thinking ends acting as logical thinking is also the moment in which thoroughly new possibilities of being and acting are disclosed. Thinking can finally be and do something entirely new and different than what its long-standing story conclusively recollected in the method has presented it as capable of doing. Having completely fulfilled its purpose, thinking is now liberated—freed from that purpose and absolved from its task. This marks the truly transformative and creative nature of the act of ending displayed by this figure—a *Zurückgehen* productively and actively prospective, a peaceful moment of satisfied rest rife with further movement, a liberating dynamic endeavor.

According to the general methodological characters of the act of ending, in the case of the "absolute idea" the end is accomplished, first, as the movement of "going back" that implies an act of moving forward, and second, as some kind of transition to a form of objectivity.²⁰ Since the end that the absolute idea is in charge of performing is, this time, both the end of the last movement issuing from the idea in general and the conclusion of the logic as a whole, the act of 'going back' is directed both to the idea and

to the beginning of the logic as a whole. The end is the final fulfillment of both. Unlike the conclusive action of being and essence, in the case of the idea the whereto of that 'going back' is clearly marked in its most extensive validity and is a true going back *to the beginning*. Introducing the "idea" as the realized truth of the concept, Hegel insists that the idea is not "just a goal (*Ziel*)" to be attained or even only approximated but which itself remains "a kind of beyond (*Jenseits*)" in relation to the forms of reality and action aiming at it (as for Kant, on his view). The idea is instead immanent actuality so that anything actual is what it is insofar as it "expresses (*ausdrückt*)" the idea that it itself is (TW 6, 464). In this apparently simple way, the idea solves the problem on which essence labored so hard but found for it only a cumbersome and insufficient solution in the figure of "the absolute" (in relation to attributes, modes, and modality). With regard to being, on the other hand, Hegel claims that in the idea as unity of the concept and reality "*being* has attained the meaning of truth." However, in the idea finitude has not disappeared. The finitude of "finite things" is due to the fact that "they do not possess the reality of their concept *completely* (*vollständig*) within themselves but are in need of other things for it" (TW 6, 465). At this level, the shortcoming that constitutes the finitude of finite things is both a lack of completeness in their displaying the reality of the concept and a lack of autonomy in their displaying such actuality ("they are in need of other things" for that). "The highest to which they attain on the side of this finitude is external purposiveness," that is, finite things are determined by an "external" purpose and have their end therein, not within themselves in their immanent idea. This sets the overall goal of the process of the idea and offers a first suggestion as to when and how the end of the movement shall be attained: the idea will come to its end when it will have "completely worked through (*vollkommen durchgearbeitet*)" all forms of reality and all modes of action so that these are completely "subjugated (*unterworfen*)" or brought under the concept/idea (TW 6, 465), thereby overcoming, or putting an end, as it were, to their finitude. This will happen precisely in the "absolute idea" as the entire development of the logic is finally "completely subjugated (*vollkommen unterworfen*) to the method" (TW 6, 552).

While "being" has attained the meaning of truth in the idea, in good reciprocity "the idea has the most general sense of *true being*." The idea as such has already gone back to being in its true sense. More particularly, though, referring to the immediately preceding movement, the idea is also "the unity of subjective concept and objectivity." It is "the concept liberated

to its subjectivity” in the return to itself from objectivity and yet again distinct from that objectivity (TW 6, 466). From this logical history, the further determination of the idea up to the end obtains. Herein begins the *lusis* of the idea's story. The idea is first determined in its immediate universality, and then displayed in the separation of subjectivity and objectivity and in the “process” (*Prozess*) where the two sides are mediated (cognitively and practically). The final moment is presented, quite simply, as “the identity of the idea with itself,” one with the “process” in which subjectivity and objectivity are progressively brought to coincide. This final determination of the idea is indicated as the self-identity of a state of *Ruhe*. The absolute idea is “peaceful rest,” that is, the predicament in which, the “process” of the idea as well as the overall movement of logical thinking coming to their end, there is no longer process and no longer movement—the end of the movement as the negation of all movement, hence “rest.” Hegel, however, immediately corrects this latter inference. He does so by promptly qualifying the meaning of that *Ruhe*. To be sure, if the idea in its final absolute determination brings forth the complete truth of being, that is, the truth of all reality and action by “liberating” actuality from the mere “*Schein* of purposeless mutability” and by “transfiguring it” into the identity that is the idea itself, then this truth cannot and should not be represented “as the dead rest (*tote Ruhe*), a mere picture (*Bild*), numb, without impulse and movement (*Trieb und Bewegung*), as a genius or number, or as an abstract thought” (TW 6, 467f.). There is no striving toward the idea (as a beyond or an external purpose: TW 6, 464, or a detached “picture” of reality); the idea, however, is itself the striving-that-is-at-rest. Hegel's position may be running against traditional philosophical representations of what the idea is as well as against representations of what reaching the end implies (especially when the act of reaching the end is the idea's own act). His position, however, is clear: when at stake is the absolute idea making the end, *Ruhe* is not “the dead rest,” the inert rest of the dead, death as the end of life and movement, but the peaceful rest that is alive because animated by striving and movement and yet entirely self-assured, in itself satisfied and fulfilled, hence restful and at rest. The idea's ending action is the seemingly contradictory unity of unchanging stillness and dynamic, striving transfiguration. Key here is the “freedom” that characterizes the idea's activity: “because of the freedom which the concept has attained in it, the idea also has the most stubborn opposition within it (*den härtesten Gegensatz in sich*).” *Ruhe* describes, specifically, the way in which the action of freedom ends or the way in which freedom brings its action to the end. “Its repose consists

in the assurance and the certainty with which it eternally generates that opposition and eternally overcomes it, and in it rejoins itself (*mit sich selbst zusammengeht*)” (TW 6, 468). The end of free action is repose and rest, not “dead rest” but a rest rife or alive with the highest and “most stubborn opposition”—an opposition that the idea, at this point, is perfectly able to bear and to handle. Accordingly, the *Gegensatz* does not lead the idea away from itself to a new transition and to a new logical sphere but maintains the idea free within itself, in complete circularity (the idea reconnects or “rejoins with itself”). This is the moment of the end, the perfect finality of which neither “absolute indifference,” nor “the absolute,” nor even “absolute necessity” could attain. In fact, there is no *Ruhe* in being’s and essence’s final action because it is rather its opposite that moves the process on to a new logical sphere, namely, respectively, absolute indifference’s self-loathing and repulsion toward its own indifference, and the absolute’s imbalanced and uncertain dealings with finitude and external reflection. To be sure, what pushes the absolute idea further is not the hardest opposition and the search for its resolution but the peaceful identity and unity that the idea reaches in the end. Properly, not only is the absolute idea able to handle the “highest opposition (*den höchsten Gegensatz*)” it bears within itself (TW 6, 549, taking up 468), it is the idea that out of self-assurance and self-certainty eternally generates that opposition and eternally overcomes it, in this process of generation and overcoming “going with itself,” that is, ultimately, giving voice to the self-contained, autonomous productivity of freedom. This is indeed the highest accomplishment or the fulfilled end gained by freedom. It is the freedom that spirit expresses in the creations of art, that is, in the creation of forms of reality that display (or “express”: TW 6, 464) the idea bearing the self-produced highest opposition within itself but also, at the same time, providing the successful conciliation of that opposition. Herein spirit, just as the idea, is truly, because conclusively, “absolute.”

After the presentation of the “absolute method,” the idea puts the method to work and takes its final step toward the end. Now the end, circularly, goes back to the beginning and structures the entire logic (or “science”) into a circle or properly into “a circle of circles.” It is only at this point that the circularity that “winds the end back to the beginning” *thereby determining the end* as the act of “turning back to the beginning” takes place (TW 6, 571f.). Only at this point, that is, only in the idea’s end, does such a return to the beginning occur, not in being and not in essence. Importantly, the complete claim here is that the end as the movement of going back to the beginning *is also a new beginning*. This is, yet

again, something that neither being nor essence could achieve—the former because of absolute indifference's maintained distance from essence, the latter because of essence's chief task of preventing the concept from inserting itself into what it sees as its own story, thereby maintaining its own distinction from the concept. By contrast, for the absolute idea the act of making the end is such as to not only connect back to the beginning but also, at the same time, as to actively make a beginning that is an utterly “new” one—that is, namely, “the beginning of a new member” of the whole of science as a system (TW 6, 572). This is then the twofold task the act of making the final end should carry through: first, to reconnect, circularly, to the beginning of the whole thereby instituting the whole in its conclusive completeness; second, to give rise to an unprecedented, entirely new beginning—to an utterly new and different way of thinking and acting beyond the logic (i.e., beyond logical thinking). “So the logic also has returned (*ist [. . .] zurückgegangen*) in the absolute idea to this simple unity which is its beginning.” The end is the absolute idea's act whereby the logic as a whole “has gone back” to the “simple unity” of the beginning, that is, to “the pure immediacy of being” that made the beginning. Notice that what the end returned to is *the same* “simple unity” that made the beginning: the circle is now perfectly closed. And yet, that “pure immediacy” of the beginning receives a new and different meaning. The change in meaning (or the additional meaning) is now carefully spelled out, being the cipher of the process undertaken by thinking beyond the method and coming here to its end. While at the beginning being's immediacy consisted in the fact that in it all determination had vanished and was removed by abstraction, now this immediacy is, directly, the idea itself, it is the idea's own action as the idea has come to “a likeness perfectly corresponding to it” (TW 6, 572). This is fully mediated truth, mediation so full and complete that mediation itself is thereby overcome, going back to pure immediacy. Immediacy is not the beginning but the end, the end that goes back to the beginning. “Method is the pure concept that only relates to itself.” Knowing when to stop: when complete self-referentiality is reached, when the same, “simple relation to itself” is achieved, which being was in the beginning, so that an apparent repetition—pure being—ensues, then the end is made. In this way, circularity describes the idea's act of ending in contrast both to the open-ended linear repetition of the finite and of external reflection (TW 6, 567), and to the dead end that lacking the impetus for a new beginning is only that, that is, the stillness of a dead end. Indeed, as the end is made by turning back and thereby repeating the first step, the idea discovers that the

“simple unity” is now fulfilled, that pure being is now “erfülltes Sein” (TW 6, 572)—being fulfilled in its potential, filled up with actuality. Now this determination, which is properly the prospective, forward-looking determination of the end, is unprecedented as it is lacking in the way being and essence make their end. Describing the final action of the absolute idea, being is both “immediate being” and “fulfilled being,” concrete, and “utterly intensive totality.” Only by getting back to this beginning, at once immediate and fulfilled, is the idea capable of entirely resetting its accounts; only after every determination and every action has been performed and carried out to the very last consequences, can the idea be a completely blank slate (yet again), can, that is, open up to a new immediacy. Only at this point can a new beginning be made, a totally and truly new action arise. This is the idea’s (and the logic’s) end.

In the introduction to the *Science of Logic*, Hegel presents the project of his dialectic-speculative science by means of an analogy with language. The pure logical forms in which thinking determines itself throughout the logic stand to the real world in which those forms are specifically and particularly embodied in the same relation in which the abstract general rules of grammar stand to spoken, lived and living, enacted language. The turning point of this analogy lies in the fact that once a language is mastered and becomes familiar in its lively actual dynamics, then the dry and abstract and seemingly dead rules of grammar are finally recognized as a “fulfilled, living value (*einen erfüllten, lebendigen Wert*)” (TW 5, 53). Those rules become fulfilled and alive to the extent that they are enacted by the individual in the lived language and by the culture in its varied linguistic productions. Eventually, the practice of language may even *change* the rules, infuse into them an utterly new life. Now, with the circularity of the absolute idea’s end, the corresponding turning point of the logic is reached. Pure being is now fulfilled: its value has now changed as all the preceding logical forms become alive and concrete as the spoken, used language is. This is the point in which logical thinking must step out beyond itself, beyond the story confined to the solipsistic and shadowy world of the logic and enter the ‘real’ world—the world of otherness, dynamic communication, and external expression. Indeed, heretofore the idea’s action of ending has remained self-enclosed—*eingeschlossen*—within “pure logical thinking” (TW 6, 572); the absolute idea as the “original word” has been solipsistically addressing only itself for lack of true “otherness” to which its “expression (*Ausserung*)” could be directed (TW 6, 550). We encounter, yet again, the *limit* implied by the action of making the end (the limit that already occupied being’s

measure and essence's mode and modality). In closing circularly on itself by apprehending the very act of conceptual self-comprehension (this being "absolute cognition"), the idea goes beyond itself as it overcomes its "position as content and object" of itself (or of the logical science: TW 6, 572). This means that the horizon is now broader than the idea itself; from now on its knowledge is no longer only *about itself*. As the idea loses its "position" as the exclusive "content and object" of its knowledge but also as absolute subjectivity, the *Trieb* to move on beyond itself comes to the forefront (TW 6, 572). Something else (than the idea) emerges *in the end*. Or, in the act of ending, the idea turns into something else entirely—becoming completely other. At stake, then, is the *Übergang* that marks this emergence and this (self-)transformation, the new beginning, "the beginning of a new sphere" of knowledge and action (TW 6, 573). This is the *Übergang* contained in the very idea of the last action, the transition that is not a transition, still enclosed in the story that such action concludes, yet aiming at getting off the threshold of the story thereby creating an utterly new beginning. Only in this way is the final end truly made. If the absolute idea is the "original word" and is originally "expression" (TW 5, 550), its nature cannot be fulfilled by the solipsistic act of talking only to itself about itself, of telling its own story to itself. For, in this case, no true "expression" takes place. Once language, first expressed only in dry grammatical rules and forms, is "filled up (*erfüllten*)" with concrete meaning and made "alive" by it (TW 5, 53), it needs to be used, needs to express something concrete to someone/something else than oneself. In the end, the *Trieb* that animates the very act of ending voices the need to break the logical idea's solipsism and step into the exteriority of the world—the world of nature, of otherness and manifold others, of exteriorization and communication. In making its end, essence already attempted this move. And it was, in effect, a move in the right direction.

The end is presented in apparently simple terms. "As the idea posits itself, namely, as the absolute *unity* of the pure concept and its reality and thus gathers itself (*zusammennimmt*) in the immediacy of being, it is in this form as the totality—nature" (TW 6, 573). The idea gathers or collects itself, and in so doing it recollects its story, the story that has made it what it truly is leading it to the end in the form of the "absolute unity" and totality of concept and reality. Then there is a pause in this recollecting act. And the pause produces a sort of identification, or perhaps only a suggestion, a hint toward the new creative act, which is no longer an act of logical thinking. It is, rather, the *Zeigen*—the act of pointing to and imagining—a new begin-

ning (TW 6, 572). It is the different, indeed unprecedented act of intuiting, an “intuition” (Enz. §244) that discloses a new horizon for thinking, knowing, acting, being, namely, “nature” (TW 6, 572). What follows to the end of the book is Hegel’s explanation of this final act. This entails, as all ending acts, the movement toward objectivity (in addition to the movement of ‘going back’: TW 6, 402). In this case, however, Hegel argues that the idea’s final action is “neither a *Gewordensein* nor an *Übergang*” in the strict sense, as was the case in the transition whereby the “subjective concept” in its totality “becomes” objectivity or the subjective purpose “becomes” life. In these cases, we have both the continuity of *Gewordensein* and the change of scene marked by the *Übergang* to a different logical sphere, to another, *still logical* beginning. The action with which the idea makes the end is, instead, the action of an “absolute liberation”—*absolute Befreiung*. This entails a crucial move to objectivity because the idea’s absolutely free action *is*, directly and immediately, the full actuality of objectivity. Since this final act of liberation is not the positing of a determination that is still immediate or not yet permeated by the concept (as is the case within the logical process), “in this freedom there is no transition that takes place.” This freedom is therefore complete; “in it” there is no passing over into something other. The end is not a transition but the act of turning the page (or rather, more radically, of closing the book): it is the liberating gesture that hints to another story altogether, to another, unprecedented way of acting and being—a way that is not yet there but must be entirely invented, imagined anew. As the idea, in a final act of freedom, “determines itself” to simple being, this “remains completely transparent to it” and is “the concept that in its determination remains with itself (*der [. . .] bei sich selbst bleibende Begriff*)” (TW 6, 573). No longer the illusory “transparency of the finite” maintained by essence’s absolute action (TW 6, 190), truly a way of destroying the finite and reducing it to the absolute’s “medium,” now transparency is the idea’s “simple being”—nothing more needs to be added at this point. Indeed, ‘to-remain-with-oneself’ is no transition and no becoming; it is, rather, another expression for that animated “peaceful rest” or *Ruhe* (TW 6, 468), which describes the end achieved by the absolute idea. It is another name for the highest freedom caught in its concluding act—to-be-with-oneself-in-otherness. Hegel suggests that since this is a rest that is active or in action, one may indeed use the expression *Übergehen* provided that an essential clarification is made. If there is a “transitioning” in this action, it should be taken “in the sense that the idea *freely lets go of itself (sich selbst frei entlässt)*, absolutely certain of itself and *internally at rest (in sich ruhend)*”

(TW 6, 573—last emphasis mine). The idea's "absolute liberation" is the act whereby the idea frees itself from itself: having fulfilled its (logical) task, it absolves and unbounds itself from it, and is now both retrospectively *free from* it and prospectively *free for* a new life, a new destination, and a new task. In its freedom, the idea lets go of itself as it has been as *logical* idea, and it lets itself go as something utterly other—nature. Ultimately, in so doing, it harkens to the poet: "These things have served their purpose: let them be."²¹ Finally, the 'letting go' and 'letting be' that describes the ending action of the idea's absolute freedom is an act of "Entschluss" (TW 6, 573). This is, simultaneously, the liberating "decision"—*Entschluss* whereby the idea embraces the utterly unprecedented form of objectivity that now makes a new beginning, the last logical act of "inference"—*Schluss* of logical thinking, and the "conclusion"—*Schluss* of the entire logical story.

2. Part I. Playing the Endgame: Indifference and the Impossible Ending—Beckett's *Endgame*

It begins with Clov, "*motionless by the door, his eyes fixed on Hamm.*" "Clov (*fixed gaze, tonelessly*): Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished. (*Pause.*) Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap. (*Pause.*) I can't be punished any more" (*Endgame*, 1).²² The end is a kind of liberation; the problem is getting to it. But perhaps we are already there. The end is right at the beginning. It is often and easily noticed that the beginning of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* is already an end, if not the end, one of the many ends.²³ However, beginning and end are also different, as Beckett explains to the actors of *Endspiel*: "Between the beginning and the end lies a small distinction which is that between 'beginning' and 'end'"²⁴—a distinction that is perhaps not entirely indifferent. From which it also follows, as Hamm does not fail to underscore, that "the end is in the beginning and yet you go on" (*Endgame*, 69). You go on, despite Clov's resigned protestation, "I'm tired of our goings on, very tired" (*Endgame*, 76). Despite the fact that the beginning is already the end, you have the story, you go on with the development that constitutes the play but also your life, your life's story or rather its "chronicle" (*Endgame*, 58).²⁵ Death is in life just as life is in death. Although the end is always latently present, at issue is the act of *making the end*, of reaching the end and thereby, finally, being finished. This, however, proves to be an impossible, paradoxical act.

A similar strategy of beginning with the end, yet going on repeatedly attempting to register an end that seems to never come although it is always present, meets us in the opening of the second trilogy novel *Malone Dies* (English version, 1956): “I shall soon be quite dead at last in spite of all” (*Malone*, 174).²⁶ What should be underscored in both works is the ground Beckett provides for the link between the seeming identity beginning-end and the act of ending or, rather, for the indefinite postponement of the end, which constitutes the topic, indeed the chief obsession, of both the play and the novel. *Malone Dies* takes its cue, right in its opening line, from the writing-speaking voice being not “quite dead” yet—only nearly dead but not quite, not entirely. He is waiting to achieve the ‘quite’ of that “quite dead.” This seems the condition for the novel’s development (although it is not, since Malone also contemplates that there is, “naturally,” the possibility of being not just “merely dying” but “dead,” “dead already” (*Malone*, 219, 213)—dismissing the alternative as utterly indifferent or rather declaring it “a great disappointment to have it confirmed”: *Malone*, 219). The narrative and existential distance separating that ‘not-quite’ but ‘only-nearly’ finished-dead (or dying) from the actual (quite) dead end, frames and enables the development of *Malone’s* chronicle as well as the play’s endgame. “Finished, it’s finished,” but actually, and more precisely, it’s “nearly finished, it must be nearly finished”—indeed, *nearly*, not entirely, not quite, not quite yet. Whatever that “it” that is nearly finished may be, since it is only “nearly” finished, it still has to be completely brought to the end. In the game of ending, the actual end is still an open possibility, or, rather, impossibility. Hamm confirms Clov’s initial words with a slight variation at mid-play. Interrupting his story even before its narration has begun, he exclaims: “It’s finished, we’re finished. (*Pause.*) Nearly finished. There’ll be no more speech” (*Endgame*, 50). The story, “we,” language itself have reached the end, are finished. But the retraction comes immediately: properly, it is—and we are—“nearly finished.” And Hamm’s story, just as the play and its characters, goes on, stumbles on to the next (partial) ending, fearing and at the same time wanting the unending. This is what the “endgame” announced in the title is about (Beckett thought to hyphenate the title as *End-game* until just before the American edition was printed): the game of the end or the game of ending; the endgame, as in chess, Hamm and Clov being its two principal players.²⁷ Hamm is the king now at centerboard, the center around whom everything revolves yet incapable of doing anything by himself; Clov is, perhaps, the only surviving pawn tending to the king yet constantly announcing his leave-taking.²⁸

There is, however, a crucial point on which attention is rarely paid in the literature, and certainly even more rarely paid in connection with the central Beckettian theme of the link between beginning and end. This is the point that I take instead to be the key for the entire play, the chief rule of the end-game. Immediately after his beginning-ending line, Clov states it for us unequivocally in his motionless, fixed composure: "Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, *suddenly*, there's a heap, a little heap, the *impossible* heap" (*Endgame*, 1—my emphasis). The key to the endgame—and to the connection beginning-ending, which the game articulates—is the sorites paradox (or, alternatively, the dialectic of measure).²⁹ Hamm confirms Clov's words, yet again, this time toward the end of the play: "Moment upon moment, pattering down, like the millet grains of . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . that old Greek, and all life long you wait for that to mount up to a life" (*Endgame*, 70).³⁰ The end—the act of ending, the game of ending—is as "impossible" as the "impossible heap" of the ancient sorites, the paradox that Beckett attributes to Protagoras, "that old Greek" whose name Hamm can't remember.³¹ Be it by addition or by subtraction, gradually and seamlessly, "one by one," "moment upon moment," the heap is amassed or alternatively dismantled, life is constituted, the end or death approached, the story brought to completion. But truly, what one has at each instant is only a bunch of identical small unities—millet grains or time units—never a heap, never a life, never a story. Each unity may very well be the last one, but the process goes on nonetheless: "all life long you wait," you wait and you add (or subtract). Where and when, then, is the end reached—the end of the wait, the end that finally constitutes the heap? How do transformation and change occur if only repetition seems to be performed? Is there one unity that makes all the difference—the difference between a heap and a nonheap, life and death—despite its being just another unity like all others? How do we reach "that kind of epilogue when it is not very clear what is happening and which does not seem to add very much to what has already been acquired or to shed any great light on its confusion, but which no doubt has its usefulness"—the usefulness of finally making the end, once and for all (*Malone Dies*, 225)? We wait and wait for the heap to be formed, for it to "mount up to a life," for the end to finally come. But the heap was there all along or, alternatively, will never be there: we're finished from the very beginning (or "nearly finished," perhaps "already dead"). Life—but also death—was there all along, but we wait for it nonetheless.³² And then, "one day, suddenly," there is a heap—or, alternatively, the heap disappears, ceases to be, just like the life that has grown little by little suddenly ends.

The process of ending is continuous and apparently gradual, yet the end is sudden, stupidly unexpected despite its well-known necessity. Indeed, *that* there is an end is certain and necessary; *what* the end may be is instead utterly contingent, you must “go on” in order to find out: you must play the end-game. This is the gist of the game of ending. But what is it that precipitates the end (assuming that there is such a final end point or event), finishing the story or the game or life once and for all? Truly, however, the entire matter, the action of ending as such is hardly comprehensible. It is a paradox, a sheer impossibility, as it were: Clov’s “*impossible* heap,” confirmed by his resigned final “I don’t understand” (*Endgame*, 81). How is the end made when the end is there from the beginning and yet “you go on,” you must go on in order to make the end, in order to play the end-game? The game of the end or the end-game aims at making the end; and yet, since the game ends as soon as the end is made, in order to go on the game of ending should not end. This paradox is Beckett’s rendering of the dialectical predicament of Hegel’s finite—*End-lichkeit*—the action of ending that by infinitely and indefinitely postponing the end never ends, although it does necessarily end or has always already ended to begin with (for this is what *Endlichkeit* properly is, “zu seinem Ende bestimmt zu sein”: TW 5, 140). In this way, Beckett turns Hegel’s “mourning of finitude” (TW 5, 140) into the “endgame.” Both are versions of the same truth expressed by the ancient paradox, the “impossible heap.”

Clov’s stage position in pronouncing his initial words is relevant in this discussion. At the outset, he appears “motionless by the door,” the same place he takes in the final scene of the play (*Endgame*, 1, 82). He occupies, at least in the English edition (in *Fin de Partie* he is instead “*immobile à côté du fauteuil*”—motionless by the armchair),³³ a position right at the threshold, at the limit of the closed world of the play (and recall Hamm’s warning: “Outside of here it’s death”: *Endgame*, 9, 70—to which one should retort that the inside world is itself “nearly” dead. Indeed, following the logic of the heap, the difference between inside and outside is an in-different one). The limit is the point of coexistence of the two states—a line that can always be redrawn, moved forward, postponed. Will Clov cross the threshold and leave for good, perhaps even die, as Hamm intimates (implying, however, that the result is ultimately the same, that is, ultimately indifferent)? Or will he just continue in his attempt to leave, only retreating as far as his kitchen, then inevitably coming back to Hamm’s orders? This is the question repeatedly, even obsessively raised up until the play’s conclusion. This is the question that the end finally addresses, thereby going back to the

beginning. The answer, however, lies perhaps in another question: Does it even matter what Clov does in the end, and in order to end? Or is it rather the indifference that the end makes, that which properly makes the end?

The logic of the impossible ending, applied to the impossible heap that frames the relation of life and death (individual and collective), which for Beckett are not opposites and not contraries but states as continuous and copresent and only vaguely distinguished as the grains of the impossible heap,³⁴ this logic plays a central role in *Endgame*, as already in *Malone Dies*, and plays this role at different levels. For one thing, the paradoxical logic of ending structures the text of the play as a theatrical text. Ending is a performative process—Hamm the actor playing an actor, Clov his necessary audience (just as Nagg and Nell are an occasional audience). It is a gradual process that moves on by incremental addition and repetition (*repetition*, the French term for rehearsal)³⁵ but also continually returns on itself. The end is constantly hinted at, yet is never decidedly made, although it could be made at any step, being there all along. Ending is the “exit” from the scene to which Clov alludes in the final scene (“This is what we call making an exit”—*Endgame*, 81). Ending is a game that is played according to strategies and rules: the end is the game’s chief objective but is also that which must be avoided or forestalled in order for the game to go on, for the play to be what it is—*End-game*. On the other hand, the endgame is also that which is *performed* throughout the play: it is the living and dying game—life in death and death in life—that shapes the characters, their relationship, their language, and the stories they tell, but also, crucially, the possibility of an end of nature (or an apocalyptic end of the world), perhaps already happened. The players want to play as much as they are constantly “trying” to end the game and with it their relationship (of master-servant, father-son, or lovers), to finish it, to leave it, to bring it to an impasse. They want to be finished with the game yet are hesitating to put a final end to it.³⁶ But the paradoxical logic of ending also informs the stories that Hamm tells—the stories that tend to merge with the characters’ own life and performance (as in Nagg’s and Nell’s case).³⁷ Stories, just like lives, end, must end, or, alternatively, do not, cannot end, and remain inexorably unfinished, open-ended. Stories are themselves games; they are, like games, ways of waiting for the end. They are a variant of the same endgame that the play is. The game is played on all these fronts: the story that tells the end should itself come to an end but cannot be concluded (is interrupted, or rather stops in its tracks due to the exhaustion of Hamm’s “prolonged creative effort,” only to start all over again, maybe with different characters: *Endgame*, 61,

69, 54); the language that speaks of the end foresees the point of silence and utter “stillness” where “there’ll be no more speech” yet still keeps the conversation going (*Endgame*, 69, 50), or, alternatively, in speculating what the “last” words one will utter will be—“written, the others do not endure, but vanish, into thin air” (*Malone Dies*, 242)—(written) language embodies the contradiction of the ending, claiming, at once, to be enduring (i.e., lasting): the enduring end (the lasting “last” moment)—the embodiment of Hegel’s bad infinite. The impasse of self-predication is an old one: “*Malone Dies*: does he? In a first person narrative, you can never be sure. *Malone Dies*: does Arthur mort in the *Morte d’Arthur*? The one thing we know for sure is that ‘King Arthur is not dead.’”³⁸ Indeed, the paradox of ending that keeps *Endgame* (and the endgame) going is paralleled by Malone’s “old aporetics” (*Malone Dies*, 175). In registering the process of his own death (or rather, dying), in marking the time of his waiting for the end, Malone tells himself stories—the stories told matching the incremental loss of life of their teller and eventually merging with or redoubling his dying chronicle. The stories will be, Malone declares, just as their teller, “neutral and inert,” “neither hot nor cold” but rather “tepid, I shall die tepid, without enthusiasm” (*Malone Dies*, 173)—utter indifference is Malone’s attitude, indifferent are his stories. The stories “will be neither beautiful nor ugly, they will be calm [. . .], they will be almost lifeless, like the teller” (*Malone Dies*, 174). Again, “almost” not entirely lifeless. Just barely alive is enough to go on. Given the fact that the stories are told while waiting for the end, Malone notices, “Perhaps I shall not have time to finish.” Indeed, if the end comes, the story will remain unfinished. But another possibility is there as well, for, “[o]n the other hand perhaps I shall finish too soon.” If the end comes, then the story will by necessity end, but end “too soon” hence will not be really finished. The result is actually the same contradiction: if the end comes (death) as it will come, there will be no end (to the story).³⁹ The life lived (and died) and the story told merge, intersect, and impede each other. The contradiction is apparent only if we grant that the terms are distinct (if death comes, there will be no end to the story), not if we insist, as Beckett does, on their indifferent continuity: if the end comes, there will be no end. Stories seem to always remain unfinished.⁴⁰ In fact, it is ultimately indifferent which case will come to pass, whether “I shall not have time to finish” or “I shall finish too soon.” “There I am back to my old aporetics. Is that the word? I don’t know. It does not matter if I don’t finish. But if I finish too soon? That does not matter either” (*Malone Dies*, 175).⁴¹ What really puts an end to the entire “aporetics” is actually the

fact that whichever way it goes is entirely indifferent. *Indifference* (perhaps, ultimately, "absolute indifference") is here the only true end.

How, then, is the endgame-*Endgame* played? The heap paradox implies that ending is a process with degrees—just like the game played, the play performed, the story told (and the life-death lived and died). The unfolding of the game consists in several successive moves, each trying to achieve what the game sets as the final objective, namely, the end; but also, as argued so far, each move attempting to forestall the end in order for the game to keep being the game it is. Accordingly, the end is always there but only, somehow, halfway—attempted and retracted, done and undone at the same time. "I shall soon be *quite* dead at last in spite of all." "Quite dead" sums up with 'quite' the entire dialectic of both death-life and the end—the dialectic of measure. The grammarians distinguish the uses of 'quite' as "maximizer, compromiser, and diminisher." A compromiser, 'quite' fulfills indeed contrary functions. "As well as being a maximizer, especially with units that are either nongradable or are seen as being at the end of the scale (*quite perfect*), we see that *quite*, apparently contradictorily, has two further roles," namely, to be compromiser and diminisher.⁴² Quite is a maximizer with "nongradable units" or with what is seen as "being at the end of the scale." Quite perfect, indeed. So, "Where does this leave death?" And where does it leave the end? After all, death and the end do seem "gradable" for Beckett. Are they also "at the end of the scale"—quite perfect?⁴³ Now, just as Malone's "*quite* dead," *Endgame* presents us with an array of equivocal figures all embodying the paradox of the gradable (imperfect) end: the rat "half" exterminated, Hamm's unfinished toy dog being "nearly white," "light black" being the name of the time of day (neither day nor night), the act of weeping ("for nothing, so as not to laugh") turning insensibly, "little by little," into grieving (*Endgame*, 54, 40, 32, 68, respectively). The chief rule is the one given by the heap paradox. The important point is that in the endgame just as in the dialectic of measure, the paradox is an expression of *truth*—the truth of ending (of ending being). The heap's end depends (logically and existentially) on the quality-quantity relation, or rather on measure in which that relation plays out. At what point is the half-exterminated rat actually (and completely) dead—"quite dead," as it were? Until what moment is it "still too early" to declare that Clov's seeds "will never sprout," and when should one say instead, with Clov: "If they were going to sprout they would have sprouted"—hence, if they have not, they are dead (*Endgame*, 13)? When is it too early and when too late? How "did the little round box" containing Hamm's painkiller, long awaited throughout

the play, get to change from: “Hamm: It was full!” to: “Clov: Yes, but now it’s empty” (*Endgame*, 71). How did the painkiller run out? Quantitative differences—the “one by one” of the millet grains successively added—seem to be indifferent, that is, to make no difference in the gradual accumulation of the heap. Until they do, suddenly, make a difference, which then is *the* difference, that is, until a qualitative difference emerges. And this is the end of the previous state—or the end as such. This is when and where change occurs. The key, then, consists in maintaining that indifference—waiting, hesitating, taking back the grain just added, readjusting the set measure or the threshold—thereby forestalling the end, pushing it a step forward. Indifference is what keeps the game going but also that which makes it go nowhere, that which keeps it from fulfilling its objective.

Thus, here is a sample of the game, at the beginning of the endgame. Hamm summons Clov, with his whistle, to “play,” then he retracts, “No, alone” (*Endgame*, 2, 3). The game, as the play, begins with the attempt to end it. But it starts, after all, and this is the first move. “Enough, it’s time it ended, in the shelter too. (*Pause.*) And yet I hesitate, I hesitate to . . . to end. Yes, there it is, it’s time it ended and yet I hesitate to—(*yawns*)—to end” (*Endgame*, 3). As in the case of Clov’s initial “it’s finished,” it is unclear to what the “it” that “it’s time” ended refers. Perhaps Hamm’s dream from which he just awoke, or the game itself, his relationship with Clov, or the “whole sorry business” of life (*Malone Dies*, 216), or even, apocalyptically, the existence of the earth and nature as a whole.⁴⁴ What “it” is, however, is ultimately indifferent since the ending at stake may apply indifferently—and equally—to all those cases. But vagueness is here more encompassing. “Enough, it’s time it ended”—“enough” of what? To be sure, no matter what it is that one’s had enough of, “enough” is a marker of the end. It’s time, “time enough” says Hamm asking for his painkillers (*Endgame*, 24). ‘Enough’ marks the end in the incremental game that forms the heap, the end of a want, a desire, the fulfillment of (or the attempt to fulfill) a purpose—enough is the right measure, perhaps slightly beyond or short of it (“More or less! More or less!” shouts Hamm, when Clov is ready to “measure it”—*Endgame*, 26). *When*, though, or *how much* is enough? And yet, although ‘enough’ does announce the end, Hamm hesitates, and hesitation keeps the game going, forestalling the end, changing that measure, revoking the conclusive power of that ‘enough.’ Hamm’s hesitation is now filled with the repetitive gestures of getting up and going to bed—ritualistic ways of beginning and ending the day that are reduced to utterly indifferent, interchangeable gestures.⁴⁵ They are actually the same gesture. Hamm’s

order to Clov: "Get me ready, I'm going to bed. Clov: I've just got you up. Hamm: And what of it? Clov: I can't be getting up and putting you to bed every five minutes, I have things to do" (*Endgame*, 3).

The second move of the game follows the same logic as the first and seems a repetition of the first. 'Enough' marks the end, yet the end needs to be revoked the moment it is summoned. "Hamm: Have you not had enough? Clov: Yes! (*Pause*.) Of what? Hamm: Of this . . . this . . . thing" (*Endgame*, 5). Clov has definitely had enough, and only as an afterthought he asks, "Of what?" What really counts is having-had-enough; 'of what' is ultimately immaterial. Hamm's answer is as vague as it can be within the constraints of grammar, and will be invoked again later on as a similar move to the end is made: "Hamm: Do you not think this has gone on long enough? Clov: Yes! (*Pause*.) What? Hamm: This . . . this . . . thing" (*Endgame*, 45). This "thing"—the game, the wait for the end, life itself, all of it. Having-had-enough—or having reached the limit—is reason enough to end it, whatever "it" or this "thing" may be. Clov's answer, however, takes the edge off that having-had-enough, normalizing it, converting it into yet another moment or grain added to the pile of the same uniform everyday: no change. "Hamm: Have you not had enough? [. . .] Clov: I always had. (*Pause*.) Not you? Hamm (*gloomily*): Then there's no reason for it to change" (*Endgame*, 5). If it's "the same as usual" (which is also Clov's answer to: "What time is it?"—*Endgame*, 4), then there is no reason to change, no reason, really, to end the game. If having-had-enough does not make any difference, if it is not a breaking point but a pervasive indifferent state accompanying each added moment, then it's not a reason to end (to end the game, or that of which one has allegedly had enough). In fact, the game keeps going on. Hence Clov's remark, his postponement of the end: "It *may* end"—not yet but it may, soon enough. For, what we have now is the indifference of sameness, a merely repetitive "routine," as Hamm calls it (*Endgame*, 32: Clov's question is: "Why this farce, day after day?"). Clov: "All life long the same questions, the same answers" (*Endgame*, 5, in the same vein at 38: Clov: "You've asked me these questions millions of times. Hamm: I love the old questions").

Following up on Clov's suggestion, "It *may* end," Hamm introduces the third move of the game. Here is the next exchange, which shows the attempt to make the end but also implies, at the same time, the act of immediately revoking the possibility of bringing the game to a close. This is how it may indeed end, a way to precipitate the end: "Hamm: I'll give you nothing more to eat. Clov: Then we'll die. Hamm: I'll give you just

enough to keep you from dying. You'll be hungry all the time. Clov: Then we won't die" (*Endgame*, 5f.). The exchange follows a strict, impassive logic. The end can be achieved and the game finished by starving Clov. In this case the game will end as *both* Hamm and Clov will die given their bond (the "we" may encompass Nell and Nagg as well). Hence Hamm takes his move back and recalibrates it to a halfway objective: he will give Clov "just enough" to keep him from dying so that the game can go on. Again, at issue is a matter of measure, the logic of 'enough.' When is it *enough* so as to not completely starve, "just enough," no more, no less, just enough to keep Clov alive, hungry all the time but not (quite) dead, so that he can keep playing the game, serving Hamm, keeping Hamm alive (along with Nell and Nagg)? Here, then, is the proposal: "I'll give you one biscuit per day (*Pause.*) One and a half" (*Endgame*, 6). The quantity side of the issue is thereby settled. This issue comes back again, with an echo of the heap of grain paradox, in Hamm's story of the starving little child and the begging father. Hamm has no bread to give but he does have corn in his granaries. How much corn is necessary to bring the starving child back to life—assuming "he's still alive"—"a pound, a pound and a half," to make him "a nice pot of porridge, [. . .] a nice pot and a half of porridge, full of nourishment" (*Endgame*, 52). At stake is the act of measuring the thin line separating life and death, pushing the end (or the 'enough') just a step farther. The crucial point, however, is the recognition of the indifference and inanity of the whole exercise, which motivates Hamm's violent reaction: "Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that!" (*Endgame*, 52, repeated at 68). Measure collapses or ends, as it were, in the utter indifference of the act of measuring. The real problem is somewhere else (it lies in the very being of *End-lichkeit*). Now, assuming that one biscuit and a half per day is "just enough" to keep Clov alive, here is the qualitative side of the issue. "Hamm: Why do you stay with me? Clov: Why do you keep me? Hamm: There's no one else. Clov: There's nowhere else" (*Endgame*, 6). A perfect symmetry and reciprocity is implied by the utter indifference of the situation. There is no choice involved, no determining ground moving one way rather than the other. It is instead the sheer lack of alternative (or the indifference in front of equally valued—*gleich-gültig*—alternatives) that defines the predicament of the game: no one else (than Clov), nowhere else (than with Hamm). A version of *libertas indifferentiae*. They might as well keep this going. And here, on the background of this indifferent reciprocity, the next move of the game emerges—a move repeatedly invoked from now on throughout the play-game.

Even though there is nowhere else to go, says Hamm to Clov, "You're leaving me all the same. Clov: I'm trying" (*Endgame*, 7). Clov leaves: that's a way to end the game. It is certainly a way to interrupt it; maybe it is the actual way the entire game (and the play) ends. And yet, the act of leaving cannot be completed (not until the end of the play, and perhaps not even then). Therefore it must be performed only halfway: it can be threatened, hinted at, is often justified in the form of "I'll leave you, I have things to do" (*Endgame*, 9, 12, 37, 38, 39ff.), is provisionally performed as a retreat into the kitchen but is an act never completed—at least, not until the end of the play-game. Hence Clov's "I'm trying." To be sure, he's been trying his entire life ("Ever since I was whelped"—*Endgame*, 14)—which means, first and foremost, that the attempt has never been successful, the objective never achieved, the action never ended. Trying is indeed more active an attitude than waiting. It denotes, however, a position still unable to make the end. Indeed, there is a Beckettian sense in which living can be viewed as the ongoing act of 'trying' to end (or waiting for the end).

Hamm's next idea for an end is put bluntly as follows: "Why don't you kill me?" The answer to which is just as matter of fact: "Clov: I don't know the combination of the cupboard" (*Endgame*, 8). The move, in this case, is impossible on merely technical grounds, implying something like: 'I would do it, but I can't because I don't know the combination.' In fact, it would be the most direct way to achieve checkmate; no one questions that. Later on, however, Hamm pushes Clov further with regard to his initial suggestion ("Why don't you kill me?"). The substance and the goal, however, remain the same. Herein we have an example of the way in which Beckett repeats different moves throughout the play and combines them in increasingly more complex figures. This is the exchange in which the move toward the end is disabled at the same moment in which is proposed. It begins with a variation of the Clov-leaving theme. "Clov: So you all want me to leave you. Hamm: Naturally. Clov: Then I'll leave you. Hamm: You can't leave us. Clov: Then I won't leave you (*Pause*.) Hamm: Why don't you finish us? (*Pause*.) I'll tell you the combination of the cupboard if you promise to finish me. Clov: I couldn't finish you. Hamm: Then you won't finish me. (*Pause*.) Clov: I'll leave you, I have things to do" (*Endgame*, 37). Clov obeys orders, indifferent to the alternative (leave—don't leave); but he simply can't "finish" Hamm. So the game is only momentarily interrupted, not ended by Clov leaving, this choice being less drastic (and indeed less conclusive) than finishing Hamm. Why can't Clov kill (or finish) Hamm? Certainly, first and foremost, because in doing so the game would end. But

it is also, perhaps, in answer to the picture of infinite, deadly solitude—the “infinite emptiness”—that Hamm just painted for him, foreseeing the moment in which Clov will be just like Hamm except “that you won’t have anyone with you, because you won’t have had pity on anyone and because there won’t be anyone left to have pity on” (*Endgame*, 36). The endgame reaches deeper. Pity, just like compassion, follows the same logic of the endgame. Two players are necessary: they must want the end but also, at the same time, not want it, and they are tied in this together. Perhaps, Hamm suggests, “it’s compassion,” “a kind of great compassion” that keeps Clov with Hamm, preventing him from leaving, making him obey all his orders (*Endgame*, 76). This may appear as a different attitude than the indifference otherwise dominating the successive moves of the game—or perhaps pity and compassion are the end of indifference (indifference’s repulsion from itself, as Hegel suggests). In the end, however, the result is still the same. In the conclusion of the play everything converges in Clov’s ambiguous monologue: to end or not to end?

An interesting variation of the move centering on Clov’s leaving occurs at mid-play. It begins with an apparent repetition of the exchange we have previously considered. “Hamm: Do you not think this has gone on long enough? Clov: Yes! (*Pause.*) What? Hamm: This . . . this . . . thing. Clov: I’ve always thought so. (*Pause.*) You not? Hamm: Then it’s a day like any other day. Clov: As long as it lasts (*Pause.*) All life long the same inanities” (*Endgame*, 45). The first part of the exchange repeats, literally as well as substantially, the second move of the game. This “thing,” whatever it is, “has gone on long enough.” And there is perfect agreement here between Clov and Hamm. The routine of the feeling thereby conveyed is also crucial because it takes, once again, the edge off that having-had-enough, disabling its power to end. At least as long as the inanity of the everyday continues as usual: “as long as it lasts,” that is, tautologically but also contradictorily, until that finishes (but also endures) as well.⁴⁶ This time, however, it is Hamm that can’t leave (because he can’t move but also because he can’t—or wishes not to—end-die). “Hamm: I can’t leave you. Clov: I know. And you can’t follow me. (*Pause.*) Hamm: if you leave me how shall I know?” Now the game turns epistemological. Clov *knows* that Hamm cannot leave; but how can Hamm *know* that Clov has left, that the game may be over? The solution seems simple: “Clov: Well you simply whistle me and if I don’t come running it means I’ve left you” (*Endgame*, 45). But here is the problem: “Hamm: But you might be nearly dead in your kitchen. Clov: The result would be the same” (*Endgame*, 46). Leaving and dying (or, again, being “nearly” dead)

are indeed different possibilities (existentially different, for sure), different ways of making the end. They do, however, make the end just the same. As far as the endgame is concerned, they make no real difference, the result is exactly the same. To this extent, ending erases the difference, reduces it to sheer indifference. Hamm's question, however, still stands: How would he *know* that Clov is not "nearly dead" in his kitchen (rather than gone for good)? Figuring this out becomes now part of the game. A difference must be made, somehow, in this indifference; the implicit vagueness pervading the two possibilities of ending (Clov gone and Clov dead), the vagueness summed up in the empty absoluteness of 'enough!' must be specified one way or the other. This is, accordingly, Hamm's order to Clov: "Think of something. Clov: What? Hamm: An idea, have an idea. (*Angrily.*) A bright idea" (*Endgame*, 46). "Think of *something*" now parallels Hamm's fearful intimation, taken by Clov as a joke, "We're not beginning to . . . to . . . mean something?" (*Endgame*, 32f.)—wherein the emphasis is as much on the 'meaning' as it is on the 'something.'⁴⁷ Think of something; mean something as opposed to 'nothing.' "Before you go . . . [. . .] . . . say something"; to which Clov: "There is nothing to say" (*Endgame*, 79). Hamm's wish—"To think perhaps it won't all have been for nothing" (*Endgame*, 43)—is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the teleology that common sense expresses in the end viewed as a purpose. At the end of the game, however, what remains is rather nothing: "Moments for nothing, now as always, time was never and time is over, reckoning closed and story ended" (*Endgame*, 83). Think of something, say something, mean something. It is a challenge to intentionality. Obeying Hamm's command, Clov comes up with the brilliant idea to set the alarm clock. And this is the solution of Hamm's dilemma, that is, the way to distinguish Clov gone from Clov dead: "You whistle me. I don't come. The alarm rings. I'm gone. It doesn't ring. I'm dead" (*Endgame*, 47). Clearly, as Clov previously noted, the result still remains the same.⁴⁸ The difference, again, is utterly indifferent. It is the same indifference that underlies Clov's stringent conclusion regarding the "half" exterminated rat: "If I don't kill that rat he'll die" (*Endgame*, 68, 54); or the dispute between Nagg and Nell concerning the sawdust and the sand in their bins, a difference that making no difference ends in utter indifference (*Endgame*, 17).⁴⁹ Indifference is the end.

Let us dwell for a moment on the logic of 'enough'—Beckett's 'logic of measure' repeatedly used throughout the text. 'Enough' is the marker of the end in a distinctive Beckettian way. It signals the end represented by measure but fulfills this function in an absolute, ultimately intransitive way.

It does so by reducing its object to indeterminate indifference. For, as we have seen time and again, the question ‘of what?’ (one has had enough of) is ultimately immaterial. Toward the end of *Malone Dies*, as Macmann’s story converges more and more with Malone’s own story, we find him pacing the perimeter of the wall of Saint John’s hospital/asylum/prison,

seeking a way out into the desolation of having nobody and nothing [. . .], in helplessness and willlessness, through all the beauty, the knowing and the loving. Which he stated by saying, for he was artless, I have had enough, without pausing a moment to reflect on what it was he had enough of or to compare it with what it had been he had had enough of, until he lost it, and would have enough of again, when he got it back again, and without suspecting that the thing so often felt to be excessive, and honored by such a variety of names, was perhaps in reality always one and the same. (*Malone Dies*, 271)

“I have had enough” taken in an absolute, indeterminate sense sums up a worldview, perhaps an entire ontology, and serves to describe the itinerary of a life, its past, present, and future as they collapse in the absolute indifference of that indistinct ‘enough,’ the point in which all becomes one—all things, all moments in time—or the point in which all reverts to being “one and the same” (one has had enough of), no matter the “variety of names” and distinctions it is honored with. The absolute indifference of that ‘enough’ signals the end. But does indifference itself make a difference in the gradual heap-like balance of life and death? Does ‘enough’ truly and finally precipitate the end, and then does indifference itself end? “But there was one reflecting in his place and setting down coldly the sign of equality where it was needed, as if that could make any difference.” Reflecting, setting down the sign of (quantitative) equivalence—as if that could make a difference! Even reflection is indifferent, at this point. “So he had only to go on gasping, in his artless way, Enough! Enough!, as he crept along by the wall under the cover of the bushes, searching for a breach under which he might slip out [. . .]. But the wall was unbroken and smooth and topped uninterruptedly with broken glass, of a bottle green” (*Malone Dies*, 217). ‘Enough,’ in the end, is no longer a properly vocalized word but a desperate inarticulate repetitive “gasp.” “Enough! Enough!” goes on and on in its frantic iteration but does not make a difference, that is, does not itself finish, does not find the way out. Rather, it expresses the predicament of

someone trapped at the threshold of life and death, in a closed indistinct world, ready to escape or to finish with it but unable to. In this way, 'enough' is the reflection of Macmann's and Malone's world, the hospital/asylum/prison with its uninterrupted, uniform wall, interrupted, in fact, only by that unique detail: with broken glass "of a bottle green"—an indifferent chromatic detail at that. In the same way, 'enough' is also the reflection of Hamm and Clov's nearly dead world, sealed up from the apocalyptic end-of-the-world or even from the "other hell" outside—but truly the double of that hell (*Endgame*, 26; and 9, 70: "Outside of here is death"). This is the end in the sphere of Being.

Macmann is in search of a breach in the wall from which to "slip out" (and notice that he is looking for the way out not 'from' but "into the desolation of having nobody and nothing") and put an end to whatever it is that the gasping 'enough' refers to, just as Malone is, who, this time, uses a harsher image. "I am being given, if I may venture the expression, birth into death, such is my impression. The feet are clear already, of the great cunt of existence. Favourable presentation I trust. My head will be the last to die. [. . .] My story ended I'll be living yet. Promising lag. That is the end of me. I shall say no more" (*Malone Dies*, 276).⁵⁰ 'Enough,' in the end, sums up this last attempt to escape, to leave, to let go or to be let go, released and relieved. It voices the emergence of that final change that "suddenly" leads from the heap to the nonheap, from life to death, although the process is gradual, starting from the feet, as in Socrates's case, and ending up with the heart (Socrates) or the head (Malone), "the last to die."

One last passage, on the proximity of 'enough' and death. This time it's an exchange in *Rough for Theater I* (written in French in the 1950s): "B: 'But why don't you let yourself die? A: I have thought of it. B: [*Irritated.*] But you don't do it! A: *I'm not unhappy enough.* [*Pause.*] That was always my unhap, unhappy, but not unhappy enough. B: But you must be every day a little more so. A: [*Violently*] I am not unhappy enough."⁵¹ The passage echoes Hamm's direct question to Clov, "Why don't you kill me?" (*Endgame*, 8); this time, however, what is hinted at is death as a 'letting oneself die.' Herein 'enough' apparently signals the moment of choice, the breaking point of indifference, and is construed with a double negation: "not unhappy enough," a construct rendered typographically as "unhap." The problem is that 'enough,' for Beckett, is an adjustable marker itself utterly indifferent, a marker within the impossible heap of one's unhappiness (one is always unhappy "but not unhappy enough" to let oneself die; but then, following the heap paradox, it is also true that one "must be every day a little more so").

The conclusive scene of *Endgame* follows the same logic and is framed by Hamm's two final 'enoughs.' Hamm pronounces his penultimate "Enough!" (*Endgame*, 80) as he interrupts Clov's monologue after his last announcement, "I'll leave you. (*He goes towards door*)" (*Endgame*, 79). It is Clov now who is in search of a way out ("into the desolation of having nobody and nothing," as Macmann puts it). We know that in agreement with Hamm he's had enough as well—he's always had enough, from the beginning (*Endgame*, 5). "I say to myself—sometimes, Clov, you must be there better than that if you want them to let you go—one day. But I feel too old, and too far, to form new habits. Good, it'll never end, I'll never go. (*Pause.*)" (*Endgame*, 81). 'To be let go' complements the act of leaving but also fundamentally complicates it, putting the burden of the act on someone else as well. It is not 'enough' to leave; one needs to be let go—to be given birth into death, as Malone puts it. And Clov's first resigned conclusion here is that the game of the end will never end: "it'll never end, I'll never go"—the heap keeps growing or shrinking, the end is never reached. The finite's destiny is the open-endedness of the bad infinite, mortality never fulfilled, never redeemed. But the sorites paradox invoked by Clov at the beginning of the play suggests a second possibility as well—a possibility with equal value, equally constitutive of the process described by the game of ending, the "impossible heap." "Then one day, suddenly, it ends, it changes, I don't understand, it dies, or it's me, I don't understand, that either. I ask the words that remain—sleeping, waking, morning, evening. They have nothing to say. (*Pause.*) I open the door of the cell and go [. . .]. I say to myself that the earth is extinguished, though I never saw it lit" (*Endgame*, 81). The end comes, "suddenly," and is a sudden *qualitative* change; a change that is indeed incomprehensible, paradoxical. But "it" happens. The subject of the process of ending is, yet again, the indeterminate "it"—the 'it' that sums up all that one has had enough of, which is ultimately one and the same (as in Macmann's case, "the thing so often felt to be excessive, and honored by such a variety of names, was perhaps in reality always one and the same"). And Clov simply opens "the door of the cell" and 'goes.' If a decision is taken, it is the act of *libertas indifferentiae*: he goes but he may well not go. Thus, the end of the game is death, "it ends [. . .], it dies." But then, perhaps, the subject of that ending and dying is the speaking Clov himself: "or it's me, I don't understand, that either"—it is an inverted or truncated 'or . . . either.' To be sure, herein language ends as well. Words, interrogated, "have nothing to say." Malone reaches the same conclusion: "That is the end of me. I shall say no more" (*Malone Dies*, 276). Thereby *Endgame* leads on to *Act Without Words*. The truth of *Endgame*, just like the

truth of the sorites paradox, is a dialectical truth. The game goes on *and* ends at the same time. In fact, the last action, even after that “it dies, or it’s me” is Clov’s act of opening the door and going. What the act of crossing the threshold reveals, however, is the sameness or in-difference of the end, not sudden change but “imageless,” indifferent sameness: “the earth is extinguished,” says Clov to himself, “though I never saw it lit.” Perhaps the end is not something that happens (and happens “suddenly”) and is really no threshold. The end may have been there all along—eternally unchanging and unending.⁵² No difference can be noticed, and no difference is noticed by Clov: “I never saw it lit.” The end or death as the end is, in Adorno’s words, “the imageless image of death, an image of indifference, that is, a state prior to differentiation. In that image the distinction between absolute domination—the hell in which [. . .] absolutely nothing changes any more—and the messianic state in which everything would be in its right place, disappears.”⁵³ The end is the “absolute indifference” that concludes the Logic of Being. And here is Hamm’s last ‘enough’: “Well, there we are, there I am, that’s enough” (*Endgame*, 83).

2. Part II. Indifference, Repetition, and Liberation: Leopardi and Bishop

Nature’s “exposition” or *Auslegung* takes place, in a paradigmatic way, in Giacomo Leopardi’s 1824 “Dialogo della Natura e di un Islandese,” one of the most remarkable of his *Operette morali*. To be sure, Nature’s exposition herein is not quite a direct self-exposition. It is rather instigated by the Icelander’s apparently foolish yet all-too-human questioning. Nature itself in its self-contained solitude does not need to ‘expose’ itself. Nature is the Icelander’s end, that is, his limit, destruction, and termination. More generally, Nature is the end of the human species as well as of all living creatures. It is the destiny of destruction from which, ironically and tragically at once, the Icelander has been trying to escape his entire life. She is the end in which he is inescapably and necessarily implicated despite all his efforts to avoid it. On a collective scale, the Icelander’s efforts ultimately define the aim of human civilization, which purports to flee and transform Nature and is instead doomed by her. It is as such End that Nature meets the fleeing Icelander precisely in the moment in which, unaware, he confesses to her that he is fleeing Nature. Leopardi’s view in this famous essay is confirmed and reinforced in his penultimate lyric, “La Ginestra” (1836), written the

year before his death. These texts offer a picture of the poet's late account of Nature and human civilization that embodies, as a real figure, the logical way in which Essence makes the end. In the "Dialogo," Nature replaces all transcendent, spiritualistic, or theological "absolute," which for Leopardi is the product of abstraction and intellectualism, and is the expression of a distinctly modern form of rationalism.⁵⁴ But it also transforms—and, in a stronger sense, even contradicts—Leopardi's own early view of nature.⁵⁵ Nature is now the material, immanent, all-embracing, and pervasive 'absolute' (in fact, Leopardi concludes, not absolutely absolute), a force endowed with a fundamentally negative, destructive power. Nature is the self-contradictory power that puts an end, indifferently, to all life as such.

In its poetic form, seen through the eyes of the wandering Icelander, Nature appears at the beginning of the "Dialogo" as a gigantic presence, a reminder of those "colossal Hermes" seen in the Easter Island. While Nature seems to display all the features of the (Kantian) sublime—magnitude, might, eternity, infinity—it does not, significantly, generate any kind of moral reverence (if anything, we'll soon discover, she is the cause of the Icelander's moral condemnation).⁵⁶ Seen up closer though, Nature's form is revealed as not being made of stone (and not an artifact) but as being "the measureless form of a woman (*smisurata forma di donna*)." Moreover, this imposing woman is "not fake but alive; her visage both magnificent and terrible, her eyes and hair jet-black" ("Dialogo," 115).⁵⁷ This is the figure that faces the Icelander at the end of his travels throughout the world. She stares at him fixedly and in silence for a long time; then she finally addresses him directly as an intruder in need of introduction. Nature is a sublime presence, an enigmatic mix between the beautiful and the terrifying; she is living (she is neither an artifact nor an illusory imitation) and utterly detached in its dominating posture. And she is Woman. However, following this initial description, we soon discover that neither the conventional traits of womanhood nor the usual analogy connecting nature and woman are invoked. Nature is not the productive, nurturing source and origin of all things—she is not the caring mother of all. She is instead their destructive, pitiless, indifferent end. Nature is *Abgrund* as much as it is the *Grund* of all the things that constitute her. Nature, as "La Ginestra" maintains with a strong image, "Madre è di parto e di voler matrigna" ("La Ginestra," v. 125)—wherein the latter attribute (*di voler matrigna*) innovates, corrects, and even contradicts the former (*madre è di parto*). Nature is, essentially, this contradiction of a productive force that annihilates the very productions in which she is immanent and which constitute her actuality. Nature's negative

Auslegung, that is, her indifferently destructive attitude with regard to all living creatures, is at the same time her positive “exposition,” that is, the fundamental display of her “absolute” (indeed despotic) power over everything. Nature is one and uniform in her manifold forms, she is unchanging and equally indifferent toward everything. Her positive affirmation consists in her actual display of might over the individual, not in the individual creature’s existence, an existence allegedly considered a manifestation of the absolute. For, the individual (the Icelander or the “fragrant broom”) does not so much manifest as rather endures the absolute power of Nature.

The Icelander’s encounter with Nature takes place in the inner, wildest heart of Africa—in its uninhabited and heretofore unexplored regions. In its fully displayed actuality, Nature is indeed everywhere, immanent in all its parts (just as everything is inescapably in nature, the Icelander will soon find out at his own expense). And yet she is directly faced and encountered only in its most disquieting, terrifying, and wild manifestations: in the innermost regions of Africa or on the desolate slopes of the volcano Vesuvius, for example (“sull’arida schiena / del formidabil monte / sterminator Vesevo”—“La Ginestra,” vv. 1–3). Indeed, Nature seems to thrive most where the “human species is unknown,” away from the human being and its civilization. For, herein Nature’s *potenza*—her infinite power and might—is “better demonstrated than anywhere else” (“Dialogo,” 116). Correspondingly, in “La Ginestra,” Nature is manifested in the desolate, “sad” places where human civilization once flourished and was then destroyed by her power (“La Ginestra,” vv. 14–19). In her outward form, Nature uncontroversially reveals that she has the upper hand over the human being and its deeds—individually as well as collectively. These latter are proven vain and impermanent by Nature’s very presence. In “La Ginestra,” Nature’s “exposition” is embodied both in the desolation of the volcanic landscape and in the historical memory of the Vesuvius’s destruction—Pompeii once, the threat of a renewed eruption still constantly present now (“La Ginestra,” vv. 240ff., stanza 5). But it is also embodied in the “odorata ginestra” at peace with the desert surroundings (“La Ginestra,” vv. 6–7), which now replaces with her humble dignity and heroic resignation the human foolishness of the Icelander.

Upon his first sighting of Nature in the form of the mighty (African) Woman, the Icelander does not know whom he is confronting. He does not recognize Nature for the absolute all-encompassing power that she is. From which the irony of the encounter arises—the essential paradox of the end. In meeting his end but not recognizing it as such, the Icelander confesses

that his lifelong task has been the attempt to avoid the end—the end that defines him, the end in which he is always and necessarily implicated. Thus, he introduces himself to Nature as “a poor Icelander fleeing from Nature; and having fled her for almost my entire life in a hundred regions of the earth, I am now fleeing her in this one.” To which Nature ironically answers: “So flees the squirrel from the rattlesnake, until in its haste and by its own doing, it runs into the snake’s mouth. I am the one from which you are fleeing” (“Dialogo,” 116). The Icelander’s plan is doomed from the outset, just as human civilization is, in its grandiose yet vain pretension of progress away from Nature (and even *against* her). Herein lies Leopardi’s poetic refutation of the anthropocentric view that sees the human being (and the human species) as Nature’s final end and chief purpose. For, in her radical nihilism, Nature is the indifferent non-teleological End-*Abgrund* of all things, humans included. Such an end is the immanent action of Nature itself, not the intervention of an external final purpose. Indeed, essence rejects the assumption that its development is guided by the concept as its end purpose. And essence combats this proposition precisely by positing the absolute as its end. Nature *is* the End (*Ende*); it *has* no end (*Zweck* or *Endzweck*). In its fully displayed actuality, Nature is, essentially, its own end. The human being (along with its culture, history, and civilization) is neither the end of Nature nor does it occupy a privileged place within it. The relation is rather the opposite. Nature is the End—the absolute termination and limit—of the human being and human species as such. To be sure, the end that all creatures meet in Nature and at the hand of Nature is no more than that: the end. The standpoint of finitude embodied by the fleeing Icelander (or the standpoint of Being) is overcome by Nature’s position as the anti-teleological end of all things (the end of Essence). As the End, Nature is indifferent to human actions and purposes just as she is to the existence of all creatures. Contrary to the Icelander’s argument, Nature’s essential indifference is morally neutral, properly beyond morality, and devoid of intentionality as such. In this sense, Nature simply “posits” the finite beings that constitute her with no will and no purpose. And it posits them as such as to be annihilated by her. However, if it does not create them as a caring mother with their interest, happiness, and welfare in view, in putting them into existence Nature does not have malevolent intentions either. What man construes as Nature’s hostility is, quite simply, indifference. Nature is utterly indifferent to happiness and misfortune, pleasure and pain, and is utterly devoid of purposiveness. Nature is the power and manifestation of a Cosmic Indifference. In this sense it is ‘absolute.’ This is indeed the hardest thought for the

Icelander to accept, and, on Leopardi's view, the hardest thought for human reason and for philosophy more generally: it seems that Essence cannot be thought without appealing to the Concept's action, the end cannot be grasped without recurring to a purpose laying beyond it. But Nature rejects this view. Expressing his anthropocentric position, the Icelander addresses Nature as "the slaughterer of your own family, your own children, and your own flesh and blood" ("Dialogo," 120). In fact, contrary to what these morally repugnant images suggest, Nature has neither distributed the creatures over the earth with their happiness in view in regard, for example, to climate and geographical conditions; nor does she intend to punish the human beings for alleged transgressions against the limits she imposed on them, as the Icelander conjectures ("Dialogo," 118). His complaint against Nature's disregard of human well-being on the ground that man has neither offended nor injured her is entirely misplaced. Nature is indiscriminately destructive and hostile, indifferent toward individuality across species, anti-teleological, 'blind,' as it were, in the necessity of her laws. Again, Nature has no end; it *is* the End—*Abgrund*. This is the meaning of Leopardi's Nature as the material immanent all-powerful absolute.⁵⁸

Accordingly, Nature's answer to the Icelander is a straightforward rejection of anthropocentrism: "Did you perhaps imagine that the world was made for your sake?" ("Dialogo," 120). As hard as it is for the human being to accept, Nature has neither awareness nor knowledge of what is supposedly good or bad, beneficial or harmful to individuals in what she does, she has no intention and no aim. Her action is simply and utterly indifferent to all that. There is nothing more to her action than the exposition of Nature's reality as such—of what Nature essentially is and does (her *Wirklichkeit* is her *Wirken*). At this point, however, the question regarding the reason why she does what she does is raised. Nature is *Abgrund*, but what is the *Grund* of her action? The Icelander's protest is conveyed with an apparently plausible analogy. It is, he explains, as if a stranger insisted on inviting me to his mansion but then, on my arrival, he tried to make me as uncomfortable as possible, neglected me, insulted me, even threatened and harmed me. And upon my complaining of this ill treatment, he answered: "Do you think I made this mansion for you? Do I keep my children and servants for your service? I assure you I have other things to attend than that I should amuse you and give you welcome." To which the Icelander retorts: Why, then, did you invite me? Even though the mansion was not built especially for the guest, once the owner does invite someone, isn't he bound to give the guest welcome and care for his well-being (or, at the very least, not harm him)?

Granted the world is not made for the sake of the human being, so the Icelander to Nature, “Now I ask you: did I perhaps beg you to put me in this universe? Or did I impose myself violently and against your wish?” To put man just as animals and all other creatures into existence—to ‘posit’ (*porre*) them into the universe—is Nature’s own free act (*spontaneamente hai voluto*), not man’s action or desire (“Dialogo,” 121), argues the Icelander. On the face of it, this seems a plausible argument. Nature’s answer, however, once again steers his interlocutor away from the relative, strictly human perspective this argument entails, and offers instead an account of Nature’s ‘absolute’ position—a position that is *ab-soluta*, that is, utterly free from any perspective, purpose, and commitment. Nature needs no ground for her action—her action in its absoluteness is, directly and actually, the ground of everything. Nature is an interconnected whole in which all parts work for the sake of the unifying whole. Within this whole, even suffering finds its place. As such a whole, Nature posits that toward which it acts with the destructive power of her indiscriminate existence. This is what Nature does, and this is what Nature is—her *Wirken* is her *Wirklichkeit*. Philosophically, this Leibnizian-sounding answer leaves the Icelander as puzzled as before. His exchange with Nature has truly no resolution as no philosophy seems able, on Leopardi’s view, to offer an account of Nature that also solves the problem of suffering in the world: Whose gain is the suffering in the universe? “No philosopher can tell” (“Dialogo,” 122). This is indeed a human question, the question to which Nature simply puts an end, although not an end in human (and philosophical) terms. The end (the Icelander’s end and the end of the essay) is brilliantly pragmatic. “While they were discussing these and similar issues, two lions are said to have suddenly appeared. They were so enfeebled and emaciated with hunger that they were scarcely able to devour the Icelander. They accomplished the feat, however, and thus gained sufficient strength to live to the end of the day.” To be sure, there is another version of the end here, although the result is truly the same, namely, the Icelander’s death at the hand of Nature. On this version, the end has a cultural implication but is still the same end. The alternative version has it that “a violent wind having arisen, the unfortunate Icelander was blown to the ground, and soon entombed beneath a magnificent mausoleum of sand. Here his corpse was remarkably preserved, and, transformed into a fine mummy, was discovered by some travelers who carried it off as a specimen to be deposited in some European museum” (“Dialogo,” 122). Culture may work on the edge of what Nature accomplishes but does not change much to Nature’s action—the End remains what it essentially is.

Confirming this view of Nature as the destructive end of all things and the power that gives existence to that which she indifferently destroys, “La Ginestra” entails Leopardi’s final poetic answer to the question philosophically left open by the “Dialogo della Natura e di un Islandese.” It is now clear that poetry alone, not a philosophical argument, can address the issue. Or perhaps, more accurately, poetry alone succeeds in changing the terms of the question entirely. For, the question may very well be unanswerable other than by the act whereby the two emaciated lions devour the argumentative Icelander. In the “Dialogo,” Nature expressed this much. Philosophically, Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* had offered the same verdict, although it had also saved the concept of *Endzweck* under the condition of its critical modification. Indeed, there is a sense in which Essence’s reclaiming an end of its own against the Concept is fully justified and must be let stand. There is, however, another aspect to the problem. The creatures—or at least some creatures—posited by Nature in existence so as to be suddenly annihilated by her are also the positive manifestation of something that exceeds the destructive power of Nature, although they are themselves inescapably nature. This point Essence recognizes in the moment in which it overcomes the absolute by declaring it not “absolutely absolute.” Significantly though, on Leopardi’s view, the human being is not one of these creatures. The solitary, “fragrant broom” content with her existence on the desolate slopes of the menacing volcano, “innocent” in the acceptance of her fate under the “mortal” blow of Vesuvius’s lava (“La Ginestra,” vv. 6, 14–15, 305–306) is by contrast the one the poet now addresses. Far from questioning Nature’s alleged ‘reasons’ for her destructive action, and far from imposing a doubtful human morality on Nature in order to condemn her in the name of our human entitlement to happiness, the “fragrant broom” accepts her own fate sternly and heroically, thereby actively and poetically transforming the end that Nature imposes on her. With her sweet fragrance, the “gentle flower” offers “consolation” to the desert around her, and almost “commiserates” “i danni altrui”—she commiserates the harm afflicting others but also the harm inflicted by another, namely, Nature (“La Ginestra,” vv. 34–37). Suffering cannot be avoided; the end cannot be revoked. It can, however, be poetically accepted and thereby dignified. Nature’s action can neither be changed by culture and civilization nor justified with higher reasons or final purposes. Instead, Nature’s absolute indifference should be recognized by a sober a-teleological, non-anthropocentric materialism. For, the human being does not enjoy a privileged place in the universe: “Non ha natura al seme / Dell’uom più stima o cura / Che alla formica: e se

più rara in quello / Che nell'altra è la strage, / Non avvien ciò d'altronde / Fuor che l'uom sue prosapie ha men feconde" ("La Ginestra," vv. 231–236). Human history, on the other hand, is utterly insignificant in the face of Nature's eternity and changelessness: "Così, dell'uomo ignara e dell'etadi / Ch'ei chiama antiche, e del seguir che fanno / Dopo gli avi i nepoti, / Sta natura ognor verde, anzi procede / Per sì lungo cammino / Che sembra star. / Caggiono i regni intanto, / Passan genti e linguaggi: ella nol vede: / E l'uom d'eternità s'aroga il vanto" ("La Ginestra," vv. 289–292). This is Leopardi's late poetic conception of Nature as the indifferent and necessary *Abgrund* of all existence.

Thus, neither reason nor (utilitarian) morality or moralism but the comfort offered by poetry and individual beauty, along with the human compassion and solidarity that they can engender, are Leopardi's final answer to Nature's nihilism.⁵⁹ There is no doubt in this lyric that Nature is the chief enemy⁶⁰ of man ("La Ginestra," vv. 123–125). This is the hard, irrevocable fact of existence—a fact that can neither be rationally explained nor justified (as still attempted by the Icelander). Teleology is not a viable option since an alleged higher (human or divine) purpose does not render destruction any more acceptable. At issue, however, is now the way in which Nature's hostility must be acknowledged and transformed. This is indeed the task of poetry—the task of the Concept. At the end of the lyric, the *lenta ginestra* of Virgilian memory becomes the ally of the poet's fight against the hubris and arrogance of human culture ("La Ginestra," vv. 297, 300: "anche tu"), against the foolish progressivism of Enlightenment rationalism—its famously mocked "magnifiche sorti e progressive" ("La Ginestra," v. 51), and against the misplaced blame that humans put on each other, thereby inflicting gratuitous harm and fighting each other in a Hobbesian way instead of forming a bond of solidarity against their only true enemy, namely, Nature ("La Ginestra," stanza 3). While Nature is equally indifferent to all her creatures alike, and her necessary course cannot be changed, the attitude displayed by the solitary wild broom carries a message of dignity, consolation, and perhaps solidarity for all human beings wise enough to accept with humble Stoicism their place in Nature. This is also the only possible form of freedom available to man. Freedom lies in the act of acknowledging necessity, of accepting one's negligible position within Nature as well as the destiny of destruction that is common to man and all other creatures. Ultimately, for Leopardi, this is also the only possible social bond among human beings.

Poetry can achieve what no theology and no rationalist philosophy can. Its achievement is the transformation of the necessary end or termination

into a new possibility of life—not its justification, not its postponement or acceleration, not its negation in the search for an impossible eternity—but the transformation of the end into an immanent new beginning and a possible new advancement. Only poetry—and *le opere di genio* more generally—is able to shake the absolute indifference and insensitivity that in the human being are equal to death. Only artwork can offer a plausible human response to Nature's cosmic indifference (*Zibaldone*, [259–261], 271f.). This is Leopardi's final message. Another poet, from a different time and language, will now lead us with a similar insight to the Concept and to the Concept's—or rather the Idea's—way of making the end. Let me turn then to Elizabeth Bishop and see how making the end—poetically and existentially—is the topic of two late poems in which nature, death, and freedom are similarly at issue.

The elegy or a poem “in memoriam” implicitly confronts the end—an end that has already taken place (as opposed to the end that is approaching or imminent), the end of someone else's life (as opposed to the poet's own). But then such a poem also shows, somehow, that the end has no absolute finality since the poem itself, by its very existence, is a step forward beyond that end. In fact, in modern times, the poem may well replace (and secularize) the religious belief in the soul's afterlife or immortality, creating what Wallace Stevens has called “the mythology of modern death.”⁶¹ In the late “North Haven. *In memoriam: Robert Lowell*” (1978) Elizabeth Bishop confronts two possible strategies to take finality away from the act of ending, from death. One strategy is encountered in Nature's action; the other is, directly, Poetry itself. The irrevocable fact of the end-death remains—death has taken her friend-poet away. The end, however, can be differently accepted, appropriated, and transformed. Nature meets the end at the level of Essence, withholding its finality (and teleology) and replacing it with unending repetition, a form of eternity that may warrant it the designation “the absolute.” Poetry instead opens the path to the Concept's end: it is the path of self-revision (still close to Nature-Essence) but also that of remembrance and liberation.

The islands haven't shifted since last summer,
 even if I like to pretend they have
 —drifting, in a dreamy sort of way,
 a little north, a little south or sidewise,
 and that they're free within the blue frontiers of bay.

This month, our favorite one is full of flowers:
 Buttercups, Red Clover, Purple Vetch,
 Hawkweed still burning, Daisies pied, Eyebright,
 the Fragrant Bedstraw's incandescent stars,
 and more, returned, to paint the meadow with delight.

The Goldfinches are back, or others like them,
 and the White-throated Sparrow's five-note song,
 pleading and pleading, brings tears to the eyes.
 Nature repeats herself, or almost does:
repeat, repeat, repeat; revise, revise, revise.

Nature as a whole does not end and has no end: it "repeats herself, or almost does," over and over—"repeat, repeat, repeat; revise, revise, revise." Individual things and creatures die or rather change, returning, cyclically, to give existence to nature's manifold manifestations, and then returning again, cyclically, to the unchanged identity of the whole. Returning is the act of 'coming back' or issuing forth again each season. But returning is also the act of 'going back' to the source, 'dust to dust,' as it were (*Genesis* 3:19). It is through repetition that nature preserves its selfsameness despite the mutability of her individual parts. Individuals die and are replaced; the whole remains unchanged. The flowers "are back" with the new season; they "returned, to paint the meadow with delight." Just like Leopardi's *ginestra*, for Bishop individual flowers with their colors and individual birds with their songs are the locus of beauty and delight in the world. But it is not in some kind of romantic or naïve way that they do fulfill this function. Rather, they offer delight because of the contrast, even the contradiction in which they stand with the inexorable, indifferent, and for Leopardi destructive whole of Nature—a contradiction that the individuals embody as present reminders. As for flowers, named by species but capitalized as if referring to individuals' proper names, for birds: "The Goldfinches are back, or others like them"—an important correction, Bishop's correction of the predicament of Keats's immortal nightingale ("Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird!"). Indeed, "Nature repeats herself, or almost does." It depends on the standpoint. Individuals are born and die; the species though remains the same through the replacement and reproduction of individuals—similar individuals, "others like them."⁶² There seems to be no way out of the self-identity of nature's cycles, no way to escape her infinite

repetition. Only that careful correction is allowed to surface, an important poetic awareness—"or almost does," "or others like them"—that does justice to the individuals, to the dead, replaceable, and indifferently replaced individuals. An elegy for them as well. In this framework, the human being is no exception. Leopardi had it right. In the human being, just as in all other living creatures, nature manifests herself, relishing in her unchanging self-identity through the manifold display of species and individuals. What she produces in its infinite repetition is always the same manifestations, no otherness. The "absolute identity" of the absolute/nature is "indifferent identity" (TW 6, 193, 194, respectively). And yet, the second stanza of the poem has already intervened to change or destabilize nature's unchanging predicament. The opening acknowledgment—"The islands haven't shifted since last summer"—is immediately revoked in all it entails of obvious and incontrovertible matter-of-fact assessment by what the poetic imagination effects: "even if I like to pretend they have." For the latter is the winning perspective: it is the truth established by the poetic imagination. In fact, the islands *have shifted* as they have been "drifting, in a dreamy sort of way, / a little north, a little south or sidewise." Nature's unalterable order is changed by the new ordering of the imagination. The islands are now let be "free"—and "they're free within the blue frontiers of bay." Now, this poetic reordering of nature follows the end (Lowell's end). It is triggered by loss, is a response to death.

The end is captured in two different images. In the order of time (although not in the poetic order) Lowell's leave-taking from his visit to Bishop at North Haven happens before the island's imaginative drifting takes place (or, rather, is poetically induced): "You left North Haven, anchored in its rock." Lowell's act of leaving marks a discontinuity in nature: the solidity of the island "anchored in its rock" stands in contrast to its (present) floating and drifting in different geographical directions. But it is the second end that is the truly drastic one, putting an end (at least in the order of the imagination) to nature's solid, unshaken substantiality. "And now—you've left / for good." Lowell's death is like a definitive, irrevocable act of leaving from which there is no returning, no coming back—a statement that ostensibly refutes (the truth of) Nature's cycles of return: the "Goldfinches are back," Bishop herself is back to North Haven for yet another summer, but Lowell will not be back. The individual, in this case, is irreplaceable. And this gives indeed a new perspective on that correction, "or others like them." What remains then to the close of the elegy is a poetic reflection on the meaning of this act—the end of a poet's individual life, Lowell departing

“for good.” Is this end any different from the end that meets all other living creatures in nature—the flowers blooming in their return each spring, the sparrows singing each spring the same song anew? After all, in repeating herself in her recursive action, Nature seems to borrow from the “voluntary action of perfection-seeking writers” (like Lowell, and Bishop herself): “repeat, repeat, repeat; revise, revise, revise.”⁶³ The line between Nature and Poetry seems blurred. In the last stanza we have Bishop’s poetic response to Lowell’s death and, more generally, to the termination that death represents in poetry. Ultimately, her response is what informs her elegy from the outset, and this is the imaginative act of reordering reality, the act of changing—if not death itself, at least nature.

Lowell was indeed the one who in his early collection *The Mills of the Kavanaughs* (1951), with a gesture of acceptance at once grim and heroic, had “performed the emergency amputation”:⁶⁴ “All’s well that ends: / Achilles dead is greater than the living” (“Her Dead Brother”). “All’s well that ends” sounds like the heroic acceptance of life’s yielding to death (and besides, “Lowell chances to be a name that ends ‘well’”),⁶⁵ underscored by the memorializing function of the poetic word—Achilles being the chosen example. Poetry (epic poetry) lends a sort of afterlife: “All’s well that ends,” indeed. Although things will be different in what Helen Vendler has called Lowell’s late poetry of “subtraction” as in *Day by Day* (1977), the poetic word remains for him the only means available to process his own impending (and foreseen) end.⁶⁶ By subtraction, now ‘all ends’—and yet the poem still remains. In “North Haven,” Bishop frames Lowell’s life and poetry in a different context. The context is Nature—unchanging in its unending repetition and self-revision, indifferent to individuality and its destiny of death. Lowell’s life and poetry seem caught or trapped in Nature’s inexorable logic, from which the meaning of his death is inferred. Lowell’s death is the end of his poetic work: “You can’t derange, or re-arrange, / your poems again. (But the Sparrows can their song.) / The words won’t change again. Sad friend, you cannot change.” For the individual, death is the end of the possibility of change. Change is life. And Lowell’s poetry, in its essence, is change practiced in and with words. It is the practice of endlessly revising and rearranging words and verse. Lowell the poet here acts just like Nature: “repeat, repeat, repeat; revise, revise, revise.” For, Nature is already viewed as acting like the perfectionist poet. But then, mindful of Lowell’s handling of Elizabeth Hardwick’s letters in *The Dolphin* but also, most likely, from a first reading of *Day by Day*, Bishop notices that his poetry is the practice of ‘deranging’ the order of reality, of dubiously altering the truth of fact,

of exploding the sequential order of history.⁶⁷ Ultimately, however, Nature seems to inexorably win over Poetry. The Sparrows can rearrange their song; Lowell cannot his. This is the price that the individual poet must pay in front of death, namely, yield to the erasure that does not seem to affect natural individuality, which replaceable (and ever-revisable) lives on in the species. Unlike in Poetry, in Nature individuals are replaceable and actually replaced with the effect of everlasting continuation, change occurring within the unchangeable order. In the end though, Bishop's elegy is from the outset a refutation of this predicament. Through the poetic imagination, nature *is changed*—the islands shift and drift and are rendered “free within the blue frontiers of bay.” Although death makes it impossible for Lowell (and his poetry) to change (or “derange”) again, Bishop's elegy for her poet friend has changed nature. Poetry wins—it wins over the end dictated by Nature; it wins over the end as it moves beyond it, one poet after another. Essence leads on to the Concept.

For Bishop poetry is a way of transforming the necessity that brings about the end (the end that is death and loss) in the natural and social world into an acceptable fact of life, into the only possible way of being free within the constraints of the world. Herein Bishop's poetic practice meets her famous stoicism (epitomized in the “art of losing” of “One Art”). I shall mention, very briefly, three examples of Bishop's stoic poetic attitude. There is, first, the sandpiper of *Questions of Travel*, the “student of Blake” with whom Bishop closely identifies. “The roaring alongside he takes for granted, / and that every so often the world is bound to shake” (“Sandpiper”): freedom is acting within the framework of natural necessity; there is really no choice but to accept the upheavals that at one point or other will inexorably shake one's world, the simple fact that every so often “the world is bound to shake.” This, the sandpiper-poet has learned to “take for granted.” One may indeed question the type of freedom that is here at stake; there is, however, no doubt that in his thoroughness and obsessive attention to detail the sandpiper inhabits his world just as completely and creatively and, to this extent, freely as the poet does hers. There is, second, Bishop's own version of old Crusoe in “Crusoe in England,” another figure with whom the poet closely identifies biographically as well as poetically. Stranded in his “un-rediscovered” and “un-renamable” island (reminiscent of Bishop's own Brazilian sojourn), and often giving way to “self-pity,” he engages in the following reflection: “Do I deserve this? I suppose I must. / I wouldn't be here otherwise. Was there / a moment when I actually chose this? / I don't remember, but there could have been.” A kind of Destiny

and Nemesis seems at work here: I got what I deserved otherwise I would not be here. But then there is also the appeal to an active choice involved, even though the choice may not have been such a momentous, conscious act. Every action follows a free choice of sort: “Was there / a moment when I actually chose this? / I don’t remember, but there could have been.” We should not be too rash in blaming necessity or fate or the course of events for what happens to us. We may have chosen our own destiny after all—even if, giving way to self-pity, (we pretend) we don’t remember. Finally, there is the stoic wisdom of acceptance expressed in “The Moose” by the distinctive Nova Scotian “‘Yes . . .’ that peculiar / affirmative ‘Yes . . .’ / A sharp indrawn breath, / half groan, half acceptance, / that means ‘Life’s like that. / We know *it* (also death).’” It is the affirmative act of knowledge and acceptance of the fact that death is in life, that death-life go hand in hand, that everything simply ends. Not quite a Nietzschean *amor fati* but close in its toned-down wisdom. This is the spectrum of freedom that Essence meets at the end of its development. Different, however, is the freedom of the Concept.

Bishop’s last poem, “Sonnet,” is published posthumously in 1979, a few months after her sudden death. It takes on the moment in which, as Vendler puts it, “the poet, after death, becomes her poems.”⁶⁸ At this point, the story lived and the story told are finally and completely converging. And something momentous happens. The end is addressed from the other side, so to speak, by creating a sort of eternal present in which life and death are coexistent, synchronically conjoined and held together by the force of one powerful “last look”—perhaps no longer a conceptual grasp but rather a new form of (poetic) intuition. Although the poem is divided into two parts—“Caught” and “Freed” that formally occupy the sestet and the octave, thereby inverting the sonnet form—life and death are truly held together in a solid unity, which consequently bears within itself “the most stubborn opposition (*den härtesten Gegensatz in sich*)” or “the highest opposition (*den höchsten Gegensatz*)” (TW 6, 468, 553, respectively). In the unity of Bishop’s last lyric such opposition is not only reconciled. It is made into the active source of the poem’s prospective energy, that which propels it, with the “rainbow-bird,” in its movement forward—in its free flight after the end and beyond it. At this point (in Bishop’s life and poetic activity), the hardest opposition of life and death, body and soul/spirit, unresolved will and absolute and uninhibited freedom is not something that generates the transition to something else—the need to travel to yet another new country—to a position of hard-won conciliation that allegedly overcomes

the contradiction. Travels have ended. Bishop's desire to stop, expressed while en route in the poem "Santarém," which appeared only the year before (1978), is now—and only now—finally fulfilled: "That golden evening I really wanted to go no farther." What "Sonnet" achieves, then, is the highly dialectical point of a final peaceful "rest" in which conciliation has already occurred but the opposition has not been erased. The poet is simply and finally 'at home' in and with it; in the opposition the poet "rejoins" herself ("mit sich selbst zusammengeht": TW 6, 468). What we have herein is the active state in which the opposition is maintained and present and rife with a forward-looking prospective impulse—indeed, it is not "dead rest" but the rest of an utterly free projection beyond the end, a movement full of new possibilities. Ultimately, this is the final act of freedom and true liberation displayed by the poet who becomes her poem, by the poet utterly one with her poetic action.

Caught—the bubble
 in the spirit level,
 a creature divided;
 and the compass needle
 wobbling and wavering,
 undecided.
 Freed—the broken
 thermometer's mercury
 running away;
 and the rainbow-bird
 from the narrow bevel
 of the empty mirror,
 flying wherever
 it feels like, gay!

"Sonnet" is Bishop's "last look." It gives poetic expression to the standpoint of the "absolute idea"—subjective and objective at the same time but also, importantly, truly "absolute" because beyond the unilateral nature of both and such as to unify both in an utterly new dimension. There is no subjective voice speaking here—no 'I.' There are inorganic objects, instruments of precise measurement, tools of scientific knowledge: the spirit level, the compass needle, the thermometer, the mirror and its bevel. They all yield, in the end, to the poet rainbow-bird. Moreover, the standpoint of "Sonnet" is 'objective' or rather 'absolute' in the sense of providing an impersonal and

impartial analysis of the two predicaments of being and acting as “caught” and being and acting as “freed.” Significantly, its standpoint is impersonal and impartial but certainly not indifferent. As Vendler has argued, “[a]n observer capable of this degree of impartiality, in a religious poem, would be God or a devout speaker.”⁶⁹ It is not God, though, but the poet finally inhabiting the position of the absolute idea. The absolute idea is the highest form of “personality” (*Persönlichkeit*) that displays and is animated by “the highest opposition” (TW 6, 549). Indeed, “Sonnet” stages the hardest opposition of life and death—the predicaments of “caught” and “freed”—and presents them as the dynamic unity of the movement connecting the two—a movement of *Übergeben* that is not really a transition but rather a liberation, a rejoining with oneself (TW 6, 573).

The poet’s finally reconciled subjectivity is the last achievement of the poem, the hard-won unification of the split proper to the “creature divided” and somehow, like the thermometer, “broken” that Bishop has inhabited in her poems throughout her life—from the Gentleman of Shalott, who in his ironic renunciation of the deceiving wholeness of the everyday order (“Half is enough,” he says—“The Gentleman of Shalott”) is “in doubt / as to which side’s in or out / of the mirror”; to the postmortem reflection of the heart split by the growing weed (“The Weed”) that turning to the poem’s voice, to the ‘I’: “‘I grow,’ it said, / ‘but to divide your heart again’”; to the “big white horse” of “Twelfth Morning; or What You Will”: “Don’t ask him, *Are you supposed / to be inside the fence or out?* He’s still / asleep”—for, “Even awake, he probably / remains in doubt.” In “Sonnet,” by contrast, personality or personhood is an achieved unity that, while emerging explicitly only in the conclusive liberating action that makes the end, is implicitly there all along, as it is viewed, successively, in two actions-states, namely, as “caught” and “freed.” Division and brokenness are the conditions for the final act of freedom: only by breaking the thermometer can the mercury, finally set free, run away. Unified, free, and thereby “gay” personality is not just the opposite of the “creature divided.” It is the conquest of a life that has learned freedom by enduring and overcoming the divisions and constraints of being “caught.”⁷⁰ There is an echo of the theme of the body-soul relation—the soul “caught” in the body—as well as of the theme of the wavering human will—“the wobbling and wavering” of the undecided compass needle. These, however, are left behind in the perspective disclosed by the rainbow-bird that raising “from the narrow bevel / of the empty mirror” finally takes his free flight—or is let go free with no constraints, no predetermined direction. He flies, simply, “wherever he feels like.” The rainbow-bird’s absolute

freedom has nothing to do with the condition of a finally disembodied soul or with the unerring goodness of the divine will. It is not freedom from the body or freedom from the will's erring wavering that is attained. The rainbow-bird leaves behind the "empty mirror" at the moment in which the perfectly beveled mirror interacts with the white light generating the rainbow—and only at this moment. From here on, the rainbow-bird begins its flight in an entirely new dimension just as the poet is liberated from her story (the mirror is now "empty," it must be) and finally *lets go*—lets go of *both* life *and* death and their opposition. Hence the last word of the poem: the exclamative, in its very utterance liberating: "gay!" qualifies the bird-poet's free action, *is* directly the voice of the free action as it expresses in its fullness the relief of finally letting go (of having finally let go), but also the exhilaration of having all possibilities open in front of oneself: the rainbow-bird is "flying wherever he feels like." It is almost an existentialist freedom embraced in utter joy (instead of anxiety and despair). More generally, it brings to the fore "the turn from tragedy or stoicism" characterizing Bishop's stance throughout her life (the predicament of "caught") "to an envisioned brilliance of being"⁷¹ (the predicament of "freed"). Although the contexts as well as the forms given respectively to this thought could not be farther apart, the final culmination of "Sonnet" matches the very end of Hegel's *Encyclopedia*. The joy and gayness of the poet/rainbow-bird's final free flight and liberation matches the *sich-Geniessen* accompanying the "movement" (*Bewegung*) with which the "idea," conclusively rejoined with itself, "acts, generates, and enjoys itself as absolute spirit" in the dimension of an eternal present (Enz. §577). As much as the (*sich*) *genießt* may appear strange next to the more expected (*sich*) *betätigt* and *erzeugt*, it gives voice to the same contentment in the peaceful, fully realized, self-contained and self-fulfilled act of making the end. Importantly, in both cases, the end is as much a return to the fullness of oneself and a liberating projection forward into the openness of the unknown. Gaiety, joy, self-contentment accompany both movements as they are expressions of this highest form of finally conquered freedom.

2.1. The Logic of Indifference: Being Indifferent to the End

The preceding discussion has spanned a wide range of literary texts that I purposely chose for being as different as possible from each other with regard to literary form, language, and historical context but also because of their distance from the context, programmatic aims, and intentions of

Hegel's logic. The task was to show how Beckett's and Leopardi's characters as well as the lyric horizons created by Leopardi's and Bishop's poems can be read as the *fulfillment* of the logical figures with which the three successive spheres of Hegel's logic develop the action of ending thematized in the "absolute method." They are, to be sure, arbitrarily chosen examples of such a fulfillment, and many others could have been presented as well. As the third chapter has extensively shown, the relation of 'fulfillment' is rooted in the structure of the 'figure' and in the 'figurative' value that can be attributed to the logical determinations. This relation refers to the way in which concrete individual yet exemplary characters—Hamm and Clov, the Icelander and Nature, the Ginestra—differently bring out the truth entailed in the logical figure by realizing and instantiating what is implied in it. They do so by reinscribing the logical figure in a different, unprecedented, and apparently contingent course of events, that is, ultimately, in a story formally different from the one told by Hegel's logic, yet fundamentally and structurally connected to it. In its fulfillment, now embodied in a literary character, the logical figure becomes part and protagonist of a new (non-Hegelian) story. Thus, the preceding analysis brought to light the fruitful use to which Hegel's logic of transformation and transformative action can be put in an utterly non-Hegelian context—and, in addition, in a context that is not strictly or exclusively 'philosophical.' Thereby an argument for the widest possible validity of the reading of Hegel's logic offered in the first part of the chapter is provided. At stake was not a 'Hegelian' interpretation of Beckett's *Endgame* but rather the reverse, namely, the use of Beckett's text to show the far-reaching and concrete validity of the structures of the logic beyond the logic itself. The argument shows how the different modalities of the ending action developed in the logic are crucial for the understanding of the stories and the actions to which those literary texts confer paradigmatic significance—a significance that is both individual and universal or rather poetically exemplary. In this way, the preceding discussion achieved the further result of displaying the 'real' validity of the logical figures, that is, the way in which, for example, the logical figure of "indifference" is embedded in many human attempts to confront or alternatively avoid confronting our mortality, a paradigmatic exemplar of which is staged in Beckett's *Endgame*.

The particular focus of the previous discussion concerned the action of Indifference as a strategy to approach the end. Indifference is the attempt to forestall or at least control the destiny of mortality characterizing finitude. We followed its inevitable failure (or, rather, its dialectical resolution) through the radicalization of "absolute indifference" and examined the act

of putting an end to indifference in an embrace of finitude that allows for the creative action of freedom. Ultimately, indifference is overcome in the act of freely letting go or letting be (*frei Entlassen*)—of letting Essence and the Concept become, of letting Nature be the externality and otherness that it constitutively is. Concentrating on this issue, the problem of ending was narrowed down to the articulation of different forms—or literary figures—of Indifference. The interest in this issue has led to a reading of the selected literary texts equally narrowed to a specific thematic focus. The heap paradox and (quantitative) indifference guided the reading of *Endgame*, while the shift from the “absolute indifference” of Being to Essence’s or rather Nature’s indifference on to its abandonment in poetry’s creative gesture led the progression from Leopardi’s “Dialogo” to “La Ginestra” on to Bishop’s two late poems “North Haven” and “Sonnet.” Accordingly, the story of Indifference and its end was a split story. Just as the texts selected, so the centrality attributed to the issue of Indifference may appear arbitrary. It certainly constitutes one of the many possible focuses that the conclusion of Hegel’s Logic of Being and its confrontation with Essence’s and the Concept’s actions of ending allows us to select. Indifference is one of the many real figures assumed by the action of ending. However, this focus is proof of the far-reaching validity of the reading of the logic herein proposed, and it is also an implication of the relation of fulfillment connecting logical figures and concrete action: the univocal logical development can be (and actually is) embodied or instantiated in many different ‘real’ actions displaying the same underlying logic.

At this point, keeping the characters of the stories told with Beckett, Leopardi, and Bishop as a backdrop, a return to Hegel’s logic is in order. I shall now turn to the complementary claim, namely, to the relevance of concrete forms of action for the understanding of the logical development. With the help, this time, of other Hegelian texts such as the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Philosophy of Right*, I show in what sense the development recounted through the three logical endings entails the logic of (real) Indifference. Just as the logical figures of the ending action were crucial for the understanding of the literary story of Indifference, so now the real figures of Indifference will be seen at work within the logical dynamic of pure thinking’s action. The logic is in the (real) story in order for it to be a *story*; the real figures are in the logic in order for it to be a *logic of transforming action*. I argue, however, that Indifference is only one of the possible implications of the logical figure of the end, and I show that in the connection between the act of ending, indifference, and the articulation of different forms of

freedom the text of the logic hints at other real fulfillments as well. Thus, in what follows, I discuss some moments of Hegel's philosophy that may not seem to fall too neatly into a given logical determination or are generally not interpreted by recurring to the logical structures I shall appeal to. This responds to the general thesis I have been pursuing throughout the book concerning the complex—and certainly not univocal or unilinear—relation between logical and real figures of action. Finally, my task in this last part of the chapter is to assess the progress made in the overall transformation process staged by Hegel's logic with regard to the action of ending. I take Indifference—its concrete and literary figures as well as its inner logic through Being and Essence and its overcoming in the Concept—as my guiding thread and show what kind of transformation connects the three figures at stake in this discussion.

I have argued that Beckett's *Endgame* as the game of the end at play between Hamm and Clov follows a central theme of Hegel's logic of measure and should be read in particular through the dialectical transformation of the heap paradox. The play stages the contradictory attempt to make the end but also, at the same time, to indefinitely postpone the end. The end is the "impossible heap" always there yet never actually reached. The endgame captures the nature of mortality as it stages the very action of the finite in its being always and constitutively in the process of ending—*Endlichkeit*. Indifference is the pervasive strategy that allows the game to go on maintaining its contradictory predicament of being the game of the end that cannot end. One more grain added to the heap makes no difference, that is, is utterly indifferent—until it is not. Logically, (quantitative) indifference postpones the end; only absolute indifference is properly the action with which being finally makes the end, thereby letting essence become. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the confrontation with mortality and death, the capacity to learn how to manipulate the former and forestall the latter, and more generally the action of making the end is famously pivotal to the constitution of self-consciousness in the *Herrschaft und Knechtschaft* dialectic. Its resolution leads to the "freedom of self-consciousness" first manifested in Stoicism—this being both a phenomenological figure of self-consciousness and a philosophical position emerging, significantly, in times of historical crisis. Allowing Beckett to intervene here, there is a sense in which, at this juncture, master and servant consciousness are playing the endgame.⁷² Their relationship is dialectically overcome in stoic *apatheia*—a form of indifference in which the freedom of self-consciousness first manifests itself. The development of the initial scene of the *Herrschaft* and *Knechtschaft*

relationship depends on whether consciousness is or is not indifferent with regard to the extreme point to which finitude can be pushed, namely, death. Or, to put it differently, all hinges on whether one or the other of the two confronting self-consciousnesses is willing to make the end—not just to inflict death on the other but also to embrace its own end. For the end here is a “double act” (*das gedoppelte Tun*—TW 3, 148) referred as it is to the other as well as to oneself. On this situation hinges the meaning of self-consciousness’s “dependence” or alternatively “independence” (TW 3, 145, title). However, self-consciousness’s indifference toward death turns out to be the sheer end—the end of natural individual life and with it the end of the movement of the incipient self-consciousness. Hence, at this point, indifference marks, quite literally, a ‘dead end.’ Indifference to death and indifference to life are one and the same. If both participants in the struggle assume the posture of indifference toward the “absolute negativity” of death and carry this position to the extreme, the result is the end. Indifference, however, is the act of “pure abstraction,” and this is the first, merely negative vestige of freedom. It is the act whereby self-consciousness shows it has no attachment to any “determinate existence” (*Dasein*), or that nothing determinate makes a difference to it—not even life itself (TW 3, 148). Again, indifference is one act equally or indifferently behaving toward life and death. However, while self-consciousness purports to prove itself above its destiny of finitude by rushing into death (or by showing its indifference toward life-death), what this action achieves is exactly the opposite, namely, exposing consciousness’s inexorable (natural) finitude. Indeed, as the life and death struggle should “prove (*bewähren*) the truth and worth” of the two antagonists (as well as freedom’s truth and worth), what it immediately proves is the untenability (or the untruth) of the claim of indifference toward death. Death does, in fact, make a momentous difference: to life, to freedom, to the movement of self-consciousness. Indifference then must be broken or kept in check—revoked, suspended, delayed, manipulated. As must Clov’s intimation to leave Hamm if the game ought to continue to be the game it is (and Hamm’s question to Clov is particularly to the point here: “Why don’t you kill me?”—*Endgame*, 8). And yet, in both instances of the endgame, self-consciousness must come as close as possible to the end. It must come as close to the end as to “intuit” the absolute negativity that death represents so as to shake off the indifference that would otherwise push it to stake its life—or to end the endgame. Self-consciousness must come as close to the end as to realize it cannot make the end. This is what the double act of “staking one’s life (*das Daransetzen des Lebens*)” and “aiming

at the death of the other” ultimately amounts to (TW 3, 149). The end must be touched (or intuited) but also avoided (and forestalled).

As it turns out, death is a paradigmatic state of irrevocable, “absolute indifference.” It is that “dead rest” (*tote Ruhe*—TW 6, 468) that Hegel mentions only to exclude it as the sheer opposite of the living *Ruhe* achieved by the concept.⁷³ This is how death leaves the two confronting antagonists: “the essential moment [. . .] vanishes from the fluctuating interplay (*Spiel des Wechsels*), namely, that of disintegrating into extremes of opposed determinateness, and the middle collapses into a dead unity, which disintegrates into dead extremes which are merely existents and not opposed terms” (TW 3, 149f.). The struggle is indeed a “game” or a “play” in which the protagonists alternate their moves—*Spiel des Wechsels*. But the game disintegrates or reaches a dead end when it loses its essential moment, namely, the opposition that keeps it alive or keeps it going. The endgame is played between “extremes of opposed determinateness”; it cannot be played between “dead extremes.” In this latter case, reciprocity of action (or anything approaching it) necessarily vanishes. Death is the same undifferentiated unity that absolute indifference is. Neither one of those “dead extremes” “gives back the other to itself nor does it receive itself from the other by way of consciousness. Rather, they only indifferently leave each other free like things (*lassen einander nur gleichgültig, als Dinge, frei*).” Indifference is both the attitude toward the other who is reduced to a mere inanimate dead “thing” (TW 3, 150), hence ‘let go free’ in an utterly careless, indeed indifferent gesture, and the nature of that very unmoved thing, a thing that no longer exercises an opposition, that is no longer an agent—in-different, that is, unable to make any difference to self-consciousness. And in this exchange, freedom also becomes indifferent, being the freedom of a merely dead thing, the freedom of being ‘let go’ or disposed of. In this twofold indifference of death the action of the two self-consciousnesses is the “abstract negation” that does not “survive (*überlebt*).” The end, in this case, is no true end since nothing follows immanently from it: no new beginning, no new advancement after (and from) this end. This is the difference between the dead end and the living end. There is no independence and no true freedom in the utter indifference of death. In fact, death can be survived, absolute indifference can be broken or turned against itself and overcome as Being finally lets Essence become—*after* and *as* Being’s proper end. Dialectically then, this death to which nothing follows or nothing survives is not the true end. Hegel puts this point in phenomenological terms as follows: the action of the two self-consciousnesses “is abstract negation, not the negation of

consciousness, which *sublates* (*aufhebt*) in such a way that it *preserves* (*aufbewahrt*) and *maintains* (*bewährt*) what has been sublated and which thereby survives (*überlebt*) its having become sublated" (TW 3, 150). *Bewährung*: to be proven true is to be brought to the end and to be able to survive the end transformed. *Bewährung* is *Aufgehobenwerden*. This "experience" of death and survival is a turning point as it teaches self-consciousness that "life" (and properly its ending) does make a difference, that is, that life is "the essence."⁷⁴ Thus, while one player still holds on to the position of indifference, the other has overcome it (although it keeps considering the former as "the truth": TW 3, 153): *Herr* and *Knecht*; the former (apparently) independent, the latter (apparently) dependent. But what is it that shakes one's self-consciousness out of indifference? It is an attitude or a feeling or an experience as "absolute" and pervasive as the indifference that death itself is. "This consciousness was not driven with anxiety about just this or that matter, nor did it have anxiety about just this or that moment; rather, it had anxiety about its entire essence. It felt the fear of death, the absolute master." It is "die Furcht des Todes, des absoluten Herrn" that jolts consciousness out of indifference (TW 3, 153). Now this apparent opposite of "absolute indifference," namely, the "absolute fear" (TW 3, 154, 155) that turns in "absolute fluidity" everything apparently settled in existence is the "simple essence of self-consciousness, the absolute negativity" (TW 3, 153). The development of the *Herrschaft-Knechtschaft* relationship follows this crucial initial movement.

The attitude toward objectivity assumed respectively by the master and the servant self-consciousness—the attitude on which their relationship to each other is based—further elaborates the starting point of their respective experiences. In both cases, at stake is a development of the attitude of not-being-attached (to objectivity as well as to their own existence), that is, the process of gaining independency—the attitude to which indifference initially and abstractly responded. While the master's satisfaction of desire in consumption puts an end to the object or brings it immediately to *Verschwinden*, the servant's formative activity and work (*Formieren, Bilden, Arbeit*) keep the end in check and produce mediated, gradual transformation (TW 3, 153f.). As it turns out, the "absolute fear" that remains the basis of all the servant's activity achieves the same result as the master's initial indifference (toward life, death, and existence), namely, to shake off and shed all attachment to objectivity, externality, and otherness. Moreover, through the formative activity of work, self-consciousness posits an object that being the product of its own activity is also the form in which, by

an act of “reflection,” it “finds itself again” or “finds itself back.” In this way, through “this *Wiederfinden*, [the slave consciousness] comes to acquire through itself a *sense of its own self (eigener Sinn)*, and it does this precisely in the work in which there had seemed to be merely an *alien sense (fremder Sinn)*” (i.e., the master’s “sense” as well as the “sense” of an alien external material). To this reflective movement of going back, thereby finding itself, both the moment of “fear” and the formative activity of “service” are necessary since they fundamentally transform and mediate each other (TW 3, 154). Significantly, Hegel insists that the formative activity without the “first absolute fear” (the apparent opposite of absolute indifference that converges with it in regard to its effects) only establishes a “vain sense of its own self”—*ein eitler eigener Sinn*—pure vanity or stubbornness. This is indifference to everything except to one’s own self, that is, an indifference that is incapable of turning reflectively against itself (which is the point achieved instead by absolute fear) hence incapable of reaching “essence”—incapable, phenomenologically, of reaching the “consciousness of itself as of the essence” (TW 3, 155). Moreover, without being connected to an experience of fear that is really *absolute*, that is, that has shaken consciousness to the very core, that indifference is no real and thorough independence from external objectivity but is only occasionally aimed at determined circumstances and conditions. This consciousness’s “sense of its own self is then merely *stubbornness (der eigene Sinn ist Eigensinn)*, a freedom that remains bogged down within the bounds of servility.” This stubborn consciousness is unable to make the transition to “essence,” is unable to extend “beyond the individual,” and to become “universal culturally formative activity, absolute concept” (TW 3, 155). Thus, *Eigen-Sinn* needs to expand beyond the self, gain universality, and become universal *Bildung*. This is precisely the point from which the “freedom of self-consciousness” achieved in Stoicism takes its cue (TW 3, 155, title).

The claim of indifference, however, is hard to break, and resurges in Stoicism, albeit at a higher level. Stoicism’s freedom is gained through a retreat in the universality and abstraction of thinking. “In thinking I *am free*” (TW 3, 156; and the Stoic adds, famously, “whether on the throne or in fetters”—TW 3, 157). For, in thinking I am in absolute identity with myself, there is no otherness, no difference (TW 3, 156). The principle of Stoicism is summed up in the claim that “consciousness is thinking essence and something has essentiality for consciousness, or is true and good for it, only insofar as consciousness conducts itself therein as a thinking essence” (TW 3, 157). Only that is relevant for consciousness with regard to truth

and goodness, which relates to it in the dimension of thinking—outside of this relation everything is (or ought to be) indifferent to consciousness. For, whatever is not taken up in thinking makes no difference, cannot touch it, change it, disrupt or destroy it.⁷⁵ The idea of *apatheia* follows immediately from this principle. Indifference to disruptive passions and emotions is the state in which only thinking (or reason) is allowed to make a difference, to be the element in which truth and the good and virtue are attained and cultivated. To be sure, the flip side of this position—or an easily attainable version of it—is described in the logic as the indifference of pure quantity, which is “being capable of and open to any determinations, provided that these are *external* to it and that quantity itself *does not have any connection* with them originating in it” (TW 5, 445). External relations can be entered in, provided they are not essential to ourselves, that is, that they do not destabilize the self, hence that we are indifferent toward them. Essential is only that which pertains to thinking. Now, the desire and work in which master and servant consciousness were implicated, as well as all externally oriented practical activity, expand the self to manifold individualized connections, interests, and attachments. Stoicism reduces this net of connections and concentrates all differences into the “simple distinction that lies in the pure movement of thought” (TW 3, 157). That is, again: thinking and thinking only makes a difference. All the rest—determinate things, particular feelings, purposes, desires (TW 3, 157) but also the “externally concrete” realms of “nature and the political world” more generally (TW 19, 251)—have no *Wesenheit*, are not essential to life: “solely the distinction that has been *thought*, that is, the distinction which is not immediately distinguished from me” matters and has essential value. But if only the difference that is not-different from me matters, then ultimately only the self matters. Fundamental egoism. Stoicism is the retreat in pure thinking that finds in this inward gesture a form of self-identical, abstract freedom that disengages the self from the world—from the natural as well as the social and political world. Hamm’s and Clov’s story of master-servant relationship continues in self-consciousness’s reduction of the external world to the inward enclosed realm of its own thinking.

In this regard, Stoicism exhibits for Hegel the same underlying logic as Buddhism and Spinozism. These positions have in common the act of “plunging (*Versenken*) all content into an only formal unity void of content”—Shiva as the “great whole, undistinguished from Brahma itself,” notices Hegel introducing the logic of measure. It may seem a position metaphysically far from Stoicism. And yet, the practical result is the same

indifference as a retreat in pure thinking against the contingency and change of worldly existence, and the same claim that such indifference is freedom. “The supreme goal of the human being, relegated as he is to the sphere of coming-to-be and passing-away, of modality in general, is to sink into unconsciousness, into unity with Brahma, annihilation; the Buddhist Nirvana [. . .] is the same” (TW 5, 389). Hindu pantheism reaches freedom by sinking into “unconsciousness,” while Stoicism, in seeming contrast, represents the first form of self-consciousness’s freedom. In both cases, however, at stake is the same fundamental gesture that seeks to disengage and immunize the self/unself from the manifold differences and connections of the world external to thinking and calls freedom precisely the state of being untouched by the world and indifferent to it. To be sure, the central moment common to these positions is rooted in the nature of consciousness itself or rather of the will.

In the introduction of the *Philosophy of Right*, presenting the fundamental structures of the will as conditions of spirit’s objective freedom, Hegel maintains that the will entails as its first moment “the element of *pure indeterminacy* or of the I’s pure reflection into itself, in which every limitation, every content, whether present immediately through nature, through needs, desires, and drives, or given and determined in some other way, is dissolved (*aufgelöst ist*); this is the limitless infinity of *absolute abstraction* or *universality*, the pure thinking of oneself” (R §5). This “infinite abstraction” that returns thinking reflectively to itself but also leaves it in a state of “pure indeterminacy” in which no natural need, desire, drive counts (or determines the will) or the “absolute possibility of making abstraction from all content as a limit” is the basic condition of what Hegel names “the freedom of the void (*Freiheit der Leere*)” in which thinking and willing are one (R §5, Remark). Hegel notices that in its purely theoretical form this position is found in “the religious realm of the Hindu fanaticism of pure contemplation,” but “if it turns to actuality it becomes the fanaticism of destruction” that both in religion and politics shatters the social order (R §5, Remark). This possibility of abstraction and pure indeterminateness, which is also a negation of the power of objectivity over the self, is the “element” that is phenomenologically conquered by Stoicism in the aftermath of the master and servant confrontation; it is the logical moment of “absolute indifference” in which being retreats back into itself in the pure indeterminateness that while mimicking the act of pure being’s beginning is rather its end and marks the transition to essence. Indeed, indicating the will’s “element of pure indeterminateness” (R §5), indifference is, as Descartes puts it, *infimus gradus libertatis*. *Libertas indifferentiae* is the first, only abstract moment of

the will. In Hegel's account, it is not so much a *state* due to the incapacity of choosing between two equally compelling alternatives, but rather, perhaps even more originally, the positive *power* or capacity of abstracting from, negating, or being indifferent, as it were, to all determining ground as such, the capacity of maintaining the condition of indeterminateness.⁷⁶ The "second moment" of the will, which properly defines its finitude and particularization, is the moment of determination (R §6, Remark); while the unity of the two—that is, indeterminate universality and determinate particularity—constitutes the will's *Einzelheit*. Herein the will determines itself but is also, at the same time, "indifferent toward the determinateness; it knows the latter as its own and as *ideal*, as a mere *possibility* by which it is not restricted, but in which it finds itself merely because it posits itself in it." This is the basic idea of the "freedom of the will" (R §7) as the capacity of being indifferent to determination *after* determination has taken place and on the ground that determination is self-determination (whereas the first moment, that of universality, expresses the will's freedom as the abstract state that *precedes* all possible determination).⁷⁷ This may be considered a second, connected and still formal, sense of the will's *libertas indifferentiae* as no content is taken into account.

The structure of the will thereby delineated shows its relevance first at the level of Abstract Right. In this sphere, the juridical idea of personality is the notion of "abstract personality," which does not yet entail the "particularity of the will." Thus, although the will's particularity is present in the form of desires, needs, contingent preferences, "it is still different from the determination of freedom" (R §37). In other words, abstract right is indifferent to those determinations, that is, to the will's particularity, and it is properly "right," that is, the first stage of freedom's actualization, only insofar as it upholds the position of indifference toward particularity. Juridical freedom is freedom to the extent that indifference with regard to particularity is maintained: "Right is that which remains indifferent toward particularity" (R §49Z). Hence Hegel adds that "since particularity, in the person, is not yet present as freedom, everything that concerns particularity is here a matter of indifference"—*ein Gleichgültiges*. Now, "if someone is interested only in his formal right, this may be pure stubbornness (*reiner Eigensinn*) such as is encountered in people with a limited heart and mind; for uncultured people insist most strongly on their rights, whereas those of nobler sensibility seek to discover what other aspects there are to the matter (*Sache*) in question" as these aspects are not considered indifferent (R §37, Remark). Pure *Eigensinn* is the position that holding fast to the formal

abstractness of right, hence remaining indifferent to all particularity concerning the subject, is also blind to the manifold web of objective relations in which life is entangled. This position is common both to the “abstract personality” of modern abstract right and Stoicism. However, while the *Eigensinn* that sticks to juridical indifference at the expense of particularity signals for Hegel a lack of cultivation, Stoicism is a philosophical stance or rather a “universal form of the *Weltgeist*” that arises specifically and exclusively in periods of historical crisis but high cultural development—in “a time of universal fear and servitude but also of universal cultural maturation which has raised culture (*Bildung*) all the way up to the heights of thought” (TW 3, 157–158).

Although historically arising in times permeated by “fear and servitude,” Stoicism is placed beyond the master-servant relation and behaves negatively toward it as its truth is in no external relation (be it *Herrschaft* or *Knechtschaft*) but only in thinking itself. This freedom from “all dependencies of individual existence,” however, turns out to be a state of “lifelessness (*Leblosigkeit*)”—a state not so different *mutatis mutandis* from the lifeless enclosed space of action in which Beckett’s endgame is played. “Outside of here it’s death,” says Hamm (*Endgame*, 9, 70). But truly this claim is the act that erases the difference between inside and outside—the inside world being arguably as lifeless and indifferent, as it were, as the world outside. Indeed the freedom of stoic self-consciousness consists in a balancing act in which indifference must be maintained at the expense of worldly relations. Indifference is a strategy to fend off the destabilizing contingency of objectivity. However, in its inaction such indifference is fundamentally lifeless. We are not so far, at least in regard to the consequences, from the destiny of Buridan’s ass, the famous exemplar of *libertas indifferentiae*. The freedom of *apatheia* consists “in maintaining the lifelessness which consistently withdraws (*zurückzieht*) from the movement of existence, withdraws from actual activity as well as from suffering, and withdraws into the simple essentiality of thought.” And this is precisely the *Eigensinn* characterizing this apathetic, inactive, and lifeless freedom in its retreat into the purity of thinking in contrast to the *Eigensinn* of servitude. As stated in the conclusion of the first dialectical movement of self-consciousness, “stubbornness (*Eigensinn*) is the freedom that latches onto an individuality and remains within the bounds of servitude. However, Stoicism is the freedom which immediately leaves servitude and returns back (*zurückkommt*) into the pure universality of thought” (TW 3, 157). The latter’s advance over the former is further described with regard to its relation to objectivity. In Stoicism,

“the freedom of self-consciousness is *indifferent* (*gleichgültig*) with respect to natural existence and for that reason *has likewise let go of natural existence* (*hat darum dieses ebenso frei entlassen*), *has let it be free*” (TW 3, 158). Indifference is here the act—or leads to the act—of letting go. Now *this act*, rather than the profession of apathetic unattachment, is self-consciousness's truly liberating act. To be sure, the *frei-Entlassen* of indifference is herein a letting go of natural existence and objective relations that is also the act that lets objectivity be in its independence: not the destructive gesture of fanatic consciousness but a more positive first move toward essence. Herein the Stoic's *Bildung* further develops in the aftermath of servitude's formative work. And yet the limit of this position remains its lifelessness or its lack of objective engagement and content: “Freedom in thought has only pure thoughts as its truth, a truth *without the fulfillment of life* (*Erfüllung des Lebens*), and thus it is also only the concept of freedom and *not living freedom itself*, for initially it is only thought itself which is its essence for it” (TW 3, 158). Ultimately, the indifference to external existence is matched by the “boredom (*Langeweile*)” that stoic lofty-sounding words such as truth, wisdom, virtue engender when severed from all worldly living connections (TW 3, 159). It is only in the thorough negativity of skepticism that the next step in self-consciousness's freedom is accomplished.

In sum, as far apart as stoic *apatheia*, medieval and early modern *libertas indifferentiae*, Hindu “fanaticism of pure contemplation,” and the “freedom of the void” may be metaphysically, morally, and epistemologically, they can all be considered variations or indeed real figures that under different historical, social-political, and cultural conditions enact or fulfill the same logical figure of indifference addressed by the Logic of Being in its conclusive sphere. As a guiding thread connecting some of these positions, we can now turn briefly to Leopardi—this time, to his early work. The idea of indifference as a historically determined practical attitude permeates his early assessment of the predicament of modernity. Indifference—even “absolute indifference” or *indifferenza assoluta*—and skeptical doubt lead for Leopardi to the same result. He sees “absolute indifference” as paradigmatic of the modern dominance of reason over the passions and the imagination. Reason fosters doubt, and doubt is the “first and foremost cause of indifference” (*Zibaldone* [382], 354). For, doubt destroys the vital emotions and illusions that sustain life and thereby “throws man into inaction, into indifference, into egoism” (*Zibaldone* [426], 382). Indifference makes man an egoist as it cuts him off the social context discouraging engagement in action and participation in the public life. On this ground, indifference traps

man—and a whole people—in a condition of civic and political “servitude” (*Zibaldone* [426], 382). Leopardi’s logical progression is here very close to Hegel’s argument in the phenomenological advance from the *Herrschaft-Knechtschaft* relation to the figure of Stoicism. Self-centered egoism, retreat in the rational self from the objective world, and lifelessness are among the connected implications of the same core position. Reinterpreting in an almost existential way the image of Buridan’s ass and the notion of *libertas indifferentiae*, Leopardi posits that “absolute indifference” is “the lack of all determination of the intellect, that is, of all belief” (*Zibaldone* [448], 395)—properly of beliefs that, not being strictly rational but rather emotionally and imaginatively based, may well be “illusions” but are nonetheless (or rather precisely on this ground) necessary for life. Reason, the praised sign of modernity (just as pure thinking is for Stoicism), destroys man’s vital illusions but is constitutionally indifferent and unable to motivate. Thus, Leopardi rejects the “hypothesis of an ignorance that leaves man in a complete indifference like that ass of the schools who placed between two distant foods [. . .] died of hunger” (*Zibaldone* [381], 353). For, it is not the “ignorance” of good and bad or of rational grounds for action but the lack of emotional motivation, hope, and purpose that throws man in a state of dead indifference, rendering him unable to act. The ass of the schools, then, is properly the indifferent modern rational man, not the ignorant or uncultured man who lives motivated by passions and illusions. In addition, the lack of purpose and hope that underlies indifference literally leads man to a dead end. Driving to total inaction, indifference is the end of action, the end of life. It is “a state of death” because in a condition of “total indifference” man “can neither love nor hate, cannot choose, hence cannot act, hence cannot live” (*Zibaldone* [379], 351). Ultimately, as the loss of all hope and the acknowledgment of the vanity of existence deepen, indifference is pushed to its extreme form and becomes self-referred indifference or indifference toward oneself. This is the state that leads man to suicide (*Zibaldone* [87], 121), the opposite of *amor proprio*. Significantly, herein indifference is the root of the apparent opposites of egoism and self-inflicted death.

The reversal of this view of indifference takes place, as we have seen, in Leopardi’s late thought and poetic work. Indifference is no longer the (epistemological, psychological, moral, political) predicament of modern reason and truth but a metaphysical Indifference that opposes Nature to man. Now it is Nature that is indifferent to man’s action and to his destiny; it is Nature that violently puts an end to man’s action both individually and collectively.

2.2. The Logic of Indifference: The Absolute of Essence and the End of All Things

The same logic whereby stoic self-consciousness gains independence from the objective world through a retreat in the subjectivity of pure thinking—the gesture that is the root of *apatheia* and an abstract lifeless freedom—is also the logic whereby objectivity begins taking its revenge. As much as the subject attempts to tame the contingency of worldly transformations by declaring itself indifferent to them, untouched by them, or even claiming them as posited by the self (i.e., as “ideal”—R §7), the world strikes back in interesting and surprising ways. As in Leopardi’s later view, Indifference is shifting from the subject to objectivity, from the human being to the whole of Nature. Indifference becomes the Absolute. If the subject does not make the end, Nature inflicts the end on the subject. In appealing to the ancient paradoxes of the bald and the heap as exemplifying the logic of measure in the “specifying quantum,” Hegel insists on the truth unveiled by the contradiction they stage in paradoxical form. The truth is that quantity is *not* “an indifferent limit” to be simply pushed forward by the mere repetition of the same act (plucking a hair, removing or adding a grain). The truth is that “the individually insignificant quantities (like the individually insignificant disbursements from a patrimony) *add up*, and the sum constitutes the qualitative whole, so that at the end this whole has vanished: the head is bald, the purse is empty” (TW 5, 397). The truth is that “quantity is a moment of measure and is connected to quality” (TW 5, 397–398). This is precisely the relation exposed by the paradoxes as they uncover the sudden “end” of the matter or *Dasein* at stake. This end shakes self-consciousness’s indifference and destabilizes it despite all its efforts to the contrary. Objectivity teaches that indifference cannot be maintained. It is, Hegel remarks, the *List des Begriffs* at work here. “When it is taken as indifferent limit, the quantum is the side from which an existence (*Dasein*) is unsuspectingly attacked and laid low.” Indifference ultimately signals the subject’s unpreparedness when a transformative response to the outside world is called for. Thus, instead of being the act of reclaiming its agency, consciousness’s gesture of closing up in the dimension of thinking, surrounding itself with indifference, allows objectivity to impose the end—to attack and lay it low. “It is the cunning of the concept (*List des Begriffs*) that it would seize on an existence from this side where its quality does not seem to come into play—and it does it so well that the aggrandizement of a State or of a patrimony, etc., which will bring about the misfortune of the state or the owner, even appears at

first to be their good fortune” (TW 5, 398). There is cunning in this logic, indeed, and being’s indifferent stance is overwhelmed by it. The process that brings states down destroying them seems all along *before the end* to highlight their good fortune and even prosperity. It is, instead, the root of their demise. We are getting close to Leopardi’s bitter irony concerning mankind’s “magnifiche sorti e progressive” (“La Ginestra,” v. 51); we are getting close to the end of essence. The end comes suddenly and unexpectedly and is not suspected by consciousness to be qualitatively different from all the changes that lead up to it. But objectivity—or the concept in its cunning—shows otherwise. “It is by a more and less that the measure of frivolous delinquency is overstepped and something entirely different comes irresistibly on the scene, namely crime which makes right into wrong and virtue into vice.—Thus states, too, acquire through their quantitative difference, other things being assumed equal, a different qualitative character. The laws and the constitution of a state alter in character whenever its territory and the number of its citizens expand. A state has its own measure of magnitude and, if this measure is trespassed, it irresistibly disintegrates internally under the same constitution which, with just different proportions, was the source of its good fortune and strength” (TW 5, 442). In moral, juridical, and political matters, just as within the subjective realm of consciousness, the logic of measure cannot be sidestepped. Even though the finite’s constitutional act of ending consists in postponing the end, the measure of its *Dasein*, just as the objectivity of the world, do sometimes have the last word. Revealing the concept’s intervention, this is precisely the logic that essence attempts to preempt by making its own end. As argued earlier, Essence is set to anticipate the Concept in its cunning, and it does so by sinking everything conclusively in the abyss of the Absolute rather than saving even destruction for some higher purpose. Thus, Nature’s response to self-consciousness, which as Leopardi’s Icelander is ready to declare itself free from her influence, is to strike with a sudden end. Freedom is now the act of acknowledging the end’s necessity, that is, the necessity of one’s own demise and annihilation within the whole of essence, *Wirklichkeit*, or Nature. In such freedom is the promise of a different transformation of the end: not its indefinite postponement but the notion of eternity. This is the achievement of Spinozism, in front of which Kantian criticism falls short in its attempt to think of the end.

In point of death, there is arguably no more postponing of the end. Objectivity finally wins. At this point, however, another strategy is available to the finite, namely, the strategy whereby essence confronts the end.

The individual's end is expanded dramatically into the "end of all things," and the attempt is made to compensate for the individual's annihilation with the thought of eternity within the vast whole—Substance, Nature, the Absolute. As much as Spinoza can be (and is) criticized for the shortcomings of his monism, as Leopardi points out seconded by Hegel,⁷⁸ the action of his Substance-Absolute is certainly more effective with regard to the act of ending than the illusory attempts to mask the end's inevitability proposed not only by teleological progressivism and Enlightenment philosophies of history, but also by Kant's critical modification of the latter. Thus, as the cosmological antinomy of the beginning (of the world in time) is paralleled by the antinomy of the end (of all things and of all time), Spinoza comes closer to an answer than Kant. Indeed, while Spinoza articulates the end of essence, Kant does not advance much beyond being. Moreover, if Spinoza, in the end, is deemed to fail, it is not for the reasons that Kant points out.

"It is a common expression, especially when speaking piously, for a dying man to say that he is passing *from time to eternity*." In the saying *er gehe aus der Zeit in die Ewigkeit* the end is properly a "transition (*Übergang*)," the transition "out of time into eternity" (AA 8, 327).⁷⁹ This common expression of the devoted language raises for Kant an immediate issue that concerns the meaning of that *Ewigkeit* connected to the end (or which the end ultimately purports to be). For, Kant argues in the 1794 essay *Das Ende aller Dinge*, that expression would be meaningless if by "eternity" one intended the infinite, unending quantitative progress in the time series. In this case, the individual would never leave time; never break with the time continuum. In other words, the end would not be the end (of time). However, the argument that Kant deploys to answer the question concerning the meaning of the eternity connected to the end raises a further and broader issue. Why and how does the death of the individual expand into the thought—or indeed the "idea"—of the "end of all things," that is, ultimately, the "end of the world" (of which the apocalyptic end is one version)? Kant's essay sketches out a progression in which the thought of eternity, moving away from the open-ended infinite of the time series, leads first to the idea of the "end of all time," then to the "end of all things" and to the "end of the world," and finally, in a purported resolution that generates instead a host of new problems, culminates in the quite different idea of the "final end" or *Endzweck* (AA 8, 327, 328, 333, respectively).

With the individual's death, time as such is thought to end (time being, transcendently, the form of inner sense) and is replaced by "man's uninterrupted survival" (AA 8, 327) in the noumenal, not-time-conditioned

dimension, that is, in “eternity.” The thought that links time’s end to eternity is by all accounts a hubristic or a stubborn thought. It betrays the fact that, while in point of death (and in the religious language) the end that death represents for the individual can no longer be avoided, it is still not truly accepted as the end. Alternatively, it betrays the way in which the end, being hard for the finite to reckon with, bifurcates in the dualism separating two incommensurable durations, one phenomenal, the other noumenal. In this way, the end becomes the contradictory (indeed antinomic) point in which ending and not-ending (or unending) somehow coexist. Kant recognizes that the “end of all time” that joins the phenomenal duration to the noumenal (or constitutes the transition between them) is a “somewhat horrifying thought.” Herein, taking the distinctly Kantian figure of the sublime, the action of Essence seems to emerge. The end of the individual, which implies the end of time as such, discloses the *Abgrund* that swallows the dying (or rather already dead) individual along with all time as it takes us right to the edge of it. This *Abgrund* is an “abyss from which there is no possible return for whoever falls into it,” explains Kant following Albrecht von Haller. It is an end that contrary to what Hegel’s methodological action of ending entails, allows for no turning back and no going back: it is an end that cannot be survived. The *Abgrund* that this thought discloses is both repelling and attractive to the mind, thereby displaying the fundamental feature of the “frightfully sublime,” which paralyzes the understanding and seizes the imagination (AA 8, 327). On Hegel’s view, however, this thought does not gain much over the bad quantitative infinite of the Logic of Being, that is, Essence is not yet at stake here. In fact, Hegel does not hesitate to consider Haller’s “description of eternity, which Kant called horrifying” as a paradigmatic case of “modern sublimity” and a chief example of the bad quantitative infinite. Hegel’s reference, to be sure, is to a different example, that is, to the infinity and eternity of the starry sky that concludes the *Critique of Practical Reason*, which Hegel significantly strips of the moral respect Kant constitutively conjoins to the idea of the sublime (TW 5, 264f., 267). In his account, Hegel is rather closer to Leopardi’s non-moral view of the infinity and eternity of nature, which “La Ginestra” displays in the comparison between man’s insignificant and fragile life span and the eternity and infinity of the sky’s millions of stars (“La Ginestra,” vv. 167–173). Nature’s indifference takes awe and respect away from sublimity.

On Kant’s view, theoretically or cognitively the thought of the end as the “transition out of time into eternity” has no “objective reality,” hence no value in extending our knowledge beyond the time-conditioned natural

world (AA 8, 327). Rather, this thought truly involves speculative reason in an antinomy that ultimately sanctions the end of thinking as such—hence, properly, the death of the understanding or, as the first *Critique* puts it, the “euthanasia of pure reason” (KrV B434/A407). Indeed, the “purported blessed end of all things” is a “concept with which the light of the understanding goes out and all thinking itself has an end” (AA 8, 336). The idea of the end of all things, however, has its origin not in the reflection on the natural and physical order of the world but rather in the reflection on the moral course of things in the world (AA 8, 328). It is in the practical, that is, supersensible realm then that the other common expression of the German language indicating the end should be understood. The end is the “last day”—in German, “the youngest day”—in which the final judgment of the *Weltrichter* occurs (AA 8, 328).⁸⁰ The end is “judgment day (*Gerichtstag*),” the point in which “the settling of the accounts of men for their conduct during their lifetimes” takes place. Herein, however, we meet one of the difficulties of the thought of the end expressed in the notion of “the last things” (*die letzte Dingen*) to be met and judged and reckoned with on the “judgment day.” Simply put: on what side of the end (or of “the youngest day”) do the “last things” stand? It is the same contradictory thought that Beckett finds expressed in the word “last”—ending, stopping, finishing, but also lasting and enduring, that is, not-ending or unending. The point, again, is that something is always expected to follow the last day (or to come *after* the end: “the last things that must come *after* the last day”—AA 8, 328), hence that the last is not really a final termination since eternity or an unending duration is implied. The apocalyptic last judgment that identifies the “last things” with the catastrophic “end of the world as it appears in its present form” is deemed problematic precisely in this regard: the last day would not be the last “for there would still be other, different days to follow,” different worlds to be (AA 8, 328). Kant’s way out of this antinomy hints at the practical sphere: “the representation of those last things that must come *after* the last day must be regarded as the sensible representation (*Versinnlichung*) of that final day along with its moral, though to us not theoretically conceivable consequences” (AA 8, 328). The problem consists in articulating an end that is followed by a thoroughly different (i.e., not temporal but eternal or supersensible) course of events—an end that is and is not the end. This idea cannot be articulated theoretically but is presented, in the first instance, as a practical possibility (a sort of practical schematization of the end implied by the final day). At this point Kant raises the central question—the question that I connect

with the constitutive problem that finitude has in facing and accepting and making the end, and that I am now interested in addressing as the action of ending moves from the Logic of Being to the Logic of Essence. Does Kant's "end of all things" reach the end of Essence? I shall suggest that it is not Kant but Spinoza who reaches the end of Essence with the absolute, that is, with a form of eternity that truly embraces the end without being sidetracked by the notion of a final end.

This is now the central question raised by Kant: "But why do men expect an end of the world at all (Warum erwarten die Menschen *überhaupt ein Ende* der Welt)?" This question is followed by a second one, which addresses the fact that human beings usually think of the end of the world as terrible and terrifying (AA 8, 330). The basis of the former expectation is a fundamental confusion between the two very different concepts of *Ende* and *Endzweck*. Kant argues that reason tells man that "the duration of the world has worth only insofar as the final end (*Endzweck*) of the existence of rational beings can be met within it; but if this final end should not be attained, creation itself would appear to them as purposeless (*zwecklos*): just as a play that has no upshot (*Ausgang*) whatsoever and no rational aim" (AA 8, 331), that is, ultimately, as a story that is not a story or fails as one.⁸¹ If the final end (of the rational being's existence) is not attained in this world, then the world turns out to be a play with no conclusion and no "exit" or *Ausgang*—a play such as Beckett's *Endgame* perhaps (although even here Clov does make his "exit": *Endgame*, 81). As the meaning of the world—or of "all things"—is framed in terms of the unity of a story or a play, the idea of the end as termination is replaced by the teleology of the final end and its fulfillment. And this creates the spurious inference advanced by the human expectation of the end: if a story without a meaningful end (*Ende*) is incomprehensible, then the final end (*Endzweck*) of the world should be fulfilled. Now this is the expected end of the world (i.e., the fulfilled *Endzweck* becomes, or rather replaces, the *Ende*). However, the first proposition may be warranted even without implying the second. For, all a story needs may be a non-teleological end or a true conclusion, a simple *Ausgang*-exit. And here a sheer end as mere negation or annihilation can very well be the end of the story of finitude without implying—or being in need of—any purpose whatsoever (let alone the fulfillment of the final end). Nature may well be indifferent to man's end as well as to his quest for a purpose of his existence. This is, after all, the lesson of the conclusion of Leopardi's "Dialogo della Natura e di un Islandese": the famished lions devour the miserable argumentative Icelander (this is the narrative end as

well as the Icelander's end, without any thought of purpose or final end being invoked). This is the case of Essence's end with the absolute as *Abgrund* of all finitude. And finally, on Hegel's account, this is the case of Spinoza's monistic absolute substance, which "corresponds" to Essence's absolute (TW 6, 195). Importantly, in this latter case the end of the finite in the absolute and the absolute's eternity coexist without generating any antinomy.

In reply to the second question, which qualifies the common human expectation of the end in apocalyptic and terrifying terms, Kant recognizes that "it is not without cause that men feel the burden of their existence, even though they are themselves the cause of those burdens"—a thought with which Leopardi would certainly agree. Kant submits that this outlook is due to the discrepancy between the "natural progress of the human race in the cultivation of talents, skills, and taste," which is accompanied by the multiplication of needs, and the development of the moral capacity, which usually lags behind (AA 8, 332). On this basis, Kant replies to the second question balancing the corrupt nature of man, which is truly at the root of the terrifying representation of the end, with the Enlightenment confidence in human moral progress. This latter allows us to at least "hope" in a "final day" (hence in an end) in line with "Elijah's ascension" rather than with "a descent to hell like that of Korah's horde" (AA 8, 332). This, however, is precisely the territory on which Kant's argument, despite its critical caution, falls prey of Leopardi's (and Spinoza's) anti-teleologism.

This last thread connecting the phenomenal realm of cultural progress to the unchanging supersensible realm of morality, and framed by the switch from the end to the final end, is further articulated up to a point of impasse in Kant's reading of *Apocalypse* 10:5–6. In this passage, the angel announces, "*that henceforth time shall no longer be*" (AA 8, 333). The angel's saying may be taken, Kant suggests, to imply the end of all change, as in: "henceforth there should be no *change*." However, if this is understood as the "end of all things as objects of the senses," we stumble yet again in a theoretically unsolvable antinomy. More promising seems the idea of the end of time as referring, practically, to a "duration thought as unending," that is, "as eternity." What we have, in this case, is the overcoming (or the negation) of the end in eternity. For, since all ends as such imply time (or occur in time), if there is no time there is no end. Hence the (practical) idea of an "unending duration." But what sense can we make of this notion, which now replaces the end, a thought that still appears much too close to Hegel's bad infinite? While Kant explores the different possibilities entailed in this thought, none seem really conclusive and thoroughly persuasive. It

appears that even morally an end of the unending process (along with or as the fulfillment of the final end) is always required. Now, as the theoretical notion of an end of all phenomenal change is easily excluded, the practical meaning of the “unending duration” seems to be only that “reason, in the practical point of view, can never do enough to attain its final end (*Endzweck*) by following the path of perpetual changes” (AA 8, 334)—which comes close to the meaning Hegel attributes to Kant’s moral *Sollen* as a constitutively contradictory (because never conclusive) thought. For, by definition, neither the end (*das Ende*) nor the final end (*Endzweck*) can be reached on the path of perpetual changes. Ultimately, there is no end (in the unending duration) because reason cannot attain its final end; but also: the final end cannot be attained because there is no end in reason’s process. Rightfully dissatisfied with this account, Kant concludes, “nothing remains then for reason except to think of steady progress toward its final purpose through a (temporally) unending process of change, in which instance its character (*Gesinnung*) [. . .] remains permanently the same” (AA 8, 334). Herein we have the attempt at conjoining the two sides of the antinomy of the end in the practical perspective: the (phenomenal, i.e., cultural, historical) change of reason’s (unending) moral progress toward the *Endzweck* and the changelessness of pure moral *Gesinnung*. How these two sides can be kept together and the gulf that divides them bridged is the *spinosa quaestio* at the center of many of Kant’s writings on applied practical philosophy and philosophy of history. Ultimately, Kant’s strategy consists here in replacing the end of the unending process of moral development (“from good to better,” he submits—AA 8, 334)—the end that despite all attempts to set it aside continues to haunt thinking with the cogency of the always required end of a play—with the unchanging nature of the noumenal character.

At this point, however, a third perspective is brought into the picture—a perspective that just like the theoretical and, albeit to a lesser extent, the practical is fundamentally destabilized by the thought of the end (as the end of all change). This is the perspective of the imagination. “That [. . .] there will be some point in time when all change (and with it time itself) ceases, is a representation that offends the imagination”—offends it and does violence to it (just as the sublime does). Indeed, what this representation amounts to is the image of “the whole of nature fixed and, as it were, petrified (*die ganze Nature starr und gleichsam versteinert*)” as all processes—of thinking and living—stop in their track petrified in their very “last” occurrence. This is the imaginative representation of the end: the last act whereby the whole as well as the individual come to a complete standstill and are

fixed as such (or perhaps identically repeated) in eternity: “the last thought, the last feeling will come to a standstill in the thinking subject and remain, without change, always the same” (AA 8, 334). This act, Kant concludes, amounts to individual “annihilation (*Vernichtung*),” to the annihilation of discursive thinking and life as such. This imaginative representation of the end, embodied in a “petrified nature” and a petrified (or annihilated) life, is ultimately not very distant from the Icelander’s apprehension of Nature, which in their first encounter appears to him as a colossal stone statue only to be found living although somehow still immovable and unchanging because all-embracing. In fact, it is not so much that Nature is petrified but that in Nature all processes and all life come to an end. Thereby Nature discloses the end as the perspective of *sub specie aeternitatis*. Nature is the unchanging, indeed eternal whole in which all change occurs. Nature has no end but is the end of all things.

This, however, is the further step that Kant chooses *not* to undertake—or perhaps does not dare to undertake. For, this step leads directly to Spinozism. Such step, which conjoins the end as annihilation to eternity is the necessary correction of the thought with which the Icelander, just as Kantian imagination, understanding, and reason so unsuccessfully struggle, namely, the acceptance of the end. The incapacity to accept the end is also what “La Ginestra” identifies as the cause of man’s illusion of a pseudo-eternity gained through history. The correction of this thought requires the transition to the different logical level of Essence’s absolute. In Kant’s view, this step leads to the monistic framework of (nihilistic and Chinese) “mysticism,” (Tibetan and generally Eastern) “pantheism,” and the “metaphysical sublimation (*Sublimierung*),” which is “Spinozism” (AA 8, 335).⁸² While Kant deems all these positions unacceptable and such as to ultimately produce the very annihilation of thinking itself, he considers them as coherent (and perhaps inevitable, if they are not critically checked) outcomes of the imagination’s representation of the end and, in particular, of a “closely related” idea proposed by practical reason. This is the “idea” of the end as the fulfillment of the *Endzweck* accompanied by a state of “contentment (*Zufriedenheit*)”—the deserved “eternal rest” or *ewige Ruhe* (AA 8, 335) that may remind us of the logical idea’s peaceful *Ruhe* (TW 6, 468), which, Hegel insists, is the rest of a fulfilled life and not of death. Kant excludes the possibility that such a state can ever be attained. In fact, at this point, the incompatibility of the “unending process” of morality (or of the “unending progress toward the *Endzweck*”) with the actual fulfillment of the final end comes dramatically to light. Herein Kant sacrifices the latter

to the former, thereby discarding once and for all the thought of the end of the process, hence the possibility of the contentment accompanying the fulfillment of the final end (which replaces the non-teleological end). Kant recognizes that in the unending “constant progress toward and approach to the highest good” we “cannot connect *contentment* with the prospect of this state [. . .] lasting through eternal change.” The notion of man’s corrupted nature, or simply finitude, is here the ultimate horizon: “for the state in which man is now, always remains an evil one by comparison with the better one he is preparing himself to enter” (AA 8, 335)—the bad infinite, it seems, all over again. As it turns out, practical reason can bear the thought of the end as little as the imagination (or the understanding) can. Nature petrified and life annihilated embody the unbearable idea of the end just as fulfilled beatitude and eternal rest do. Critical thinking shrinks away from them as from that *Abgrund* “from which there is no possible return” (AA 8, 327). *Zufriedenheit*, *beatitudo*, or “eternal rest” are instead precisely that in which those monistic and pantheistic representations as well as their “metaphysical sublimation,” namely, Spinozism dare to place the end—perhaps (and certainly in the case of Spinoza) not the teleological final end but the end as the conclusive annihilation of finitude and finite thinking as such.

In sum, in *Das Ende aller Dinge*, while making several attempts to think of the end in different perspectives, Kant finally retreats from the “abyss” that this notion inevitably opens for the understanding, practical reason, and the imagination. The end as the conclusive, irrevocable annihilation of finitude and of discursive thinking into the eternity of the forever fixed Nature, the end as the final fulfillment and the “eternal rest” of *beatitudo*, is replaced by the unending approximation to the moral *Endzweck*. The tension separating the unchanging and supersensible moral *Gesinnung* (AA 8, 334) and the phenomenal historical progress of culture and morality seems to be reconciled only by turning from the notion of *Ende* to the quite different idea of *Endzweck*. Herein Kant places his critical argument, unwilling to take the step toward an *Ende* that is *not Endzweck*. The necessity of the (non-teleological) end, however, resurfaces in this case as well—the play, after all, needs its conclusion in order to make sense; the curtain must fall. Kant sees rightly that the next coherent step beyond his own position is mysticism and Spinozism, which endorse precisely the rejected conception of the end. Now Spinozism is the position that Hegel sees as belonging to the specific way in which Essence, placed between Being and the Concept, attempts to make its own end beyond being’s “absolute indifference” but also without recurring to the resources of the concept

such as, for example, subjectivity, self-determination, and (inner) teleology. Hegel explicitly considers the all-encompassing absolute, which swallows the finite in an indeterminate *Abgrund* and is thought as fundamentally anti-teleological, that is, as essentially indifferent to the destruction of the finite, but is also eternal, as corresponding to Spinoza's substance. It is precisely at this juncture that all the often-discussed points of criticism that Hegel famously raises against Spinoza can be considered instead as perfectly justified merits of his conception of substance—even against Kant. Significantly, Hegel's criticism is carried out from the standpoint of the Concept. However, the destruction of finitude, the absolute's indeterminateness and lack of subjectivity, its rigid and petrified eternity—these are among the characters that have their necessary place *at the end of Essence*. They are necessary in order to articulate the specific way in which *Essence* makes the end. And, pace Kant, there is no other way from Being to the Concept than to pass through the *Abgrund-Grund* of Spinoza's substance. Set against Kant's critical attempt to address the idea of the end, Spinoza has the upper hand as he achieves the action of essence that remains foreclosed to Kant's dualism and to his appeal (albeit critically) to the notion of a final end. Herein lies, for Hegel, the unsurpassed value of Spinoza's Substance-Absolute. The absolute is the “end of all things,” itself eternal, the *Abgrund-Grund* in which the finite is swallowed and annihilated but at the same time identified with the absolute eternal totality. Freedom is the recognition of the necessity of finitude's destruction—the necessity of the end; not the illusory moral progress “from good to better” (AA 8, 334) to an unattainable final end, not the abstraction of an unchanging and supersensible moral *Gesinnung* untouched by worldly events.

Hegel famously claims that “the concept of Spinozistic substance *corresponds* (*entspricht*) to the concept of the absolute” (TW 6, 195—my emphasis). In Spinoza's system, substance is the monistic whole; it is “*one* substance, *one* indivisible totality.” Hegel underlines that “there is no determinateness that is not contained and dissolved into it.” Precisely to this extent, Spinozistic substance is posited at the same level of or as the same totality that essence is, and more precisely, as the absolute with which essence attempts to conclude its movement. There is no determinateness that is not *contained*—in its existence and positedness—in the absolute as its *Grund*. But there is also no determinateness that is not *dissolved*, in the movement of *Auflösung*, in the absolute as its *Abgrund*. Indeed, Hegel recognizes that a valuable insight of Spinozism is that “anything that to the natural way of representing and to the determining understanding appears as

self-subsistent (*Selbständiges*) is entirely reduced in this necessary concept to a mere *positedness* (*Gesetzsein*)” (TW 6, 195). Against the abstract freedom of Stoicism, which in this regard is not far from the abstractness and formality of Kantian autonomy or from the arrogant and illusory independence of Leopardi’s Icelander—a freedom that is the stubborn pretension of the finite to claim some form of “independency” or “self-subsistence” of its own, that is, to claim its being a *Selbständiges*—Spinoza’s substance shows the true destiny of annihilation that inescapably awaits the finite within the whole (Nature as the absolute). Freedom lies elsewhere, namely, in the acknowledgment and acceptance of the necessary identity with the whole. It is the diminutive but much more honest attitude of Elizabeth Bishop and her sandpiper, who take for granted “that every so often the world is bound to shake” (“Sandpiper”), inscribing their life within this world. This is a world at once solid and precarious, necessary and utterly contingent. In fact, what “appears” as independent is truly “posited” as such by the absolute; what appears as “self-subsistent” is only posited as such within the absolute. The finite is posited as such as to be annihilated. And it is posited with no further purpose or final end in view. Indeed, this is the hard truth Nature (substance or the absolute) reveals to the Icelander—no need of a Kantian dualism to soften this hard truth (whereby an unchanging, autonomous supersensible character is seen as coexisting with the conditioned natural progress of humanity).

Hegel famously expresses the “absolute principle” of Spinoza’s substance in the proposition “determinateness is negation,” a proposition that he considers a “true and simple insight” but also a limited insight. For it remains at the view of “negation as determinateness or quality” and does not advance to negation as self-negation. Ultimately this means that the individual does not recover from—or does not survive—the negation or annihilation within the absolute; that it does not subsist *as individual* within it. Moreover, the further limit of Spinoza’s position consists in the fact that the “manifold act of determining” lies in “an external thinking,” that knowledge is the act of an “external reflection” (TW 6, 195). Importantly, unlike in Eastern pantheism, the act of determining (and negating) is indeed present in Spinozism. The problem, on Hegel’s view, is that it belongs to an “external” activity of reflection, not immanently to substance itself. While thinking is indeed one with extension, it does not differentiate or “separate” itself from it. Hence thinking is “not as determining and informing (*als Bestimmen und Formieren*), nor as a movement of return that begins from itself (*als die zurckkehrende und aus sich selbst anfangende Bewegung*)”

(TW 6, 195—my emphasis). In other words, the end, in the case of the absolute, is not a turning back to a new beginning. Thinking (both finite thinking and the thinking that the absolute essentially is) radically ends in the absolute substance but does not make a return back into itself, hence does not make a new beginning out of itself (such is the nature of subjectivity). It is an “external understanding that takes up the determinations as *given* and *brings them back* (*zurückführt*) to the absolute, but does not take them as having their beginning from it” (TW 6, 196). Despite its definition as *causa sui*, the absolute is not itself a creative power truly determining itself—it is the end but not a new beginning. It is the repetitive power that reproduces itself in a self-identical position, with no otherness and no difference (TW 6, 196)—Nature repeating and revising itself, as Bishop puts it, but truly unable to imagine an utterly different order; thinking identical with extension but unable to differentiate itself from it. However, the capacity of making a new beginning *out of itself* and *after the end* is for Hegel the methodological meaning of ending: not a standstill but an utterly new beginning. Indeed, the end entails the creative act that requires the production of otherness as otherness. Herein we meet the limit of Spinoza's position. The absolute is not “absolutely absolute” (TW 6, 190); it is not the true end. Thinking stalls in the absolute and is indeed ‘petrified’ in the end, unable to turn back to itself and unable to gain the “concept of an other by which it would have to be formed” anew, as different from itself (TW 6, 196). Thinking is annihilated in the abyss but does not survive negation. As in Kant's case, the end is the *Abgrund* “from which there is no possible return for whoever falls into it” (AA 8, 327). The difference is that Kant, armed with critical prudence, is careful not to fall into the abyss (recurring to the substitute concept of a final end, persisting in the dualism of speculative and practical reason), while Spinoza coherently and fearlessly embraces it. The eternity of Spinoza's substance or the “sublime demand” he makes “on thought that it consider everything under the form of eternity, *sub specie aeterni*,” is connected with the failure of essence's end to be a new beginning. The consequence is the absolute's eternity as “unmoved identity.” *Deus sive natura* is the “petrified nature” of Kant's imagination. All finite determinations, all attributes and modes, are in the absolute “only as *disappearing*, not as *becoming*, so that this disappearing also makes its positive beginning only from without” (TW 6, 197). There is no immanent beginning after the end in the absolute substance, no becoming anew after the act of disappearing in the abyss. If there is a beginning or a becoming, it is due to the external intervention of reflection. It is only in the sphere

of the Concept that the limit of essence's end is overcome. In the structure of the concept, Hegel notices harkening back precisely to the analyzed passage, "the concept is not the abyss (*Abgrund*) of the formless substance [. . .] but as the absolute negativity it is that which forms and creates (*das Formierende und Erschaffende*)" (TW 6, 277, referring to 195). This activity of forming and creating is precisely that which essence's absolute and Spinoza's substance lack. Those, however, are crucial requisites attained only by and in the *conceptual* end, not before.

Hegel's critical insistence on the lack of immanent reflection proper to Spinoza's substance or on his need to mobilize the work of an external understanding is well known and always repeated when Hegel's confrontation with Spinoza is at stake. It should be underlined, however, that this rebuke is justified only from the perspective of the concept. At the level of essence things are quite different. There is a sense in which essence's absolute and Spinoza's substance need to bring out their positive *Auslegung* (in addition to the negative one) as little as Nature, in Leopardi's "Dialogo," needs to come out and explain the reasons why she does what she does to its creatures. If this movement or explanation (*Auslegung*) is intended to follow, then its burden falls on the external intervention of reflection or thinking or on the promptings of the inquiring Icelander—not on the absolute or Nature themselves as they are and remain fundamentally indifferent to any self-presentation. In other words, external reflection is brought into the picture *by the finite's* urge to give itself reasons for its own destruction. The finite cannot conceive the end without a final purpose (*Endzweck*). It is the human being who needs "external reflection" in order to make sense of a story that ends in a way he cannot grasp (or does not want to grasp). In the absolute, by contrast, external reflection comes to its end just as all forms of finite thinking do. In this regard, Spinoza's position is an entirely coherent one. It needs self-reflecting subjectivity as little as Leopardi's Nature needs reasons or purposes for her actions. At the level of Essence, then, Hegel's rebuke to Spinoza regarding external reflection may indeed be considered as utterly misplaced. Spinoza's substance has truly no use for external reflection.

The recognition of the necessity of the end and of the finality of death is the starting point of its transfiguration, that is, the condition of a new beginning *after* the end (essence's end) that neither stalls in the antinomy of an alleged eternal duration nor is blocked in the selfsame repetition of an eternity without otherness. The transition to the concept's end is made by the poetic imagination that shakes the petrified fixity of Nature's substantiality and shifts or fundamentally alters nature's order in space and

time. As Bishop intimates in "North Haven," the islands are made to shift and drift, freeing themselves of their natural constraints "within the blue frontiers of bay." Within the framework of the concept's act of ending, the imagination is no longer paralyzed as the Kantian imagination is, but it is free to make a new beginning.

2.3. The Logic of Creativity: Ending Beyond the End (of the Idea)

In contrast with Kant's attempt in the 1794 essay to construe the end in terms of the "transition out of time to eternity" or as the "end of all things," but also in contrast with the unmoved finality of Spinoza's eternal *deus sive natura*, the Logic of the Concept, with Bishop's "Sonnet," embraces the end as the unity cum "hardest opposition" (TW 6, 468, 549) expressed in the poetic movement that links "Caught" and "Freed." Life and death are not opposites separated (or even connected) by a "transition." In fact, at stake is no longer an *Übergang*. It is instead the end of all transition (and transitioning) taking place in the final act of liberation that is the joyous free flight of the rainbow-bird daring to launch unconstrained into the unknown ("wherever it feels like": "Sonnet"); and is the creative gesture of the poet that through an imaginative act achieves in language the otherwise impossible transfiguration of nature (she makes the "islands" shift and drift "a little north, a little south or sidewise": "North Haven"). The end implies and requires a radical change in language. The idea's logical language yields to intuition and imagination, that is, to another language or to the other's language; or perhaps, once grammar is enlivened by its actual use, it also accepts new rules or even invents new rules thereby becoming a different language altogether. The end is an act of creation. But what does this act entail? It is at this point that the artwork and the potential of Kant's aesthetic idea in its proximity to the final action of Hegel's absolute idea come to light.

"Stories, stories, years and years of stories, till the need came on me, for someone, to be with me, anyone, a stranger, to talk to, imagine he hears me, what I am, now"—declares Henry, the protagonist of Beckett's *Embers* (*Embers*, 62). Similar is the predicament of the absolute idea in finally bringing the logical story to the end as it is moved to invent its radical other by the "need" to speak to and of one other than itself—and eventually to be heard in return. The absolute idea as the "original word," which has been solipsistically addressing only itself for lack of true "otherness" to which its "expression (*Ausserung*)" could be directed (TW 6, 550), turns in the end to another. Turning to otherness is the end. After or beyond the (logical)

end is otherness: nature's otherness, other beings, strangers, other subjects to whom one speaks, who listen to the one who speaks, who speak back in return, other stories. The "hardest opposition" that the idea harbors within itself yields to (or rather is compounded by) a hard opposition from without. However, this new framework requires a new language; it is, to be sure, the beginning of a new story. Beyond the (logical) end are Nature and Spirit. The movement beyond the end begins with both the idea's *Entschluss* and its *Befreiung*—decision and liberation disclose Nature and Spirit beyond the idea's end (TW 6, 573).

"*Geist* in the aesthetic sense," says Kant in a famous definition crucial for Hegel, "is the animating principle in the mind (*das belebendes Prinzip im Gemüte*)" (KU §49, AA 5, 313). What spirit uses to animate the mental powers—the *Stoff* or material that is subjected to that principle—is what lends the movement and the "impetus (*Schwung*)" of life to the mind, a movement that is a relaxed yet dynamic state of free "play" or *Spiel*, not the constrained activity of a logical inference or the engaged stance of a moral commitment (AA 5, 313). Spirit, in this aesthetic sense, is closely related to "genius" and to the creativity that uniquely belongs to it—genius being, most properly, the convergence of nature and spirit (AA 5, 318). But for Kant, *Geist* is first and foremost connected to the "aesthetic ideas" and to the creative imagination that produces them. Indeed, the "principle" at issue (the principle that spirit itself is) is defined as "the power of exhibiting (*Vermögen der Darstellung*) aesthetic ideas." An aesthetic idea, Kant explains in *Critique of Judgment* §49, is a representation of the imagination that "prompts much thought" or offers a lot to thinking, "but to which no determinate thought, i.e., *concept*, can be adequate, so that no language can express it completely and make it completely understandable" (AA 5, 314). The aesthetic idea, the *Darstellung* of which is provided by spirit, is a representation that pushes thinking beyond logic (or beyond the concept) and beyond logical language in its strictly cognitive function. In fact, the aesthetic idea finds expression in (and gives expression to) a different language, that is, the language of poetry and art more generally. Indeed, Kant suggests that "it is properly in the art of poetry (*Dichtkunst*) that the faculty of aesthetic ideas can manifest itself to full extent" (AA 5, 314). In this language, which is the language of "inner intuition" and not of determinate concepts, an entire realm exceeding logical conceptuality is not only brought to expression but is channeled into interpersonal communication (or rather communicability). Thus, a poem by the "great king" Frederick the Great gives voice for Kant to uplifting feelings (even to a "cosmopolitan attitude") in that moment "at the end of

life" (AA 5, 316), which in the 1794 essay produces only troubling, terrifying, and indeed unresolved thoughts. There is a sense in which poetry as such is a formal transfiguration of the end—of the end of thinking and conceptual language—just as can be the transfiguration of the end of life; the end that the (Kantian) concept can neither conceive nor express, just as it can neither conceive nor express the transition from time to eternity that marks the end of individual life.

The aesthetic idea, Kant submits, is "the counterpart (pendant) of a rational idea" (AA 5, 314). While the latter is a concept to which no intuition or representation of the imagination can be adequate, the former is an intuition or imaginative representation that no determinate concept can fully express. Thus, as Kant's aesthetic idea brings to light the limit of logical conceptuality and logical language, it does so by positively disclosing what lies beyond it, that is, by extending or expanding with an act of *Erweiterung* (AA 5, 315) the domain in which the mind can have free rein. Significantly, in this case, the lack of adequacy between imaginative representation and determinate concept instead of being a limitation and a signal for thinking not to venture beyond (as is generally the case in Kant's transcendental framework) is precisely that which inaugurates a new legitimate realm for the idea. This is the realm of aesthetic freedom. The imagination is the cognitive power to which Kant appeals in order to explain the production of aesthetic ideas and the "extension" of the realm of what is thinkable beyond logic and cognition. The imagination is herein a "productive" cognitive power, that is, a power that acts in a creative way: "Schaffung" is its activity; in its aesthetic productions the imagination is "schöpferisch" (AA 5, 314, 315, respectively). Indeed, the imagination creates "another nature" than the one given to and by experience, although it creates it "out of the material that actual nature gives to it" (AA 5, 314). At the limit of the concept, the imagination's creative act posits "another nature." It is the act that Bishop lyrically performs in "North Haven"—the act that first shakes the solidity of Nature's substance by making the islands shift and drift in an imaginative, "dreamy sort of way," and finally brings on the elegiac acceptance of Lowell's death. This is the capacity of *Umbildung* that Kant ascribes to the productive imagination (AA 5, 314). But it is also the act whereby Hegel's absolute idea makes the logical end, and in an unprecedented intuition (Enz. §244) discloses beyond the end the new horizon of "nature" (TW 6, 572). Importantly, crucial to this act that puts an end to the logical development but also extends it into the movement of the imagination or intuition, is the creation of a new space for otherness.

The end of the concept is the creation-imagination of a new, utterly ‘other’ beginning. Otherness is central to the creative act as such: the productive imagination creates “another nature” than the one given in experience; the other than the concept (or the otherness of the concept) is communicated to others in a different language than the conceptual one. Otherness emerges as the ‘excess’—or lack of adequacy—separating (determinate) concept and intuition or imaginative representation, the excess that is constitutive of the aesthetic idea. It is this excess that prompts the “extension” or “expansion” of the mind beyond conceptual thinking (AA 5, 315)—and the extension of Hegel’s dialectic-speculative logic to “system” (TW 6, 567).⁸³ This in turn sets “reason” in “movement,” enlivening or quickening the *Gemüt* by opening up for it “an immense field” of representations in which the mind can have free and unconstrained range (AA 5, 315). Otherness, the movement of *Erweiterung* beyond the end, excess, and liberation—these are among the characters belonging to the creative act of ending and common to Kant’s aesthetic idea (and the connected notions of spirit and genius) and to Hegel’s absolute idea.

Kant’s aesthetic idea is a “representation that makes us add to a concept the thought of much that is ineffable (*Unnennbares*) but the feeling of which [. . .] connects language, which otherwise would be mere letters, with spirit” (AA 5, 316). By pushing beyond the logical concept and properly extending its reach (albeit not cognitively), the aesthetic idea infuses new life into language as well, thereby fundamentally transforming language and its rules. The mere letter (or, in Hegel’s formulation, the dry unmoved rules of grammar) is now alive as it is connected with its “spirit” and embodied in a living artwork—a work and a language that gains new life as it is communicated and actually speaks to others. It is here that the activity of “genius” as the “unification” of the mind’s powers (imagination and understanding) comes to the fore (AA 5, 316f.). Such unification brings forth the liberation of the imagination from the constraints of the understanding (or of logic). The act of the rainbow-bird who finally launches on its free flight beyond the “narrow bevel of the empty mirror” is both the end and a new beginning. The absolute idea’s liberating decision to embrace its other once absolved from its logical story is, at the same time, the end and a new beginning. But the connection of spirit and genius is also the point in which language (as poetic language) becomes truly communicative, the point in which others are allowed into the new space created by the imagination—into the new story. Although the *Unnennbares* marks the end of logical language (or of the concept), spirit does find “expression (*Ausdrück*)”

for it—"whether the expression consists in [poetic] language, in painting or plastic art"—and it does so by capturing the imagination's free play with images and consolidating it into a new concept or a newly invented rule, that is, a rule "that could not have been inferred from any earlier principles or examples" (AA 5, 317). The capacity of changing the rules of the game (or of changing the game altogether) is indeed one more character of creativity. Kant maintains that the production of the genius along with the new rules it entails is "an example that is meant not to be imitated but to be followed by another genius" (AA 5, 318). With regard to the work of art, the relation of succession is that of *Nachfolge* not of *Nachahmung*, the former implying precisely that the completion of an artwork and its legacy leads on to an utterly new beginning (not to the repetition, albeit with variation, of the same model or template). The individual artist (or genius) may indeed perish—as in Lowell's case. The production of art, however, is picked up by another unique artist and carried on in unprecedented directions. Thus, setting herself in the *Nachfolge* of a tradition, following her friend Lowell, and paying him the tribute of elegy, yet being utterly different from—even critical of—him, Bishop fundamentally innovates that tradition. Ultimately, this is the "transition" with no transition with which the absolute idea makes its end and inaugurates a new systematic beginning. What we have here is the moment of radical innovation. The end is creation.

In the "Second Position of Thought Toward Objectivity," which along with the other "positions" serves as historical and systematic introduction or "Vorbegriff" to the *Encyclopedia* Logic, Hegel offers a pointed insight into Kant's critical philosophy. He makes it clear that it is only in the *Critique of Judgment*, with the thought of "reflective judgment," that Kant has reached the "representation, truly the thought of *the idea*." Hence it is only here, in contrast to the antinomic conflicts of theoretical reason's ideas and to the open-ended *Sollen* of practical reason, that Kant's philosophy is truly "speculative" (Enz. §55, Remark). On Hegel's reconstruction, "*to the reflective judgment* is assigned the principle of an *intuitive understanding*," and its workings are experienced "in the products of *art and organic nature*" (Enz. §55). While for Kant reflective judgment far from being ascribed the principle of an intuitive understanding is rather that which replaces the humanly impossible intuitive understanding, this claim does betray Hegel's own interest in Kant's allegedly "speculative" thought of the idea. Relevant herein is the shift from Kant's judgment of taste and teleological judgment to the objective realms of art and organic nature in which the speculative thought of the idea is manifested. The intuitive understanding is first and

foremost a *creative* principle. The principle that produces the work of art and is the channel whereby nature gives the rule (to art) is the genius (AA 5, 318). As much as the notion of the intuitive understanding in its constitutive validity is an impossibility within Kant's transcendental framework, it does have a representative in the creative activity of the genius and the principle of spirit. Thus, insofar as the final *Entschluss* of Hegel's absolute idea, which is, at the same time, its *Befreiung* to nature and spirit (TW 6, 573), entails the crucial moment of creativity that pushes the end beyond the end, it can be seen as following the same logic that Kant approached with his uniquely "speculative" notion of aesthetic idea.⁸⁴

As much as the creative act, in its logical and methodological validity, expresses the way the absolute idea makes the end, thereby reaching the end of the logic and inaugurating the next systematic development, art and the artwork belong to the conclusive sphere of Hegel's philosophy of spirit, namely, "absolute spirit." In general, creativity is a feature proper to the absoluteness characterizing the action of Hegel's conclusive systematic figures ("absolute knowing," "absolute idea," "absolute spirit") and is that which connecting the absolute idea to absolute spirit brings spirit back to the logic, thereby sanctioning the end of the system as a whole. However, within the development of absolute spirit art stands as the beginning—a figure that is immediate, still natural, rooted in finitude despite its absoluteness. The final and culminating moment of absolute spirit, that is, its very end, is philosophy. And there is a sense in which, famously, philosophy is the end of art, or alternatively, art ends in and as philosophy. There is, however, another issue to be briefly raised at this point, namely, the issue of the end of the artwork. Taking on the perspective of the artist, when is an artwork finished or completed? When is the end of the creative process reached? In the face of it, this does not seem to be an issue on which Hegel speaks directly in his theory of art. It is, however, relevant, if anything because it is paralleled by the issue addressed with regard to philosophy—and specifically to Hegel's philosophy—in the last sections of the *Encyclopedia* (§§574–577). In what sense is philosophy the end (the end of art, of absolute spirit, of the system, of the logic itself)? How does philosophy (and with it absolute spirit and the system as a whole) end? The way in which the absolute idea makes the end will help us shed light on these questions.

To the extent that the *Kunstschöne* or "ideal" is embodied in the "artwork," the "subjective producing activity" of the artist comes to the forefront (*Ästhetik*, 392).⁸⁵ This is the place in which Hegel, having already appropriated and expanded on Kant's notion of *Geist* "in the aesthetic sense"

to make it into a central concept of his *Realphilosophie*, takes up more specifically the idea of the genius and its production. Herein the contradiction that animates the work of art is displayed. The artwork is, on the one hand, “something made” and to this extent dependent on the artist’s subjectivity, but is, on the other hand, something endowed with artistic value (as expression of the divine) only when all “signs of subjective particularity” are eliminated. Subjectivity is present in the production of the artwork as the artist’s *Begeisterung*, that is, as the “force” that makes the artist produce her work despite its acting almost as an “alien force (*fremde Gewalt*)” and an “unfree pathos.” In the artwork, subjectivity is therefore a sort of alienated subjectivity: it is spirit moved by a spiritual force that acts as an other, spirit embodied in its other—close, in this regard, to the absolute idea deciding in the end to embrace and become its otherness. The artist acts through the “natural immediacy” of the “genius” (Enz. §560). This is “creative subjectivity” (*Ästhetik*, 392). Creative subjectivity is alienated subjectivity, subjectivity made other and making itself other, subjectivity coming to its end and yielding to objectivity, but also beginning anew, transformed in the artwork. While the consideration of the creative side of the artist’s activity isolates the moment of production that “has not yet come to actuality,” the side of the artwork as the objective “product” of such activity displays its being “for others, for the intuition and perception of the public,” fully installed in actuality (*Ästhetik*, 392). Now there is a sense in which this side of objectivity and actuality—whereby the artwork is something other than the artist’s subjectivity and is publicly “for others” in intuition and communication—sanctions the end or the completion of the process in which the artwork is made, hence the moment in which the artwork is properly finished, the moment in which it leaves the realm of creating subjectivity and enters the objective world. This is the moment in which the artist, judging (or feeling) the work to be completed, knowing when to stop in its creation, releases the work into the world or ‘lets it go,’ as it were, as a free and independent being capable of beginning a life of its own. *Frei Entlassen* can be seen as the action whereby the artwork is finally completed, the (subjective) creative process reaches its end, and a new story—the independent history and legacy of the artwork—begins. The work is let go free into the natural and human world, in otherness and as otherness by an act that is, at once, a decision and a liberation—a liberation, to be sure, of both the artist and the artwork. The artist is absolved, as it were, from her task; the artwork is now free and independent with a life of its own.

As the first figure of absolute spirit, art is haunted by the end, by its own end—indeed, with T. S. Eliot’s “Little Gidding,” “Every poem an epitaph.” Both historically and systematically, art is a process of completion (*Vollendung*) and fulfillment (*Erfüllung*) that has the idea or ideal of the “beautiful” as its protagonist (Enz. §561). As implied by the methodological action of ending, this process always hints beyond itself—art begins again beyond its end, beyond itself although not in a self-identical stance, not necessarily *as art*. Indeed, before getting to the end of art in philosophy, Hegel claims that fine art “has its future in the true religion”—true religion is not art’s end but its “future.” Thereby an *Übergehen* is indicated, that is, the movement whereby what in art constitutes the “idea’s limited content” “transitions” into the “universality identical with the infinite form” proper of true religion; intuition settles into self-mediated “knowing,” into a form of existence that is no longer external, material, sensible, and natural but is itself *Wissen*. Absolute spirit is now “for spirit” (Enz. §563). Thus, art’s creative act “transitions into the act of revealing (*das Offenbaren*)” proper of religion (Enz. §563). However, religion is not art’s endpoint but a transitional moment in the path toward philosophy. What interests me at this point is not to revisit the issue of the end of art.⁸⁶ The previous argument has offered the conceptual means necessary to address such issue as it outlined the characters of the end made by the logical idea, characters that include completion, liberation, the act of turning back reflectively to itself and making a new unprecedented beginning, the movement toward otherness. What interests me here is instead the end of philosophy—the end that philosophy as such constitutes (for art, absolute spirit, the system, the logical idea), and the end of Hegel’s philosophy in particular. This issue can be seen, in many respects, as running parallel to the question concerning the end of the artwork, which I briefly articulated through the logical end made by the absolute idea.

Philosophy is presented, quite unproblematically, as the “unity of art and religion.” The form of *Wissen* attained at this point by absolute spirit is “the *concept* of art and religion known by thinking (*der denkend erkannte Begriff*).” Philosophy concerns the “concept” of what art and religion are, of what they have accomplished and do accomplish in their specific spiritual modality (i.e., respectively, intuition and representation). Moreover this “concept” is expressed as an ongoing act of thinking (*denkend*), a concept that provides positive cognition of both art and religion, not, however, as a repetition of these spheres but rather by opening up to a new dimension, namely, philosophy. Indeed, in this form of *Wissen* no new content

is properly introduced distinct from or other than the one addressed in art and religion. Such content, however, is now known in its specific difference “as necessary and this necessary as free.” A fundamental change in modality (or form) is effected by philosophical cognition with regard to the content of absolute spirit (art and religion) as spirit’s freedom in its acknowledged necessity is now brought to the forefront. Similarly, in the logic, the absolute idea does not introduce a new logical content but reconfigures the entire logical movement in its conclusive, ending modality. In this reconfiguration the absolute idea is presented as “absolute method.” Now, at the conclusive stage of Hegel’s system, philosophy fulfills the same function. Both in the case of the absolute idea and absolute spirit, the creativity that sanctions the action of ending is not the creation of an utterly new content or the introduction of yet new information, but the unprecedented reconfiguration of what is known by the very act of knowing it in an ‘absolute’ way. Thus, in philosophical *Wissen*, the otherwise separate and fragmented activities of art and religion are “held together (*zusammengehalten*) in a whole,” are taken up and “unified (*vereint*) in the simple spiritual intuition” (which replaces the external mode of intuition proper of art), and thereby are “elevated (*erhoben*) to self-conscious thinking” (Enz. §572). This, then, is the complex act of creative reconfiguration whereby philosophical cognition confers necessity and freedom to the productions of art and religion, thereby bringing the movement of absolute spirit to the end. Such creative reconfiguration implies the act of holding its moments together, unifying them, and lifting them to a higher, that is, conceptual level.

Philosophy is the “cognition of necessity” that, *developed to the end* or fulfilled in its entirety, produces the highest form of spirit’s freedom and the highest act of liberation. Herein the conclusion of Essence, that is, the idea of freedom as cognition of necessity, is taken up again as it becomes integral to spirit’s conclusive movement. Philosophy is “cognition of the necessity of the content” as well as of the form—properly of “both forms,” namely, of art’s “immediate intuition and its *poetry*” and of religion’s “objective and external *revelation*.” Poetry, just as *Offenbarung*, ends in philosophical thinking and knowing. Herein it finds its truth and true freedom. Properly, philosophical cognition is “re-cognition”—*Erkennen* is *Anerkennen* of both content and form (the contents and forms articulated by art and religion). Philosophy’s creative act of reconfiguration consists precisely in this recognition. Such recognition is *Befreiung*: it is the “liberation” from the unilateral nature proper to both previous forms of absolute spirit. And it is their *Erhebung*, the act of lifting them up “in the absolute form.” Thereby, the

end is presented as a movement of *Anerkennung*, *Befreiung*, and *Erhebung* that opens the dimension of “absolute form.” Herein the self-determination of philosophy’s content takes place. Through this act, the “absolute form” “remains identical with the content” (Enz. §573; also TW 6, 551), that is, no longer needs a further “transition” to be completed and finds accordingly its “peace” or *Ruhe*.

This structure, which articulates the final movement of spirit that is philosophy, is the structure of the end within the reality of spirit. Indeed, not surprisingly, the end “that philosophy itself is” is a process or a “movement (*Bewegung*).” Now, given the logical and methodological features that characterize the end made by the logical idea, it should also come as no surprise that Hegel announces: this “movement finds itself already accomplished”—*findet sich schon vollbracht*. In coming to the end, “the movement that philosophy itself is” is already finished, accomplished, fulfilled—and properly, “finds itself” already completed or recognizes that it is so (Enz. §573). *Consummatum est* or, *es ist vollbracht*—as in John 19:30 and in Luther’s translation. The movement whereby spirit makes the end has already ended. Or, when the end is presented, the end has already taken place. Philosophy’s absolute cognition is the end after or beyond the end. It is the movement of ‘going back’ to itself by retroactively contemplating (only) itself. The movement of knowledge is already accomplished and concluded “insofar as philosophy in the end (*am Schluss*) comprehends its own concept, i.e., looks back (*zurücksieht*) only to its knowing” (Enz. §573). To look back to itself and only to itself is the act that seals the end. Herein absolute idea and absolute spirit follow the same logic or the same modality of ending. But this ‘looking back’ is an act that can take place only when everything else has been accomplished or brought to completion; it is the ‘last’ act (of both the absolute idea and absolute spirit). Only then is cognition recognition of oneself as being completed, fully accomplished, entirely fulfilled—*schon vollbracht*. Now, in looking back, thinking ‘re-cognizes’ itself—sees what it finally is in what it has accomplished, and this is the “only” thing thinking needs to contemplate (it “looks back *only* to its knowing”). Thinking recognizes the necessity of the path that has led all the way through the logic, nature, and spirit to finally turn back to itself, thereby sealing its own story. The recognition of this necessity is freedom and liberation. For the act of turning back reflectively to itself and acknowledging the necessity of the process that has made it into what it is, that is, philosophical cognition, constitutes spirit’s true absoluteness as the ‘absolution’ hence liberation from the task that has been finally completed, from the story that is now fully

exhausted and can be consequently 'let go': *frei Entlassen* goes hand in hand with *es ist vollbracht—consummatum est*.

Opus consummatum est. Quite simply, the "work" that is the *Encyclopedia* comes to its end the moment in which its task is recognized as having been completed. *Opus consummatum est*. In a more complex reference, as Christ's redeeming function in the human world has been fulfilled, the task is ended, death is accepted and dialectically overcome, eternity is disclosed. Importantly, in Christ's death on the cross and in his last words, the end is a new beginning. Christ's death is the beginning of the new eternal life. And this is the 'speculative' solution of the problem with which Kant's transcendental philosophy struggled in *Das Ende aller Dinge*. There is no "transition" out of time into eternity. Rather, only *mors consummata* leads to eternal life, as Cusanus puts it. Indeed, Christ's death is a "complete death"—*mors consummata*—because it is death that being *known* in its full extent, dialectically or rather in the way of *coincidentia oppositorum*, leads to eternal life. Christ's death is the "death of death."⁸⁷ Only *mors consummata* leads to eternal life. Christ's vision of death is the full and complete knowledge of death as total alienation and distance from god. This *knowledge* implies not only eternal life but also eternal beatitude. This is the constellation that Hegel evokes by construing philosophy and philosophical knowledge as the *end* of his own philosophy and the *end* of absolute spirit, that is, as the movement of knowledge that comprehending "in the end" its own concept—and thereby its own end (it is *schon vollbracht*)—discloses an utterly new horizon. Ultimately, this is the way the absolute idea (not being and not essence) makes the end.

Hegel's implicit reference to the way the end is expressed in Christ's last words as he is dying on the cross brings us full circle, conclusively as it were, back to the discussion of the way in which the logical figure is 'fulfilled' in the development of the real figures presented in the *Realphilosophie* and further in the real and literary figures of many other stories, some of which we have been pursuing in these chapters. At stake is the process expressed by the past tense *consummatum est* and its dialectical appropriation in the action of *sich vollbringen*, an appropriation Hegel has already begun with the *Phenomenology's* idea of "sich vollbringende[r] Skeptizismus" (TW 3, 72) but which comes to its full realization only in the concept of philosophy.⁸⁸ *Consummatum est* gives voice to the specific character of Johannine New Testament eschatology. This eschatology considers the New Testament as fulfilling in and with the figure of Christ's death what the Old Testament anticipates. Moreover, John's *consummatum est* expresses the act

whereby in the figure of Christ both Jewish messianic hopes and Gentiles' expectations are fulfilled or realized and thereby brought together and reconciled. But this eschatology also looks forward, proleptically, to the fulfillment produced by the "lifting up"—indeed by the *Erhebung*—of Christ. As philosophical knowledge in the end and as the end fulfills the truth of the logic, that is, completes it, realizes it, and proves it true, it also "lifts up" in the "absolute form" all the content already developed by spirit in general, and by art and religion in particular (Enz. §573). Thus, in philosophical knowledge, the logic—or rather the more pervasive "logical element" or *das Logische*—appears again, circularly going back to itself. This time, however, it appears 'fulfilled'—*logica consummata*, as it were—since its truth has been shown real and enacted in its complete realization process throughout the system. The meaning of the logical figure has now changed since it has been finally *consummatum*: completed, fulfilled, and thereby brought to the end, accomplished. The logical figure is now *bewährte Allgemeinheit*: universality that has proven itself true "in the concrete content as in its actuality" (Enz. §574). Thereby the end goes back to the systematic beginning.

If the "concept" of philosophy makes the end by looking back and reconnecting with the beginning, that is, with the logic ("Science is in this way gone back to its beginning"—"ist [. . .] in ihren Anfang zurückgegangen": Enz. §574), as in the case of the absolute idea, the action of making the end leads *beyond the end* to the beginning of an utterly new story. This is the story the beginning of which is told by the three syllogisms—or the three 'ends' or *Schlüsse*—that conclude the *Encyclopedia* (Enz. §§575–577) leading the "concept" of philosophy to the "idea of philosophy" (Enz. §574 and §577, respectively). What we have herein is the last creative act of absolute spirit, the reconfiguration of the movement of philosophy as a whole. The reconfiguration of the system takes place as the story of philosophy is told yet again three times over but also in an entirely new way. This reconfiguration is the creative act that belongs, in its true absoluteness, to the end—the act that opens up utterly new possibilities. For, the three syllogisms are only three modalities with which the new multiple stories of philosophy begin. They hint at three different ways of telling philosophy's story—ways that differ according to the perspective they endorse. The first syllogism, "the syllogism in the idea," hints at a story all enclosed within the logical form (Enz. §575); the second, "the syllogism of the spiritual reflection in the idea," tells the story from the perspective of spirit (Enz. §576); the latter is the syllogism "in the idea of philosophy" (Enz. §577).⁸⁹ Ultimately, it is *in the end beyond the end* that we find the new horizon

disclosed by Hegel's "idea of philosophy." At this point, Hegel has given us the key to *imagine* how to bring thinking forward *beyond the end* of his own philosophy. It is up to us now to creatively imagine new ways of thinking with Hegel's dialectic-speculative philosophy beyond it. However, the very last paragraph of the *Encyclopedia* is a passage from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (XII, 7). In the end, philosophy does not forget its being spirit's activity in reality and history. Accordingly, in its "idea," philosophy 'goes back' to its historical beginning. Herein as well Hegel's message to us is relevant. The new ways of thinking beyond this end should go hand and hand with the new historical horizons that necessarily inform philosophical thinking in different, future, historical constellations.

3. Transforming the End

We have come, finally, to the end. Although this may have seemed to be the chapter that could never end, we are just a step away from it. What remains to be done is a brief synchronic consideration of the three figures—logical and real figures—that the action of ending has displayed in the preceding argument. The aim is to assess the *transformation* that takes place from being's ending action to essence's and the concept's end. As claimed throughout this work, the act of ending (just as beginning and advancing) is not a monolithic one, differing only with regard to who performs it or what its content is. Rather, the act of ending displays logically and structurally different and irreducible figures determining the nature and activity of the agent, so that the analysis of the logic of the end has conclusively produced a typology of endings: modes, modalities, and methods of making the end. At stake, at this point, is a quick overview of the progress made in the movement that connects these figures. Since Hegel's dialectic-speculative logic is a 'logic of transformation' or a 'logic of transformative processes,' we are now in the position to indicate the *change* taking place from Being through Essence to the Concept with regard to the way in which the end is achieved or, alternatively, postponed and not achieved in the successive logical spheres. For, at this point, we can hold the three figures comparatively together and assess the progress made by thinking in the transition from one to the other, that is, assess the transformation that has occurred in thinking itself. The additional claim, which the long argument mounted earlier should have substantiated, regards the 'real' validity and implications that the transformation

involved at the logical and methodological level has with regard to concrete human action, that is, the way in which transformation occurs in reality. The specific difference characterizing the way in which being relates to the end constitutive of finitude and separating it from essence's and the idea's act of ending is not a merely abstract one but is exemplified, for example, in concrete existential attitudes toward death, and it is paradigmatically or exemplarily staged in Beckett's *Endgame*. Leopardi's poetic work as well as Bishop's late lyric have fleshed out, respectively, the difficult end achieved by essence and the creative conclusive gesture of the idea.

Looking back, yet again, at the logical account of the end given in the "absolute method," it is relevant that the end is uniquely connected to the two other moments of the beginning, to which the end *goes back*, and the advancement, which the end *follows*. It is also relevant that unlike the two previous methodological moments, the end is not merely formal but brings into consideration the content of the action (which is consistent with the notion of "absolute form" achieved at this point). As a first consideration in the synchronic view of the three ends, then, the end's connection with the beginning and the advancement should be taken into account. We have seen that Hegel's dialectic-speculative logic presents the beginning as endowed with the impulse or *Trieb* to move on, away from its own immediacy, toward further determination—the impulse that common sense may want to attribute, instead, to the advancement. I have argued, on the other hand, that the advancement, which we may intuitively see as the act of moving on (which belongs instead to the beginning), is truly its apparent opposite, namely, the critical standstill of a stasis from which alone the true advancement ensues. Now the end connects with both these moments to the extent that it is the act that going back to the beginning results in a quiet state in which, however, movement is not negated but renewed. Counter, again, to common sense, the end is not the cessation of movement, is not stasis. The act of retrospectively going back is rather a prospective leap forward.

Let us compare then the three endings of being, essence, the concept in this regard. It is clear that only the idea in its conclusive step truly goes back to the beginning. And this may seem strange given so many accounts of the circularity to be found in Hegel's philosophy that repeat unqualifiedly that the end as such is a going back to the beginning. As we have seen, by contrast, although being and essence both make the end by the act of *Zurückgehen*, they do not go back to the beginning—not to *their* beginning but to something else. Which means that in their case, the end

is neither entirely *fulfilled* nor fully conclusive—at least not in the way in which it is for the idea. Now given that the end made by the logical idea (just as the end made by the idea of philosophy) in its turning back to the fulfilled beginning is an act of creation, we can conclude that neither being's "absolute indifference" nor essence's "absolute" lead to a new beginning on the basis of their creativity. For they rather generate the inception of the following sphere through the contradiction that animates the end and calls for a resolution. To put this point differently, the beginning connected to being's and essence's end is not the result of an utterly *free* act of creation; it obtains instead from an act constrained by the contradiction that has generated it. In these cases, the movement leading the end to the new beginning is logically necessary but is not the utterly free act proper to the idea's *frei Entlassen* or, in its poetic exemplification, proper to Bishop's "rainbow-bird," who is finally "flying wherever / it feels like, gay!" ("Sonnet"). This is the achievement of the absolute idea and the realized idea of philosophy and of these only—a consideration that lends a new meaning to the openness of the logic and the system *precisely in their end*. Far from hinting at an alleged 'closure' as many interpreters suggest, the end reached by the idea is the true open-ended movement proper of a free act of imagination and reconceptualization that discloses utterly unprecedented possibilities.

Second, the simplicity of the absolute idea's end in contrast to being's and essence's end should also be underlined at this point. The idea's act of ending is a simple one in its methodological complexity: it is not vexed by retreating or stalling strategies but comfortably embraces the end, thereby finding itself beyond the end. The end is a very simple gesture—simple and yet thoroughly unprecedented and utterly momentous. Such is every creative act: simple yet apparently inexplicable in its complexity. In it the concept finally joins intuition. In the case of being, by contrast, ending appears the most difficult act; it is, in fact, an impossible act—a paradoxical endgame, as it were. The end, however, is made nonetheless and is made in utter indifference. The point of 'rest' attained by "absolute indifference" is a standstill troubled by the tension of its self-loathing. Essence, as usual, is plagued by its convoluted, scheming doubleness pitched as it is between being and the concept: even the absolute's annihilation of the finite is no simple act. The finite vanishes only in order to resurge again as posited by the absolute's own action. In the case of the idea, the simplicity of the end capitalizes on its coming at the conclusion of the entire logical movement as its completion. The simple act of ending, the peaceful *Ruhe* achieved at this point is the result of the highest form of knowledge. Indeed, it takes

the highest knowledge to know when to stop. Stopping at the right point, knowing when the work is finished is itself, most properly, a creative act. Completion is perfection—again, *opus consummatum*: the end that characterizes the creative gesture is the birth of the artwork, its release into the world.

The final comparative remark regards the progression in the conception of freedom—or the transformation in the idea of freedom—that is connected with the way in which being, essence, the concept make, respectively, the end. I have insisted that contrary to a tradition that includes positions as different as Descartes's and Schelling's and places indifference, just as creation at the beginning, as the origin of the divine creative act, the Logic of Being proposes "absolute indifference" as the end of being's entire movement, as the basis for the "becoming of essence." From here on, indifference and the freedom connected to it constitute the action's end. Creation, however, is not a matter of indifference, although it expresses the highest form of freedom. Creation belongs to the idea's concluding action, namely, to the figure of ending that has utterly overcome the position of indifference. There is, in fact, no creativity in indifference, no movement and no action that arises from *libertas indifferentiae*. This is, instead, with Leopardi, the death (or the end, as it were) of the will's living impulse. And yet Stoic *apatheia* is a crucial moment of freedom's transformation. The indifference that belongs to it is precisely that which allows the transition to essence, that is, the transition to a more essential form of freedom, freedom that is no longer indifferent toward necessity and objectivity but rather results from the acknowledgment of necessity. However, creativity belongs only to that act that far from being indifferent and disengaged—from objectivity as well as subjectivity—has instead the strength and commitment to engage in an utterly new project even after the fulfillment of and absolution from the story that first constituted it in its completeness. Herein Socrates's last words go hand in hand with Christ's last words on the cross. They all stand for the accomplished task of philosophy itself and for the highest creative act that coming after Hegel's own philosophy points the way to its future.

Ending—As in Concluding

I would say more to you, but must not stand
forever talking, speech must have an end.

—Robert Lowell, translation of Dante, *Inferno*,
Canto XV, Brunetto Latini

We have come to the end. And now we know that the end goes back, circularly, to the beginning but also makes a new beginning. Most importantly, the end of the story leads on beyond the story, leaving us with something to think about, something to live with, possibly the germ of a new story. Faithful to this tenet, then, my conclusion takes up the issue with which I opened the argument of this book and which I revisited several times along its development. At stake is the need to give an account of our present time of historical transformation, crisis, instability, and apparently unlimited and certainly unresolved conflicts. I have argued that Hegel's logic is a "logic of transformative processes" as it presents and enacts the fundamental structures of change and transformation in their pure formality, that is, independently of the concrete contents in which change takes place as well as independently of the agents that bring change about. Furthermore, as a "logic of action," Hegel's dialectic articulates the fundamental structures of all action as such, the structures that it methodologically indicates as the action of beginning, advancing, ending. I have proposed a *synchronic* reading of the overall action—or the story—of the logic, a reading 'out of sequence,' as it were, according to these three methodological moments. I have shown how the different *logical* "figures" that display the different modalities in which the beginning, advancement, and end are made, respectively, in the spheres of Being, Essence, the Concept are fulfilled by *real* "figures," the

paradigmatic or exemplary validity of which can be found in works of literature as well as in history and concrete human action. I have also shown how between logical and real figures a heuristic interaction and a relation of fulfillment takes place: the logical figures allow us to gain insight into the deeper formal import of the real figures, while these latter allow us to appreciate the concrete validity that always already animates the former; the real figures fulfill (in their real multiplicity) the logical figure.

Now, conclusively, I want to bring this interpretive framework to bear, more directly, on the issue of understanding one's present time. Herein, however, I shall only point the way to a further reflection. I want to stress, in particular, the importance of the synchronic reading proposed in the long journey of this book. If we follow this reconstruction of the logic, there are always—logically and formally—at least three possibilities available to the actual developing action. Historically, these three possibilities may be co-present or they may pose a question of choice to the agent. The point, however, is that there is never a predetermined, necessary linear progression that dictates what 'category' the next state of affairs will fall under (or into) or what the next state of affairs will be on the basis of a certain given predicament.

Take the case of the end. Whether we have presently reached the end, as we keep insistently hearing nowadays—the end of virtue, the end of democracy, and the many similar 'ends'—or we strongly desire the present political situation to come to its end, Hegel's logic tells us that such an end may assume different figures that being structured according to different modalities of action will yield significantly different outcomes and have significantly different implications. Which one of these figures does or will structure the present (and future) course of events is a momentous matter. It is a matter that is certainly not inscribed in the nature of things and is ultimately up to us, the agents immersed in our present, to determine and to shape. In other words, whether we meet the present crisis—or the Crisis that the present is—with an attitude of (absolute) indifference, with apocalyptic expectations and resignation, or as a creative challenge to bring about something entirely new matters deeply and makes a crucial difference—individually and collectively. Moreover, there is also no necessity that one figure will take precedence over the others. On the other hand, however, as much as it is important to distinguish these figures in their logical (and not just historical or cultural) *specificity*, it is also crucial to recognize that these are different strategies that configure the *same* kind of action, namely, the act of ending. Only in this way it is possible to bring to light the progress made or the transformation taking place across the respective actions of ending.

General Appendix

Here is an overview of some of the key passages from the *Science of Logic* used in the preceding chapters (part 2, chapters 4–6) as guiding thread for the unfolding of my synchronic reconstruction of Hegel's work according to the method. The synchronic passages come first, followed by a *small selection* of the texts commented upon extensively in the respective chapters. Clearly, this overview is not meant to constitute an independent narrative but simply to help orient the reader in the unfolding of the argument of the second part of the book. The texts are arranged synchronically. Translations are mine.

Beginnings

(Part 2, chapter 4)

In the sphere of Being, in front of being *as immediate* non-being *arises* equally *as immediate*, and their truth is becoming. In the sphere of Essence, it is first essence and the inessential, then essence and the *Schein*, that face each other—the inessential and the *Schein* as residue of being. But both of them, along with the difference that essence has from them, consist in nothing else than this, that essence initially is taken as an

In der Sphäre des Seins *entsteht* dem Sein als *unmittelbarem* das Nichtsein gleichfalls als *unmittelbares* gegenüber, und ihre Wahrheit ist das Werden. In der Sphäre des Wesens findet sich zuerst das Wesen und das Unwesentliche, dann das Wesen und der Schein gegenüber,—das Unwesentliche und der Schein als Reste des Seins. Aber sie beide, sowie der Unterschied des Wesens von ihnen, besteht in weiter nichts als

immediate, not as it is in itself, namely, as the immediacy that immediacy is as pure mediation or absolute negativity.

darin, dass das Wesen zuerst als ein *unmittelbares* genommen wird, nicht wie es an sich ist, nämlich nicht als die Unmittelbarkeit, die als reine Vermittlung oder als absolute Negativität Unmittelbarkeit ist (TW 6, 23).

Beginning Being

Being is the indeterminate immediate; it is free from the determinateness against essence as well as free from the determinateness that it can contain within itself.

Das Sein ist das unbestimmte Unmittelbare; es ist frei von der Bestimmtheit gegen das Wesen sowie noch von jeder, die es innerhalb seiner selbst enthalten kann (TW 5, 82).

Their [i.e., of Being and Nothing] truth is this *movement* of the immediate vanishing of the one into the other: *becoming*; a movement in which both are distinguished, but through a difference that has dissolved itself in the same immediate way.

Ihre Wahrheit ist also diese *Bewegung* des unmittelbaren Verschwindens des einen in dem anderen: *das Werden*; eine Bewegung, worin beide unterschieden sind, aber durch einen Unterschied, der sich ebenso unmittelbar aufgelöst hat (TW 5, 83).

Beginning Essence

Essence is placed between *Being* and the *Concept* and constitutes the middle between the two; and its movement is the *transition* from Being into the Concept.

Das Wesen steht zwischen *Sein* und *Begriff* und macht die Mitte derselben und seine Bewegung den *Übergang* vom Sein in den Begriff aus (TW 6, 15–16).

Schein is the entire residue that still remains from the sphere of Being.

Der Schein ist der ganze Rest, der noch von der Sphäre des Seins

However, it appears to have itself an immediate side independent of essence, and to be in general an *other* of essence.

übriggeblieben ist. Er scheint aber selbst noch eine vom Wesen unabhängige unmittelbare Seite zu haben und ein *Anderes* desselben überhaupt zu sein (TW 6, 19).

Beginning Concept

The abstract immediate is indeed a *first*; however, as such an abstraction it is something mediated. But if such a mediated must be grasped in its truth, then its foundation must be brought to light. Hence, such foundation must indeed be an immediate but such one that it *has made itself into an immediate* by overcoming the mediation.

Das abstrakt Unmittelbare ist wohl ein *Erstes*; als dies Abstrakte ist er aber vielmehr ein Vermitteltes, von dem also, wenn es in seiner Wahrheit gefasst werden soll, seine Grundlage erst zu suchen ist. Diese muss daher zwar ein Unmittelbares sein, aber so, dass es aus der Aufhebung der Vermittlung *sich zum Unmittelbaren gemacht hat* (TW 6, 245—my emphasis).

Advancing

(Part 2, chapter 5)

This meaning of judgment should be taken as its *objective* sense and at the same time as the *true* form of all the preceding forms of transition. What is *becomes* and *changes* itself; the finite *goes under* into the infinite; what exists *emerges* from its *ground* in appearance and *goes to the ground*; the accident *manifests* the *richness* of substance as well as its *power*; in being is *transition* into other, in essence appearing

Diese Bedeutung des Urteils ist als der *objektive* Sinn desselben und zugleich als die *wahre* der früheren Formen des Übergangs zu nehmen. Das Seiende *wird* und *verändert sich*, das Endliche *geht* im Unendlichen *unter*; das Existierende *geht* aus seinem *Grunde hervor* in die Erscheinung und *geht zugrunde*; die Akzidenz *manifestiert* den *Reichtum* der Substanz sowie deren *Macht*; im Sein ist *Übergang* in Anderes,

in another, through which the *necessary* relation reveals itself. This transition and appearing has now itself transitioned into the *original dividing* of the *concept* [. . .].

im Wesen Scheinen an einem Anderen, wodurch die *notwendige* Beziehung sich offenbart. Dies Übergehen und Scheinen ist nun in das *ursprüngliche Teilen* des *Begriffs* übergegangen [. . .] (TW 6, 307).

Advancing Being

Dasein is *determinate* being; its determinateness is a determinateness that *is*, quality. Through its quality *something* is set against an *other*, is *alterable* and *finite*, negatively determined absolutely not only against an other but in itself.

Dasein ist *bestimmtes* Sein; seine Bestimmtheit ist *seiende* Bestimmtheit, *Qualität*. Durch seine Qualität ist *Etwas* gegen ein *Anderes*, ist *veränderlich* und *endlich*, nicht nur gegen ein Anderes, sondern an ihm schlechthin negativ bestimmt (TW 5, 115).

Dasein proceeds from becoming. *Dasein* is the simple being—of being and nothing. Because of this simplicity, it has the form of an immediate. Its mediation, becoming, *lies behind* it. Since the mediation has overcome itself, *Dasein* appears to be *a first from which departure is made*.

Aus dem Werden *geht* das Dasein *hervor*. Das Dasein ist das einfache Einssein des Seins und Nichts. Es hat um dieser Einfachheit willen die Form von einem Unmittelbaren. Seine Vermittlung, das Werden, *liegt hinter ihm*; sie hat sich aufgehoben, und das Dasein erscheint daher *als ein Erstes, von dem ausgegangen werde* (TW 5, 116—my emphasis).

The individual is relation to itself insofar as it imposes limits on everything else, but thereby these limits are also its own limits; they are relations to other. The individual does not have its own *Dasein* in itself. The individual is

Das Individuum ist Beziehung auf sich dadurch, dass es allem anderen Grenzen setzt; aber diese Grenzen sind damit auch Grenzen seiner selbst, Beziehungen auf Anderes, es hat sein Dasein nicht in ihm selbst. Das Individuum ist wohl

indeed *more* than that which is enclosed on every side; but this 'more' belongs to another sphere, the sphere of the Concept.

mehr als nur das nach allen Seiten beschränkte, aber dies *Mehr* gehört in eine andere Sphäre des Begriffs (TW 5, 121).

Advancing Essence

Gesetzsein faces *Dasein* on the one hand, and essence on the other, and should be considered *as the middle* that conjoins *Dasein* with essence, and vice versa, essence with *Dasein*.

Das Gesetzsein steht einerseits dem *Dasein*, andererseits dem *Wesen* gegenüber und ist *als die Mitte* zu betrachten, welche das *Dasein* mit dem *Wesen* und umgekehrt das *Wesen* mit dem *Dasein* zusammenschliesst (TW 6, 32f.—my emphasis).

Gesetzsein is not yet a determination of reflection [. . .]. *Gesetzsein* is a *determination of reflection*.

Das Gesetzsein ist noch nicht Reflexionsbestimmung [. . .]. So ist das Gesetzsein *Reflexionsbestimmung* (TW 6, 33).

Advancing the Concept

Judgment is the determinateness of the concept *posited* in the concept itself [. . .]. The concept is itself this act of abstracting; the act of placing its determinations over against each other is its own determining. Judgment is this act of positing of the determinate concepts through the concept itself. Judging is *another* function than conceiving, or rather, it is *the other* function of the concept, for it is the determining of the concept through itself and the *further*

Das Urteil ist die am *Begriffe* selbst *gesetzte Bestimmtheit* desselben [. . .]. Der Begriff ist aber selbst dieses Abstrahieren; das Gegeneinanderstellen seiner Bestimmungen ist sein eigenes Bestimmen. Das *Urteil* ist dies Setzen der bestimmten Begriffe durch den Begriff selbst. Das Urteilen ist insofern *eine andere* Funktion als das Begreifen oder vielmehr *die andere* Funktion des Begriffes, als es das *Bestimmen* des Begriffes durch sich selbst ist, und

advance of judgment through its different forms is the *progressive determination* of the concept.

der *weitere Fortgang* des Urteils in die Verschiedenheit der Urteile ist diese *Fortbestimmung* des Begriffes. (TW 6, 301f.—my emphasis).

Endings

(Part 2, chapter 6)

In the first book of the objective logic abstract *being* was presented as passing over into *Dasein*, but also as *going back* into *essence*. In the second book essence *shows itself* as *determining itself* as *ground*, thereby stepping into *existence* and realizing itself as *substance*, but again *going back* into the *concept*. Of the concept, we have now first shown that it determines itself as *objectivity*.

Im ersten Buche der objektiven Logik wurde das abstrakte *Sein* dargestellt als *übergehend* in das *Dasein*, aber ebenso *zurückgehend* in das *Wesen*. Im zweiten zeigt *sich* das *Wesen*, dass es sich zum Grunde *bestimmt*, dadurch in die Existenz *tritt* und sich zur Substanz *realisiert*, aber wieder in den *Begriff zurückgeht*. Vom Begriffe ist nun zunächst gezeigt worden, dass er sich zur *Objektivität* bestimmt (TW 6, 402—my emphasis).

Ending Being

Being is the *abstract indifference* in which there is not supposed to be as yet any kind of determinateness—and when this indifference is to be thought by itself as being, the expression *Indifferenz* has been used. Pure quantity is indifference as being capable of and open to any determinations, provided that these are *external* to it and that quantity itself *does not have any*

Das Sein ist die abstrakte Gleichgültigkeit—wofür, da sie für sich als Sein gedacht werden soll, der Ausdruck *Indifferenz* gebraucht worden ist—, an der noch keine Art von Bestimmtheit sein soll; die reine Quantität ist die Indifferenz als aller Bestimmungen fähig, so aber, dass diese ihr äusserlich sind und sie aus sich keinen Zusammenhang mit derselben hat; die Indifferenz aber, welche die

connection with them originating in it. The indifference which can be called absolute, however, is one which, *through the negation* of all determinateness of being, of quality and quantity and of their immediate unity, that is, of measure, *mediates itself with itself* to form a simple unity.

The absolute indifference is the last determination of being, before the latter becomes essence; *but it does not attain essence*. It shows that it still belongs to the sphere of Being because it is still determined as *indifferent*, and therefore difference is *external* to it, quantitative. This is its *Dasein*, by which it finds itself at the same time in the opposition of being determined over against it as *being in itself*, not as being thought as the absolute that *is for itself*. Or again, it is external reflection which insists that specific determinations, whether in themselves or in the absolute, *are one and the same*, that their difference is only an indifferent one, not a difference in itself.

absolute genannt werden kann, ist die, die *durch die Negation* aller Bestimmtheiten des Seins, der Qualität und Quantität und deren zunächst unmittelbarer Einheit, des Masses, *sich mit sich* zur einfachen Einheit *vermittelt* (TW 5, 445f.).

Die absolute Indifferenz ist die letzte Bestimmung des Seins, ehe dieses zum Wesen wird; *sie erreicht aber dieses nicht*. Sie zeigt sich, noch der Sphäre des Seins anzugehören, indem sie noch, als *gleichgültig* bestimmt, den Unterschied an *äusserlichen*, quantitativen an ihr hat. Dies ist ihr *Dasein*, womit sie sich zugleich in dem Gegensatze befindet, gegen dasselbe als nur das *ansichseiende* bestimmt, nicht als das *fürsichseiende Absolute* gedacht zu sein. Oder es ist die *äussere Reflexion*, welche *dabei stehenbleibt*, dass die Spezifischen an sich oder im Absoluten *dasselbe* und *eins* sind, dass ihr Unterschied nur ein gleichgültiger, kein Unterschied an sich ist (TW 5, 456—my emphasis).

Ending Essence

Essence *as a whole* is what quantity was in the sphere of Being: absolute indifference to the limit.

Das Wesen ist *im Ganzen* das, was die Quantität in der Sphäre des Seins war; die absolute

But quantity is this indifference in *immediate* determination and the limit in it is an immediate external determinateness; quantity *passes over* into quantum; the external limit is necessary to it and *is* in it. In essence, by contrast, the determinateness *is* not; it is *posited* only through essence itself, *not free* but only with *reference* to the unity of essence.

Gleichgültigkeit gegen die Grenze. Die Quantität aber ist diese Gleichgültigkeit in *unmittelbarer* Bestimmung und die Grenze an ihr unmittelbar äusserliche Bestimmtheit, sie *geht* ins Quantum *über*; die äusserliche Grenze ist ihr notwendig und ist an ihr *seined*. Am Wesen hingegen *ist* die Bestimmtheit nicht; sie ist nur durch das Wesen selbst *gesetzt*; *nicht frei*, sondern nur in der *Beziehung* auf seine Einheit (TW 6, 15—my emphasis).

Ending the Concept

The identity of the idea with itself is one with the process; the thought that liberates actuality from the seeming of purposeless mutability and transfigures it into *idea* must not represent this truth of actuality as *dead rest*, as a mere picture, numb, *without impulse and movement*, as a genius or number, or as an abstract thought; the idea, because of the freedom which the concept has attained in it, also has the *most stubborn opposition within it*; its rest consists in the assurance and the certainty with which it eternally generates that opposition and eternally overcomes it, and in it rejoins itself.

Die Identität der Idee mit sich selbst ist eins mit dem Prozesse; der Gedanke, der die Wirklichkeit von dem Scheine der zwecklosen Veränderlichkeit befreit und zur Idee verklärt, muss diese Wahrheit der Wirklichkeit nicht als die *tote Ruhe*, als ein blosses Bild, matt, *ohne Trieb und Bewegung*, als einen Genius oder Zahl oder einen abstrakten Gedanken vorstellen; die Idee hat um der Freiheit willen, die der Begriff in ihr erreicht, auch *den härtesten Gegensatz in sich*; ihre *Ruhe* besteht in der Sicherheit und Gewissheit, womit sie ihn ewig erzeugt und ewig überwindet und in ihm mit sich selbst zusammengeht (TW 6, 467f.—my emphasis).

As the idea posits itself, namely, as the absolute unity of the pure concept and its reality and thus *gathers itself* in the immediacy of being, it is in this form as the totality—nature. This determination, however, is nothing that *has become*, is not a *transition*, as was the case above when the subjective concept in its totality *becomes objectivity* [. . .]. The pure idea into which the determinateness or reality of the concept is itself raised into the concept is rather an *absolute liberation* for which there is no longer an immediate determination which is not equally *posited* and is not concept; *in this freedom, therefore, there is no transition that takes place*; the simple being to which the idea determines itself remains perfectly transparent to it: it is the concept that in its determination remains with itself. The transition is to be grasped, therefore, in the sense that *the idea freely lets itself go, absolutely certain of itself and internally at rest*.

Indem die Idee sich nämlich als absolute Einheit des reinen Begriffs und seiner Realität setzt, somit in die Unmittelbarkeit des Seins *zusammennimmt*, so ist sie als die Totalität in dieser Form—Natur. Diese Bestimmung ist aber nicht ein *Gewordensein* und *Übergang*, wie (nach oben) der subjective Begriff in seiner Totalität zur Objektivität [. . .]. Die reine Idee, in welcher die Bestimmtheit oder Realität des Begriffs selbst zum Begriffe erhoben ist, ist vielmehr *absolute Befreiung*, für welche keine unmittelbare Bestimmung mehr ist, die nicht ebensowohl gesetzt und der Begriff ist; *in dieser Freiheit findet daher kein Übergang statt*; das einfache Sein, zu dem sich die Idee bestimmt, bleibt ihr vollkommen durchsichtig und ist der in seiner Bestimmung bei sich selbst bleibende Begriff. Das Übergehen ist also hier vielmehr so zu fassen, dass *die Idee sich selbst frei entlässt, ihrer absolut sicher und in sich ruhend* (TW 6, 573—my emphasis).

Notes

Chapter 1

1. To the extent that my answer to these questions is positive, I claim that Hegel's logic cannot be separated from (and rejected on the basis of) his practical philosophy. The contrary view is held by Allen W. Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3: "The Hegel who still lives and speaks to us is not a speculative logician and idealist metaphysician but a philosophical historian, a political and social theorist, a philosopher of our ethical concerns and cultural identity crisis." I completely endorse the last part of this statement. I strongly reject, however, the dichotomy proposed by Wood. This work will show that the Hegel who speaks to our ethical concerns can do so only because he is a dialectic-speculative logician as well.

2. See Enz. §85; see the essays in the recent *Hegel and Metaphysics: On Logic and Ontology in the System*, ed. Allegra De Laurentiis (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016).

3. For the discussion of the relation between Hegel's logic and metaphysics, see Hans Friedrich Fulda, "Spekulative Logik als die 'eigentliche Metaphysik'—Zu Hegels Verwandlung des neuzeitlichen Metaphysikverständnisses," in *Hegels Transformation der Metaphysik*, ed. D. Pätzhold and A. Vanderjagt (Köln: Dinter, 1991), 9–28; for an epistemological reading of the logic, see H. F. Fulda, "Hegels Logik der Idee und ihre epistemologische Bedeutung," in *Hegels Erbe*, ed. Ch. Halbig, M. Quante, and L. Siep (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2004), 78–137; for the idea of speculative mystification, consider both the traditional critique of Schelling and, in a different sense, of Marx discussed in: Angelica Nuzzo, "Existenz 'im Begriff' und Existenz 'außer dem Begriff'—Die Objektivität von Hegels 'subjektiver Logik,'" in *Die Wahrheit im Begriff*, ed. A. Fr. Koch (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003, 171–188); the more recent critiques by Jacques Derrida go in the same direction.

4. In the unfolding of my argument, the meaning of this expression will become clear. Here I will not further specify it in a technical sense. Transformative process is often taken as the same as change, movement, transition, development; it implies, however, a moment of "zum Bewußtsein bringen," an act of cognition

and conscious recognition. In addition, speaking of transformative process, I also indicate a necessary moment of self-transformation. To specify the different meaning of terms such as change, transition, development, and so on would require the discussion of how transformative processes are differently shaped in the logic of *Sein, Wesen, Begriff*. The present chapter provides the background for such research, which occupies me in the remainder of the book.

5. See section 2 of this chapter.

6. Although this is the central interest of my discussion, I will be able to directly return to this point only briefly in the conclusion of the chapter. However, hints for a further elaboration of this topic are to be found throughout my argument. To the extent that this is the focus of my discussion, I will not address the issue of the ontological versus epistemological, among others, status of the logic *directly*. If one were to ask: “Is not the suggested interpretation yet another unilateral reading of Hegel’s logic?” my answer would be that my account addresses, in some sense, a different problem or alternatively the same problem in a different way. For one thing, my reading intends to offer an account that does not necessarily exclude the others mentioned earlier but is more fundamental in the sense of aiming at the root of the very idea of Hegel’s logic—an idea that those other accounts must of necessity presuppose; for another, the guiding interest of my reconstruction is the fruitfulness of dialectic for our contemporary philosophizing.

7. See section 3.

8. See section 4.

9. See section 5.

10. What in France is done in practice, in Germany is (only) thought. See, recently, Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 1ff.

11. See also the “Anstrengung und Bemühung” (TW 3, 19). Many are the contemporary voices that express a similar assessment of the present time. See, among them, Goethe’s passage at the end of *Hermann und Dorothea* (written between 1796 and 1797) where a German revolutionary says: “Alles bewegt sich/ auf Erden einmal, es scheint sich alles zu trennen. / Grundgesetze lösen sich auf der festen Staaten, / [. . .] Alles regt sich, als wollte die Welt, die gestaltete, rückwärts / lösen in Chaos und Nacht sich auf und neu sich gestalten” (J. W. Goethe, *Werke* [Hamburger Ausgabe; München: Beck, 1988], vol. 2, 512f.). The political diagnosis turns here into a metaphysical view of the development of history out of and back to the original Chaos.

12. TW 3, 19: “Preis eines vielfach verschlungenen Weges.”

13. Compare Hegel’s questions here to the position of a contemporary historian such as Eric Hobsbawm, who is moved by a very similar puzzlement in front of our contemporary uncertain predicament; see, for example, the opening of the essay “War, Peace and Hegemony at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century,” in *Globalization, Democracy and Terrorism* (London: Abacus, 2008), 31–48, 31: setting out to “approach present problems in the perspective of the past,” Hobsbawm

asks us to bear in mind that “we are living through a period when *history, that is the process of change in human life and society* and the human impact of the global environment, has been accelerating at a dizzying pace” (my emphasis). Just as for Hegel, also for this historian to understand the present is to understand change, but the very task of such an understanding makes us realize that “we do not know where we are going.” For similar expressions of puzzlement in front of the present changes and epochal transitions as well as for the diagnosis of the present as a time of deep unrest and transformation, see 48, 75, 83, 113, 137 in Hobsbawm’s volume.

14. If the process is crystallized and fixated for the sake of comprehension, we fall back to the logic of the understanding and we miss the target of the theory: the process is no longer there.

15. See the claim in TW 3, 35: “Das Bekannte überhaupt ist darum, weil es *bekannt* ist, nicht *erkannt*.” The claim is repeated in the preface to the second edition of the *Science of Logic* with regard to the pervasiveness of logical form (TW 5, 22).

16. Enz. §25 Remark; TW 5, 49: in the *Phenomenology* Hegel has offered an “example” of the logical method “on a more concrete object, namely, consciousness.”

17. See the sentence of the first draft of the preface, then expunged from the final version, in TW 1, 452 fn. 2: “The following pages are the voice of a mind that regretfully takes leave from the hope that Germany be lifted from its state of insignificance.”

18. See, in general, Manfred Baum, *Die Entstehung der Hegelschen Dialektik* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1986).

19. Hannelise Maier, “Hegels Schrift über die Rechtsverfassung,” in *Politische Vierteljahrsschrift*, 1963, 340; this observation is supported by Claudio Cesa, “Introduzione,” in *Hegel: Scritti politici (1798–1831)*, a cura di C. Cesa (Torino: Einaudi, 1972), vii–lii, xxii.

20. See the appendix to chap. 4.

21. See Manfred Baum and Kurt Rainer Meist, “Durch Philosophie leben lernen: Hegels Konzeption der Philosophie nach den neu aufgefundenen Jenaer Manuskripten,” *Hegel Studien* 12 (1977): 43–81.

22. In GW 5, 16–18/TW 1, 457–460. With regard to the period of its composition and its editorial history, see the remarks by Baum and Meist in this volume. A commentary of this fragment is in Cesare Luporini, *Filosofi vecchi e nuovi* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1981), 58–118; see also H. S. Harris, *Hegel’s Development: Toward the Sunlight 1770–1801* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 440–450.

23. See also the “Unbekannte(s)” in TW 3, 18. Hegel’s diagnosis of the German crisis as due to the lack of unity and to the inner split and contradiction cutting through all aspects of German social and political life reminds me of Carlo Levi’s very similar diagnosis, this time coming *post factum*, of the origins of German Nazism: “L’interna mancanza di unità è la condizione che ha fatto della Germania la protagonista della crisi universale.” And also: “La crisi [. . .] fu la rivelazione, e l’attuazione nei fatti, della rottura dell’unità dell’uomo” (*La doppia notte dei tigli* [Torino: Einaudi, 1959], 8, 6, respectively).

24. See Remo Bodei, *Scomposizioni: Forme dell'individuo moderno* (Torino: Einaudi, 1987), 19.

25. See also, with a similar echo to Hegel's passage, the "absolute demand for a better world" in the third part of Fichte's 1800 *Bestimmung des Menschen* (SW II, 264).

26. To this extent, one could conclude that "better" means only "successive"; and this minimal sense is also the sense in which I take this claim at the present stage of the argument. This point is further developed later: with regard to that "pure" transformative process that is the logic, "better" is the moment that is more encompassing, more complex, richer in possibilities, that can solve the problems that a previous formation could not solve; see also David Kolb, "Authenticity with Teeth: Positing Process," in *Philosophical Romanticism*, ed. N. Kompridis (London: Routledge, 2006), 60–78. See also, with a similar echo to Hegel's passage, the "absolute demand for a better world" in the third part of Fichte's 1800 *Bestimmung des Menschen* (SW II, 264).

27. See Hegel's letter to Schelling, November 2, 1800.

28. Hegel's own early logic (from the fragments of the Troxler Nachschrift of 1801/02 to the Logic and Metaphysics of 1804/05), which as a logic of finitude and of the *Verstand* is followed by a metaphysics, is liable to the same (self-)criticism.

29. See Hegel's attacks to the "tabellarischer Verstand" and its "gleichtönige(r) Formalismus" in the preface to the *Phenomenology*, TW 3, 50. Following this Hegelian account, one could argue that Kant himself has seen this problem and attempted to solve it with the theory of the reflective faculty of judgment in the third *Critique*. It is no accident that Kant indicates the specific function of teleological judgment to be that of providing an explanation of organic processes such as growth. To this extent, Hegel's dialectic is the alternative to Kant's logic of the reflective faculty of judgment.

30. Hegel's critique, in other words, does not advance a static model of completeness in details or predicates such as Leibniz's *notio completa*.

31. To the extent that the aim of its exposition is its own (self-)destruction or consummation, this program applies to the early Logic and Metaphysics of 1804/05 as well.

32. Heraclitus, B80. See Charles H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 66f.

33. See TW 5, 84, Hegel's comment on Heraclitus with regard to the moment of "Becoming" in the *Science of Logic*.

34. I have developed this point in "Vagueness and Meaning Variance in Hegel's Logic," in *Hegel and the Analytic Tradition*, ed. A. Nuzzo (London/New York: Continuum, 2009), 61–82.

35. For a discussion on these sections and the related literature, see Angelica Nuzzo, "Das Problem eines 'Vorbegriffs' in Hegels spekulativer Logik," in *Der "Vor-*

Begriff” zur Wissenschaft der Logik in der *Enzyclopaedie von 1830*, ed. A. Denker and A. Sell (Freiburg: Alber, 2010), 84–113.

36. And notice the insistence on that distributive “jedes.” This passage is paralleled by the claim that, at the end of the logic, establishes the absolute idea as coextensive with “all truth” (see Angelica Nuzzo, “The End of Hegel’s Logic: Absolute Idea as Absolute Method,” in *Hegel’s Theory of the Subject*, ed. by David G. Carlson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 187–205).

37. Significantly, for Aristotle the “soul” is principle of movement for all living being or process (see for example *De anima*, 403b27ff.; 415b10–15).

38. See Angelica Nuzzo, “The Truth of ‘absolutes Wissen’ in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*,” in *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. A. Denker (Amherst, NY: Humanities Press, 2003), 265–294.

39. See *Erinnerung* in TW 3, 591 and 19, respectively (see, for an accurate discussion of this movement, my *Memory, History, Justice in Hegel* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), chap. 1).

40. And Kant was indeed the first to notice that traditional formal logic was not a logic of truth.

41. Chapter 3 is dedicated to offering the interpretive framework in which the structures that I call “forms” and “figures” and the operations of dialectic or modalities of action are discussed; chaps. 4–6 present a synchronic reading of the Logic according, respectively, to beginnings, advancements, and ends.

Chapter 2

1. See TW 6, 551: method is “Modalität des Erkennens” and “Modalität des Seins.”

2. TW 5, 48; the claim is repeated in the introductory pages of the *Begriffslogik* (TW 6, 243) and is already in the preface of the *Phenomenology* (TW 3, 37). The idea that traditional logic treats its material as “dead (*totdes*)” has been entertained by Hegel since his reflections on Logic and Metaphysics in the early *Systementwurf I* (see GW 7, 111f.). Interestingly, a similar consideration is in Fichte’s contemporary Lectures on Transcendental Logic of 1812 (see SW IX, 139); for this see Angelica Nuzzo, “‘Das Ich denkt nicht, sondern das Wissen denkt, sagt der transcendente Logiker’: Fichte’s Logic in Kant’s Aftermath,” *Jahrbuch des deutschen Idealismus* (2016): 189–211.

3. See for example *De anima*, 403b27ff.; 415b10–15.

4. The former is the problem addressed by Kant’s theory of reflective judgment; Kant’s theory, however, offers no answer to the latter question. The Vichian suggestion that Hegel follows here is that only when one can effectively generate the movement is one able to know it in its truth—*verum est factum*.

5. See TW 5, 50: “[Die Methode ist] von ihrem Gegenstande und Inhalte nichts Unterschiedenes.”

6. See TW 3, 68, Hegel opposes here the view of method as “Werkzeug”; see also TW 6, 552, in which the instrumental conception of method is said to be proper of finite cognition.

7. To continue with the organic metaphor used by Hegel: to infuse life into a dead organism is to bring to life a new organism. In fact, no dead body can be brought back to life.

8. TW 5, 49; also *Enz.* §25 Remark, and the general seminal study by H. F. Fulda, *Das Problem einer Einleitung in Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1965). (More recent literature is discussed in my “Das Problem eines ‘Vorbegriffs.’”)

9. This is the case precisely at the beginning of the *Enzyklopaedia* (see references in the preceding note). Hegel does seem to endorse the Greek etymology of *metodos*—meta odos: “after the road.”

10. See Walter Jaeschke, “Äusserliche Reflexion und immanente Reflexion: Eine Skizze der systematischen Geschichte des Reflexionsbegriffs in Hegels Logik-Entwürfen,” *Hegel-Studien* 13 (1978): 85–117, 85.

11. Indeed, the issue of the beginning is as important as that of the advancement or, as Hegel puts it in the method chapter, methodologically the beginning is the beginning of the advancement. See TW 5, 48: “Das Einzige, um den wissenschaftlichen Fortgang zu gewinnen, [. . .].” This can be considered Hegel’s further speculative transformation of the Aristotelian question that shifts the issue of movement to that of the (first) mover.

12. Given my present objective, I shall dwell on the latter more than on the former.

13. On determinate negation as an operation of dialectic, I shall return later. Jaeschke points to the insufficiency of Hegel’s characterization of this principle: “Äusserliche Reflexion und immanente Reflexion,” 85. Hegel’s considerations, however, must be understood precisely in the framework of a preconcept of method.

14. See, for example, TW 6, 70f., for the former, 6, 64ff., for the latter.

15. Briefly put, at stake here is the distinction between thematic and operative concepts. I have offered a discussion of this distinction and of the first “example” of the Logic of Being in: “Thinking Being: Method in Hegel’s Logic of Being,” in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. S. Houlgate and M. Bauer (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 111–139.

16. TW 5, 50—my emphasis. See David Kolb, “The Necessities of Hegel’s Logics,” in *Hegel and the Analytic Tradition*, ed. A. Nuzzo (London/New York: Continuum, 2009), 40–60, who addresses the problem of how the claim of truth and necessity of the method can be reconciled with the variations not only of content but also of order that Hegel introduces in the different editions of the Logic (both the *Wissenschaft der Logik* and the *Encyclopedia* logic).

17. See TW 5, 50, from which the method's perfectibility follows.

18. See TW 5, 49, discussed earlier.

19. Such consciousness is the capacity of 'doing' the movement again, namely, for one thing, to retrospectively reconstruct it. In other words, method is 'true' when it produces its own self-thematization as the end of the process it engenders.

20. Enz. §79 Remark. analyzed in chap. 1.

21. See, for example, TW 5, 84f., with the mention of the use of representation.

22. TW 5, 61, also TW 6, 560 (with reference to Plato and to dialectic).

23. See the proximity of Socrates and Daedalus in *Euthyphro*, 11b–c and 15b–c. To argue that processuality and eternity are not irreconcilable but dialectically connected is Hegel's task in the introduction to the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. That philosophy has a history is proof thereof. See TW 3, 40, in which Hegel, by contrast, defines the "truth" and "falsity" of the *Verstandeslogik* as inert or "bewegungslos" thoughts or essences.

24. See TW 18, 235, with regard to Pythagoras.

25. "The functions of the understanding are obtained once the functions of the unity of judgment are completely presented" (KrV B94/A69). Fichte is obviously the philosopher who will insist on the practical streak of Kant's philosophy. The meaning of the practical, however, is precisely what is at stake in the post-Kantian discussion. Here, however, I am still only referring to *logical* activity.

26. In the Nürnberg *Encyclopedia* 1810/11, §§129–132, the absolute idea comprehends the idea of the true, the good, and beauty.

27. See my analysis of the initial movement of the Logic of Being in "Thinking Being."

28. TW 6, 556f. ("absolute method" as "immanentes Prinzip und Seele"); 549 ("absolute idea" and "truth").

29. See, for example, TW 6, 499, for the idea of the true, 547 for the idea of the good.

30. It is a return to the idea of life: TW 6, 549.

31. TW 6, 550: notice the limitation of that "*nur* als das ursprüngliche Wort" (my emphasis).

32. See the "unmittelbar wieder verschwunden ist" and the "sich vollkommen durchsichtig ist und bleibt" of the passage quoted earlier (TW 6, 550).

33. See the qualifications of "form" as belonging to method in TW 6, 555: "immanent"; 551: "absolute"; 550: "infinite"; 551: "external."

34. TW 6, 551—recall the task of the "only true method" discussed at the beginning of this chapter, namely, to infuse life into the dead bones of traditional logic.

35. TW 6, 551: "alle Gestalten eines gegebenen Inhalts"—where it is also relevant (as we shall see in the next chapter) that one content displays a plurality of logical "figures."

36. To be opposed to the immediate vanishing of the “original word” discussed previously (TW 6, 550).

37. *Poetics*, 7, 1450b, 20–25. The plot or mythos is a structure of events or a unitary action that is “complete, whole, and of magnitude.” A whole, in turn, “is that which has a beginning, middle, and end.”

38. TW 6, 553: “Es ist dabei *erstens* mit dem *Anfange* anzufangen.”

39. It can be, alternatively, “Sein, Wesen, Allgemeinheit,” it can be “a content of being or of essence or of the concept” (TW 6, 568, 1). For the development of this argument, see chap. 3. For the synchronic montage that breaks the narrative in the cinematic medium, see Slavoj Žižek, *Less than Nothing* (London: Verso, 2013), 28.

40. I discuss this point extensively in chap. 4; see also my *Memory, History, Justice in Hegel*.

41. It is certainly true that the two perspectives somehow coincide. However, they do coincide only at the end of the logic.

42. TW 6, 555; and 557, 1: “Gewißheit” of the concept; recall the passage commented on earlier at TW 5, 49 (method is the “consciousness of the form of the inner self-movement of the content”).

43. See TW 6, 557: “Die Methode des absoluten Erkennens” is both synthetic and analytic.

44. TW 6, 555; see the corresponding passage on the relationship between *Anfang* and *Fortgang* in the introduction, TW 5, 71.

45. Hegel refers to Plato (TW 6, 557) and then to Kant (TW 6, 560); also TW 6, 561.

46. Analogously, one may have been present to all the successive events in which a historical occurrence has unfolded and still be unable to grasp their overall meaning, still be unable to tell the story.

47. TW 6, 566: “Es kann zunächst scheinen, dass dies Erkennen des Resultats eine Analyse desselben sein und daher diejenigen Bestimmungen und deren Gang wieder auseinanderlegen müsse, durch den es entstanden und der betrachtet worden ist.”

48. TW 6, 551: “absolute Grundlage und letzte Wahrheit”; 569: “Das Allgemeine macht die Grundlage aus; der Fortgang ist deswegen nicht als ein Fließen von einem Anderen zu einem Anderen zu nehmen.”

49. TW 6, 567: “Hier ist es erst, wo der Inhalt des Erkennens als solcher in den Kreis der Betrachtung eintritt.”

50. TW 6, 567, 3: it is reflection’s “bestimmte Forderung [. . .], daß der Anfang, weil er gegen die Bestimmtheit des Resultats selbst ein Bestimmtes ist, nicht als Unmittelbares, sondern als Vermitteltes und Abgeleitetes genommen werden soll, was als die Forderung des unendlichen rückwärtsgelenden Progresses im Beweisen und Ableiten erscheinen kann.”

51. Of such “Anfänge wie Sein, Wesen, Allgemeinheit” (TW 6, 568).

52. TW 6, 568: “Aber die Unbestimmtheit, welche jene logische Anfänge zu ihrem einzigen Inhalte haben, ist es selbst, was ihre Bestimmtheit ausmacht.”

53. TW 6, 568: “Von einer Seite ist die Bestimmtheit, welche sie sich in ihrem Resultate erzeugt, das Moment, wodurch sie die Vermittlung mit sich ist und den unmittelbaren Anfang zu einem Vermittelten macht.”

Chapter 3

1. Anne Carson, *Plainwater* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 88.

2. I want to briefly address here an apparent contradiction. Although I have claimed that the logic stages an action without an “agent,” I am now proposing to discuss the “agents” that carry out the logical action. While with the first claim I reject the view of action as dependent on a presupposed “subject” (metaphysical, transcendental, psychological, etc.), in the latter case I refer to functions that carry on or enable the movement, to points of concentration of the action itself.

3. This would not be the case of any of the Aristotelian or Kantian “categories.” Recall the passage analyzed in the previous chapter regarding the relation between the content and the method of the logic.

4. See chap. 1. See *Poetics* 6, 1450a20: “it is not to provide mimesis of character that the agents act; rather, their characters are included for the sake of their actions”; 1450b1–5: tragedy is mimesis of action, agents are represented only for action’s sake; plot is central, character is secondary.

5. Enz. §25. See Walter Jaeschke, “Objektives Gedanke: Philosophiehistorische Erwägungen zur Konzeption und zur Aktualität der spekulativen Logik,” *The Independent Journal of Philosophy* 3 (1979): 23–37.

6. Enz. §§26–78; see Nuzzo, “Das Problem eines ‘Vorbegriffs,’” and in general the entire volume.

7. I have developed an analysis of the concept of figure in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* and a discussion of the reference to Goethe in: “A proposito della costituzione della sfera della ‘eticità’ in Hegel: il ruolo del concetto di *Gestaltung*,” *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore* 22, 1 (1990): 249–286; more recently, I have examined the concept of *Gestalt* in its relation with the issue of history and the constitution of *Geist* in the *Phenomenology*, in: “History and Memory in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*,” *The Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 29, 1 (2008): 161–198.

8. See for example KU §14 (for the distinction between *Spiel* and *Gestalt*) and §17 for the human figure.

9. See, for example, the following definition: “Die Gestalt ist ein Bewegliches, ein Werdendes, ein Vergehendes. Gestaltenlehre ist Verwandlungslehre” (“Fragmente zur vergleichenden Anatomie,” in: J. W. Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke*, 18 vols. (Zürich: Artemis-Ausgabe, 1977), vol. 17, 415. For the dynamic character of Goethe’s philosophy of nature as a theory of natural “trans-formation” or *Verwand-*

lung, explicitly anti-Platonic in its rejection of unchanging forms, see Allegra De Laurentiis, "Aristotle in the Nineteenth Century: The Case of Goethe's Study of Life," *Idealistic Studies* 30, 2 (2000): 107–119.

10. See Goethe, "Fragmente zur vergleichenden Anatomie," 420: "Funktion und Gestalt notwendig verbunden. Die Funktion ist das Dasein in Tätigkeit gedacht."

11. Erich Auerbach, "Figura," *Neue Dantestudien*, Istanbul (1944): 11–71 (English trans. R. Manheim, in: *Scenes from the Drama in European Literature* [New York: Meridian Books, 1959], 11–76), and "Figurative Texts Illustrating Certain Passages of Dante's *Commedia*," *Speculum* 21 (1964): 474–489.

12. See for this Lisa Freinkel, *Reading Shakespeare's Will: The Theology of Figure from Augustine to the Sonnets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), chap. 3: "Luther Disfiguring the Word."

13. *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar, 1883–1929), vol. 23, 219; Enrico De Negri, *La teologia di Lutero* (Firenze: la Nuova Italia, 1967), 259; for the use of *Gestalt* in the German language, see Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1897), vol. 5, 4178–4190.

14. As I shall suggest, it exceeds the real in the logical order.

15. See chap. 6, 373–379.

16. See Auerbach, "Figura," 12.

17. I have examined the issue in "A proposito della costituzione della sfera della "eticità."

18. Reason becomes "C. (AA) Vernunft" followed by "(BB) Der Geist" (chap. 6) and "(CC) Die Religion," and ends with "(DD) Das absolute Wissen." See also my "History and Memory in Hegel's *Phenomenology*" for a thorough discussion of the literature.

19. See TW 3, 583, 588f.; confirmed in TW 5, 42, 43: the *Phenomenology* offers the *Deduktion* of the concept of science.

20. TW 3, 588, 589; see TW 3, 39, and the introduction of the *Phenomenology* for the initial thematization of this difference in relation to the overall movement of consciousness; see the corresponding TW 5, 43, for the Logic.

21. TW 5, 43: *Befreiung*; 67; TW 3, 589: the concept is "moment" of the process as "befreite Gestalt."

22. TW 5, 49 (footnote added in the 1831 edition); see also Enz. §25 Remark, in which Hegel refers to "concrete figures of consciousness" and further elaborates on the tension between the formal and the content-determined side of the development. For intralogical "examples" of method, see TW 6, 561 (in particular with regard to determinate negation).

23. Such content is consciousness in the *Phenomenology*, the *Begriff* or the activity of pure thinking in the logic, the figuration of the idea in nature and spirit in the *Realphilosophie*.

24. To the interesting point whereby one and the same content displays different logical figures I shall return in the next chapter.

25. The beginning “ist das aus der Sukzession wie aus seiner Ausdehnung in sich zurückgegangene Ganze, der gewordene einfache Begriff desselben. Die Wirklichkeit dieses einfachen Ganzen aber besteht darin, dass jene zu Momenten gewordenen Gestaltungen sich wieder von neuem, aber in ihrem neuen Elemente, in der gewordenen Sinne entwickeln und Gestaltung geben”: TW 3, 19 (my emphasis, Findlay translation modified).

26. “Umgekehrt entspricht jedem abstrakten Momente der Wissenschaft eine Gestalt des erscheinenden Geistes überhaupt” (TW 3, 589, my emphasis).

27. I have discussed the issue in “Hegel’s Method for a History of Philosophy: The Berlin Introductions to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy (1819–1831),” in *Hegel’s History of Philosophy: New Interpretations*, ed. D. Duquette (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 19–34, “Logic and Time in Hegel’s Idea of History—Philosophical *Einteilung* and Historical Periodization,” in *L’idée d’époque historique*, ed. D. Losurdo and A. Tosel, Centre de recherches d’histoire des idées (Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 2004), 165–180 (see these references for Hegel’s passages and secondary sources). More broadly, see my *Logica e sistema: Sull’idea hegeliana di filosofia* (Genova: Pantograf, 1992), and my *Rappresentazione e concetto nella ‘logica’ della Filosofia del diritto di Hegel* (Napoli: Guida, 1990) for a reconstruction of the problem with regard to the *Philosophy of Right*.

28. As Hegel suggests, against the formalism of traditional logic in TW 5, 44.

29. It is not, for obvious reason, the empirical reality of natural or spiritual objects, but it is also not a mere abstraction from them.

30. See Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 73.

31. With regard to the position that the logic assumes at the very end of the *Encyclopedia* as the last science of the system, see my “Hegels Auffassung der Philosophie als System und die drei Schlüsse der Enzyklopädie,” in *Hegels enzyklopädisches System der Philosophie*, ed. B. Tuschling and U. Vogel (Stuttgart: Frommann Holzboog, 2004), 459–480.

32. See the meaning of “function” cited earlier with regard to Goethe (“Fragmente zur vergleichenden Anatomie,” 420).

33. “Das Reich der Schatten” is the title of Schiller’s poem that appeared in the *Horen*, Jahrgang 1795, 9. Stück. The title was changed in 1800 to “Das Reich der Formen,” and in 1804 to “Das Ideal und das Leben.”

34. In effect, for Hegel, it belongs to *Bildung* to produce estrangement or *Entfremdung* in order to attain self-consciousness and to form a cultivated and educated personality. Herein the function of the logic is indeed close to the function that Hegel assigns to the learning of ancient languages (see, for example, TW 4, 321f., on the value of the learning of Latin and Greek grammar; see Brady Bowman,

“Labor, Publicity, and Bureaucracy: The Modernity of Hegel’s Civic Humanism,” *Hegel Studien* 47 (2013): 41–73.

35. According to the Idea of the True and the Idea of the Good, which emerge at the end of the logic.

36. “Um sie kein Ort, noch weniger eine Zeit” (*Faust II*, v. 6214); also v. 6275: “Versinke denn! Ich könnt auch sagen: steige!”; v. 6428: “Im Grenzenlos.”

37. *Faust II*, vv. 6275–6276: Mephistopheles to Faust: “Versinke denn! Ich könnt auch sagen steige! / ’s ist einerlei.”

38. See Pietro Citati, *Goethe* (Milano: Mondadori, 1970,) 277; in general, but not very useful, see Harold S. Jantz, *The Mothers in Faust: The Myth of Time and Creativity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969).

39. These schemes, being aspatial and atemporal but also lacking the conditions of spatial and temporal sensibility, are different than Kantian schemes.

40. The difference between the two versions of the text betrays an interesting oscillation between the earlier Platonic notion, that the images preexist the actual things as ideas, and the later suggestion that they are the shadow of their having been (in the first version, v. 6431 reads: “Was war, was ist, was kommt in Glanz und Schein” instead of “Was einmal war in allen Glanz und Schein”).

41. See Citati, *Goethe*, 279–281, also, the Mothers are the “custodi del Museo dell’Essere.”

42. Citati, *Goethe*, 280f.

43. The idea of the Mothers is original to Goethe. In his colloquium with Eckermann (January 10, 1830) Goethe says he found the name in Plutarch: “this is what I found in the tradition; the rest is my own invention.” For Goethe’s relation to Plato’s representation of the “plain of truth” in the *Phaedrus*, see Citati, *Goethe*, 275–277; for the relation between the images that surround the Mothers and the third form of the *Timaeus* (48e–52e), see Citati, *Goethe*, 280–281.

44. For Hegel’s discussion of Plato’s myth of the cave, see TW 19, 36f.

45. See TW 5, 48, discussed in the previous chapter.

46. Notice that in the *Timaeus* Plato presents the third form (“a form that is baffling and obscure”) as “the nurse of all Becoming” (*Timaeus* 49a).

47. See chap. 1.

48. Respectively, TW 6, 557 (with reference to Plato), and TW 5, 55.

Chapter 4

1. See chap. 1.

2. For this proposal of braking the linear, sequential narrative, considered in the cinematic medium, see Žižek, *Less than Nothing*, 28f.

3. See chap. 2.

4. See chap. 3.

5. The following consideration should be kept in mind with regard to the distinction that I make between “Being” (“Essence,” “Concept”) and “being” (“essence,” “concept”). Generally, I indicate with “Being” the entire first sphere of the logic. Alternatively, the capitalization refers to Being considered as the subject and the protagonist (or the actor, as it were) of the action at stake in an entire logical sphere. By contrast, “being” is, alternatively, a general determination or a specific moment of the logic, a figure or a determination within the broader sphere of Being (or Essence or the Concept).

6. For the first two points, see chap. 1; for this latter issue, regarding the specificity of the logic in its lack of presuppositions, see Enz. §1.

7. Commented on at length in chap. 2.

8. And that Hegel himself actually followed both in the different editions of the *Science of Logic* and in the successive editions of the *Encyclopedia* logic, see for a convincing exemplification of this point, Kolb, “The Necessities of Hegel’s Logic.”

9. Diachronic, obviously, without time.

10. TW 6, 553: “es sein sonst ein Inhalt des Seins oder des Wesens oder des Begriffs [. . .].”

11. See chap. 2.

12. Edward Said, *Beginnings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 13.

13. Herein at stake is *Nichts* not *Nichtsein*, there is no proper *Entstehen* and no *gegenüber*.

14. Also the beginning of “A. Sein” presents being “in seiner unbestimmten Unmittelbarkeit.”

15. See TW 5, 83: “jedes in seinem Gegenteil verschwindet.”

16. See TW 5, 83: “nicht übergeht, sondern übergegangen ist.”

17. Restated in TW 6, 23, cited earlier.

18. This is, in point of fact, an almost existentialist freedom.

19. See Kant, KrV B379–381/A324–325.

20. See for example the definition of freedom in the cosmological sense in KrV B561/A533; also *Prolegomena* §53 Fn. Notice, however, that for Kant the beginning connected with the definition of freedom is a beginning of causality—and in this respect the distinction is drawn between the beginning of the effect produced by the cause and the beginning of causality itself (freedom).

21. For an analysis of the language of the beginning of the *Science of Logic*, see my “Vagueness and Meaning Variance in Hegel’s Logic.”

22. TW 6, 13; for *Erinnerung*, see also Nuzzo, *Memory, History, Justice in Hegel*, chapter 2; TW 6, 19f., for *Schein*.

23. This is how *Wesen* begins (TW 6, 18): “A. Das Wesentliche und das Unwesentliche.”

24. TW 6, 18: the two sides are “gegeneinander gleichgültig, und beide stehen [. . .] im gleichem Werte.”

25. TW 6, 19: “eine vom Wesen noch unabhängige Seite.”

26. Thus, the figure of the beginning of Being is articulated in the logical movement of *Sein-Nichts-Werden*; the figure of the beginning of Essence is articulated in the logical movement *Wesentliches/Unwesentliches-Schein-Reflexion* (TW 6, 24).

27. See also the “genesis” at TW 6, 274.

28. See TW 6, 269: although being and essence are in the concept, “im Begriffe” they no longer have “die Bestimmung, in welcher sie als Sein und Wesen sind”; they have, in other words, another, this time ‘conceptual,’ determination.

29. See TW 6, 270, 273, with reference to the way in which the third division of Hegel’s dialectic-speculative logic takes up the logic of the understanding.

30. Respectively, TW 6, 273f., for the “Maßstab,” and 274 for the “absolute Identität mit sich.”

31. See TW 6, 274: the formal identity of the universal that “alle Momente durchdringt und in sich faßt” (my emphasis).

32. See the absolute method at TW 6, 553, extensively discussed in chap. 2.

33. TW 6, 275: the concept’s identity is “absolute *Vermittlung*, nicht aber ein *Vermitteltes*.”

34. Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative)* (London: Penguin, 1986, 287–385), here chap. 2, 300.

35. The novella, begun in 1886 and left unfinished at the author’s death in 1891, was published posthumously in 1924.

36. Already in chap. 1, see Billy’s confrontation with Red Whiskers recounted by the captain of the *Rights-of-Man* (see my discussion later).

37. Also chap. 22 (Billy as a “dog of generous breed”).

38. Chap. 2; chap. 1, 298, for Billy’s incapability “to deal in double meanings.” See the extraordinary end in chap. 25, 375, with Billy’s last words—his last ‘song’—before the execution.

39. See the historical background in chaps. 3–5. For the influence of France, see the “live cinders blown across the Channel from France in flames” (chap. 3).

40. See the journal report in chap. 30 and the poem in chap. 31.

41. Shakespeare, *King Lear*, act 5, scene 3.

42. See chap. 21, 365, for this parallel; see also the claim: “Forty years after a battle it is easy for a non-combatant to reason about how it ought to have been fought. It is another thing personally and under fire to direct the fighting while involved in the obscuring smoke of it” (chap. 21, 365).

43. See chap. 18, 343, in which Claggart’s accusation of Billy Budd to Captain Vere happens in the background of an explicit mention of the Nore Mutiny.

44. Chap. 1, 297; also chap. 18, 345. Thereby, we leave the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and we begin the *Science of Logic*.

45. Chaps. 6–7 for Captain Vere; chap. 9 presents the “old Dansker,” and chap. 8 introduces Claggart, whose “portrait,” Melville says, “I essay, but shall never hit it” (chap. 8, 313).

46. The first incident is narrated in chap. 10, while chaps. 11–14 discuss Claggart's character in relation to it; the second incident is narrated in chap. 14, while chaps. 16–18 are dedicated to presenting Billy's innocence in his reactions to it. See also Billy's "essential innocence" at the end of his life, chap. 25 in Melville's discussion of religion.

47. For the "natural depravity," see chap. 11, 325–326. See chap. 21, 354, where Melville himself suggests that "innocence and guilt" are "personified in Claggart and Budd," and chap. 24, 371, where Billy is said to have experienced and been consumed by the "diabolical incarnate."

48. Melville is clear, "there was nothing of the sort" (chap. 11, 323). These considerations on the reconstruction of action in Claggart's case are paralleled in chap. 18 and end by analogous considerations regarding Billy after the afterguardsman's episode.

49. In this sense, I disagree with the antinomic opposition that much of the literature uses to construe the conflict between Billy and Claggart (and Vere); see already Eugenio Montale, "Billy Budd: An Introduction," *The Sewanee Review* 68, 3 (1942): 419–422, who speaks of radical Manicheism; and in general Joyce Sparer Adler, "Billy Budd and Melville's Philosophy of War," *PMLA* 91, 2 (1976): 266–278 (notice that in Hegel's dialectic of being and nothing the latter is not simply privation of being).

50. Chap. 12, 328; see chap. 17, 338: "sometimes the melancholy expression would have in it a touch of soft yearning, as if Claggart could even have loved Billy but for fate and ban." There is an echo here of Satan's attraction first to both Adam and Eve and then to Eve in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (book 8): "That space the Evil one abstracted stood / From his own evil, and for the time remained / Stupidly good, of enmity disarmed / Of guile, of hate, of envy, of revenge"—notice here that the "Evil one" stands "abstracted" from his evil qualities, remaining suspended in an abstracted indeterminateness, "stupidly good."

51. Compare Billy's "entirely new experience," which opens the chapter with the Dansker's "long experience" that concludes it.

52. Chap. 18 recalls both the analogy between Billy and "the young Adam before the fall" and his farewell to the *Rights-of-Man*. In a sense we are back to the beginning.

53. It is the "in sich gegangenen, [. . .] seiner Unmittelbarkeit entfremdeten Schein" of TW 6, 24.

54. See chap. 20: "what was best not only now at once to be done, but also in the sequel?"

55. To this extent, Melville's message here is much more complex than the linear Manichean opposition of Good and Evil and Peace and War, usually appealed to by interpreters, would imply.

56. In Arendtian terms, it would have been speech, hence properly "action" and not raw "violence."

57. This occurrence is brought up in Claggart's report to Captain Vere in chap. 19 as a significant precedent defying who Billy Budd is.

58. See chap. 22: Billy's reaction to the question during the interrogation that immediately recalls to his "mind the interview with the afterguardsman in the fore-chains." The recollected event appears now in a different light, no longer in its immediacy. Being has indeed passed over to essence (and to the memory of being). In chap. 25, 39, to the Chaplain who tries to make him understand that in a few hours he shall die, Billy Budd shows all his innocence: "True, Billy himself freely referred to his death as a thing close at hand; but it was something in the way that children will refer to death in general, who yet among other sports will play a funeral with hearse and mourners."

59. In chap. 23, 367, Captain Vere narrates the entire incident again in front of the *Bellipotent's* crew.

60. See TW 6, 245; see chap. 21, 358: Billy turns to Vere when asked why Claggart should have lied, incriminating him.

61. Vere does not live up to the task announced by Melville in the very opening of chap. 21, 353: "Who in the rainbow can draw the line where the violet tint ends and the orange tint begins?" He crosses the line.

62. See chap. 21, 364ff., and chap. 22, 366.

63. See the incredible tension between the "benediction" pronounced by Billy upon his execution and echoed by the entire crew (chap. 25), and the possible "sullen revocation on the men's part of their involuntary echoing of Billy's benediction" immediately after the execution (chap. 27).

64. With this, however, I do not claim that Violence is the only meaning or fulfillment of the logical figures of the beginning.

65. Slavoj Žižek opens his book *Violence* (New York: Picador, 2008), 1ff., advocating the need to step back from the "directly visible 'subjective' violence, violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent," and to recede to the "background" that constitutes violent action. "Symbolic" and "systemic" violence are the other crucial factors analyzed in his book. I take this to be a 'logical' distinction in the sense I am advocating. It is a distinction in types of violence that needs different "perspectives" (Žižek) in order to be detected in the first place.

66. See Hannah Arendt, "On Violence," in *Crises of the Republic* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace, 1972), 103–198, 151. While Arendt's discussion regards the political concept of violence (134), what I am proposing here is a philosophically more elementary inquiry that regards the *logical* concept of violence. There is another important connection in which Arendt's thought can be brought to bear on my reading of Melville's novella, and that is her concept of "natality" and of freedom as rooted in natality—freedom being the capacity to bring something utterly unexpected and new into the world. I leave this important connection aside because, as will be clear at the end of chapter 6, in the view I propose, the moment of action's radical creativity does not belong to the beginning (Arendt says, to "all beginnings"):

see *The Human Condition* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958], 178) but rather to the action that ends (and, in this case, only to the action of the “idea” that ends, not to all ending actions).

67. Arendt (“On Violence,” 144) distinguishes between “force” that belongs to nature and “violence” that pertains instead to social groups. Her distinction, in other words, is primarily a distinction between different agents. At the logical level on which I am arguing here, by contrast, at stake are different types of action and, more precisely, the different logic that such actions display (not their different political, social, moral implications).

68. Arendt, “On Violence,” 161.

69. Arendt, “On Violence,” 106.

70. Arendt, “On Violence,” 161f., writing in 1969 she significantly adds: “these are still among the strongest motives in today’s violence on the campuses and in the streets.”

71. See at the end of chap. 19, 352, Vere’s exclamation: “Struck dead by an angel of God!” but he immediately adds: “Yet the angel must hang!”

72. I limit my confrontation here to a very particular issue, the issue of *Verschwinden*. Thus, my claim is restricted to this point only. See for a broader discussion my “Arbitrariness and Freedom: Hegel on Rousseau and Revolution,” in *Rousseau and Revolution*, ed. R. Lauristen and M. Thorup (London: Continuum, 2011), 64–82; see Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 380, for the more general claim that in all “revolutionary explosion there is an element of ‘pure’ violence,” which I take precisely in terms of the violence of pure being.

73. “[U]ngetreunt und untrennbar sind und unmittelbar jedes in seinem Gegenteil verschwindet.”

74. See also Arendt’s discussion of the Terror and the terrorist state in a twentieth-century framework in “On Violence,” 154.

75. See Žižek, *Violence*, 4, for the need to develop a ‘dispassionate’ ‘typology of violence.’ His warning here is important: “there is a sense in which a cold analysis of violence somehow reproduces and participates in its horror.” This I take to be a direct implication of the performative nature of Hegel’s logic.

76. See TW 4, 219, on *Reflexion*. For a view of violence as the beginning of humanity, see Jean-Paul Sartre’s position (in his preface to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*) as criticized by Arendt in “On Violence,” 114f., and the Hegelian and Marxian background of such position. Arendt’s critique of Sartre (and Fanon), however, is based on the full-fledged concept of violence (intentional, instrumental) that is not yet at play at the beginning of the Logic of Essence.

77. And it is “also the appearance of idealism.” On Hegel’s view, the ‘idealistic’ claim, which denies that a *Ding-an-sich* underlies all appearance and considers all things to be only in relation to the subject, is logically identical to the skeptical claim. See also TW 19, 358, in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*: the skeptic

reduces to *Schein* and to nothing all the forms of being and cognition; it is “die Kunst, alles Bestimmte aufzulösen, es in seiner Nichtigkeit zu zeigen.”

78. See TW 6, 23, commented on earlier: “das Wesen ist das Scheinen seiner in sich selbst.”

79. At stake beyond the mere “unmittelbares Sein” of right is its *Wirklichkeit*, and this “ist das, was wirkt und sich in seinem Anderssein erhält.”

80. This is the *Erscheinung* of right: R §82Z.

81. R §82Z. “Das Unrecht is ein solcher Schein, und durch das Verschwinden desselben erhält das Recht die Bestimmung eines Festen und Geltendes.”

82. See TW 6, 223, 230f.; also 247 in the introduction to the Concept.

83. This is the last stage of the development of the *Kausalitätsverhältnis* (the other moments are: a. The Formal Causality and b. The Determinate Causal Relation).

84. Arendt’s discussion of the co-originality (psychological and political) of “the will to power” and “the instinct of submission” follows the same logic (“On Violence,” 138f.).

85. See the movement of substance and its power (including the movement that I have just discussed) recapitulated again in TW 6, 246–248, as constituting the “concrete genesis” of the concept.

86. Both in trying Billy Budd on the *Bellipotent* and in Vere’s exerting a biased influence on the members of the drumhead court with his speech. Melville insists on the feeling of rush in resolving the situation that characterizes Captain Vere’s action.

87. See chap. 18, 347, end: the “shifting of the scene” as a “transfer to a place less exposed to observation than the quarter-deck”; chap. 19, beginning; in particular chap. 21, 354: Vere decides “against publicity”; the “maintenance of secrecy in the matter, the confining of all knowledge of it for a time to the place where the homicide occurred,” make the situation regress back to a sort of tragedy of the time of “Peter the Barbarian.”

88. My reading opposes the view advanced by Jacques Derrida and then often repeated in his aftermath that the concept’s *Übergreifen* is an act of totalizing violence. The entire argument heretofore developed is the premise for my different conclusion (see his early “Violence and Metaphysics,” in *Writing and Difference* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967], 79–153).

89. See this passage in the conclusion of chap. 22, 367: “Captain Vere in the end may have developed the passion sometimes latent under an exterior stoical or indifferent. He was old enough to have been Billy’s father. The austere devotee of military duty, letting himself melt back into what remains primeval in our formalized humanity, may in the end have caught Billy to his heart even as Abraham may have caught young Isaac on the brink of resolutely offering him up in obedience to the exacting behest.”

Chapter 5

1. Dante Alighieri, *La divina commedia*, Paradiso, V, 109–114.
2. *Paradiso*, V, 97–99.
3. The stasis of Corcyra described in book 3 of his *History*.
4. See TW 6, 550f.: it is “*Art und Weise*.”
5. See TW 6, 557.
6. See TW 6, 563. Notice that the resolution of the crisis simply means that the process goes on; it does not mean that it is ‘better.’
7. TW 3, 23, 29; 6, 556: “only in its fulfillment [the universal] is the absolute.”
8. In fact, when desire is fulfilled the end is reached.
9. Hegel refers to Plato (TW 6, 557) and then to Kant (TW 6, 560); also TW 6, 561.
10. This is not in the first place or directly a problem of choice of *contents*. It is rather the problem that logically (or *formally*) describes what choice properly is.
11. In such passages we find Hegel doing in the course of the logic what Dante does in the passage commented on at the beginning of the chapter.
12. See the *Veränderung* at TW 6, 313; the differences addressed by the form of judgment are “nothing fixed” (*nichts Fixes*) at 307.
13. Which is different than the claim that what is defined in its nature as finite can only act in a certain way.
14. This corresponds to the view that Hegel presents in the introduction to the *Science of Logic* by claiming that the logical determinations do not inhere in (metaphysical) substrates but are rather dynamic forms that betray what they are through their inner way of acting (see TW 5, 61).
15. Notice that with *Dasein* Hegel indicates a mode of action or the form of action; he does not re-propose an ontological category of former metaphysics. This is the general reading that I propose in this work.
16. TW 5, 115 and 125, respectively (my emphasis).
17. TW 5, 118: “Die Bestimmtheit so für sich isoliert [. . .] ist die Qualität”; 118: *Dasein* is the “measure” of the “Einseitigkeit” of quality.
18. TW 5, 118: “Die Qualität, so dass sie unterschieden als *seiende* gelte, ist die *Realität*; sie als mit einer Verneinung behaftet, *Negation* überhaupt, ist gleichfalls eine Qualität, aber die für einen Mangel gilt.”
19. TW 5, 125. “Etwas und ein Anderes” in the title; “Etwas *und* Anderes” in the first line of the division “B. Die Endlichkeit.”
20. TW 6, 33: *Gesetzsein* is “only posited with regard to essence.”
21. TW 6, 33: *Gesetzsein* is the “Negation des Zurückgekehrtheits in sich selbst.”
22. Recall: “*Gesetzsein* is an other” (TW 6, 32).

23. TW 6, 301: “Der Begriff ist aber selbst dieses Abstrahieren.”

24. TW 6, 301f. Herein even more than in the Logic of Being and Essence it is clear that the new determination is a way of acting, rather than a newly deduced content.

25. Not only do “concepts rest on functions,” but “we can bring all actions of the understanding back to judgments” (KrV B93/A68 and B94/A69, respectively).

26. KrV B93/A94: it is a “mittelbare Erkenntnis eines Gegenstandes, mithin eine Vorstellung einer Vorstellung desselben.”

27. See Molière, *Tartuffe or the Impostor*, in: *The Misanthrope and Other Plays*, ed. J. Wood (London: Penguin, 1959), 97–164. This edition does not divide acts in scenes. For this division I refer to the French original. Henceforth, citations from *Tartuffe* reference the act number, scene number, and page number.

28. See Judith Shklar, “Let Us Not Be Hypocritical,” *Daedalus* 108, 3 (1979): 1–25, 4, for the interdependence of Tartuffe and Orgon. The connection between hypocrisy and fanaticism is, however, rarely discussed in the literature.

29. II, 2, 124; I, 2, 4, 129: for Orgon’s previous promise.

30. The difference is interestingly one of gender and social class.

31. I, 1, 113; I, 1, 111: “he forbids everything.”

32. See Stuart Hampshire, *Justice Is Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 34f., for a similar account of the position of “fundamentalism.”

33. For the political dimension of the fanaticism at play between Orgon and Tartuffe, see Shklar, “Let Us Not Be Hypocritical,” 5.

34. IV, 4, 148: “take care that he does not see or hear you.”

35. This was already Dorine’s idea right at the beginning of the play as she suggests to Mariane with regard to Orgon’s decision to have her marry Tartuffe: “you had better pretend to fall in with his nonsense and give the appearance of consenting” (II, 4, 133). On the other hand, it should also be noted that in setting up this stratagem Elmire is also having further hidden motivations.

36. And V, 1, 152: Orgon’s “I am convinced, and, for my part, I ask nothing further.”

37. Notice that Tartuffe says to Elmire, regarding Orgon: “I’ve got him to the stage where though he saw everything with his eyes he wouldn’t believe it” (IV, 5, 151)—in this, ironically, he is wrong.

38. After all, the original meaning of ‘hypocrite’ is to act a part on the stage.

39. See TW 6, 33.

40. TW 6, 33, see this chapter, section 1.2.

41. See, for example, II, 1, 123, Dorine to Orgon’s claim that Tartuffe is a “gentleman”: “Yes. That’s what *he* says, but that kind of boasting doesn’t go very well with his piety.”

42. To which one should add the self-appraisal of Tartuffe’s own intentions and actions, a point that touches on the issue of self-deception proper to all fanatic behavior.

43. Last emphasis is mine. This move, according to which Orgon seconds Tartuffe's desires by doing the opposite of what he suggests (and seems instead to desire) is then conducive to the setup discussed earlier in which Elmire exposes Tartuffe in front of the hidden Orgon (IV, 4–5).

44. See Dorine's scene with Mariane at II, 3, 127, and again at II, 4, 133; and see Clèante's insistence to the end, with Orgon, that he "ought to have been more conciliatory" in dealing with Tartuffe (V, 1, 154), that he should "moderate" his feeling (V, 2, 155) because perhaps a compromise or a "reconciliation" can still be reached (V, 3, 157).

45. In this regard Dorine and Clèante share a common position—although they differ in many other respects.

46. Translation modified.

47. For a history of the terms fanaticism and enthusiasm especially in the English-speaking world, see John Passmore, "Fanaticism, Toleration and Philosophy," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 11, 2 (2003): 211–222; with regard to Kant, see Rachel Zuckert, "Kant on Practical Fanaticism," in *Kant's Moral Metaphysics*, ed. B. Lipscomb and J. Krueger (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 291–318, and her distinction of theoretical and practical fanaticism.

48. An analogous claim is made in the previous chapter with regard to the figure of violence in relation to the beginning action.

49. In other words, Hegel claims that a doctrine of duty is possible only as a doctrine of *ethical* duties and virtues: R §135, §150 Remark.

50. Fichte employs this Enlightenment notion in this sense in 1794; see SW VI, 279. Fichte's intention is to overcome both the formality of Kant's moral law and his separation of nature and freedom within the human being. In Fichte's notion of *Bestimmung des Menschen* the categorical imperative is always individualized as it expresses one's own vocation through which the individual realizes itself as an individual.

51. By rendering Hegel's *Grenze* alternatively with limit, border, and boundary I want to underscore, on the one hand, the difficulty in translating this term, while, on the other hand, I want to connect Hegel's logic to the political context discussed at the beginning of the essay—the context that represents the background of my analysis.

52. TW 5, 136 (my emphasis): the something "has a limit *against* the other: the limit is the *Nichtsein* of the other not of the something itself."

53. In addition, there is the intermediary figure of the 'existence-at-the-border.'

54. At the border, the something and the other are playing the same role.

55. See Shklar, "Let Us Not Be Hypocritical," 7–12.

56. See for self-deceit implicit in fanatic and hypocritical attitudes in particular in matters of faith Jonathan E. Adler, "Faith and Fanaticism," in *Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, ed. L. M. Antony (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 266–285, 278–280.

57. See Adler, “Faith and Fanaticism,” 275f.

58. Adler, “Faith and Fanaticism,” 276.

59. Adler discusses the case of religious fanaticism that fits my reconstruction only with the addition of the conditions of faith and duty as god’s command.

60. Adler, “Faith and Fanaticism,” 276.

61. See for example Norberto Bobbio, “La natura del pregiudizio,” in *Elogio della mitezza*, (Milano: Linea d’ombra, 1994), 123–139, who suggests “democracy” as a good way to ‘cure’ the ever-resurgent collective fanaticism that plagues the “human mind.”

62. See section 1 of this chapter: TW 3, 24; see also TW 6, 571, for the “impatience” (*Ungeduld*) of subjective thinking.

63. See Adler, “Faith and Fanaticism,” 277: “If one is wrong, one wants to discover it before one acts. If one is right, one expects corroboration, even if the occasional source is mistaken.”

64. And wearing shoes! *Symposium*, 174a, see on Socrates’s shoes, Anne Carson, “Shoes: An Essay on How Plato’s *Symposium* Begins,” *The Iowa Review* 25, 2 (1995): 47–51.

65. *Symposium*, 175b, but see starting from 174c.

66. “[W]ith some problem or other”: *Symposium*, 220c.

67. Jonathan Lear, *A Case for Irony* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 84f.

68. Lear, *A Case for Irony*, 85.

69. Lear’s point is somewhat different: he claims that Socrates is an exemplar of self-possession “and yet” he often experiences crises (*A Case for Irony*, 86).

70. *Symposium*, 202e–203a. For a further analysis of the topic of Eros, see my “Translation, (Self-)Transformation, and the Power of the Middle,” *PhiloSophia* 3, 1 (2013): 19–35.

71. KU §40.

Appendix: “Living in the Interregnum”

1. See Plato, *Republic*, 470d: *stasis* “as it is commonly used” indicates “a *polis* that is internally divided.”

2. As I shall argue in the next chapter, this expression has a different logical and political validity than expressions such as “living in the end times” (for which see Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* [London: Verso, 2010]).

3. See Hampshire, *Justice Is Conflict*, 34f.; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 332f.

4. Žižek, *Violence*, 7.

5. Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal carcere*, ed. V. Gerratana (Torino: Einaudi, 1975), Quaderno 14, 1932–33, 1727.

6. See pp. 249–250 in this chapter.

7. See Said, *Orientalism*, 332.

8. Quaderno 3, 1930, 34.

9. *History* III.81.1–2; 84.1: Corcyra's is the "first" stasis that then spreads to convulse "the entire Hellenic world." That the entire Peloponnesian War is a stasis is the thesis of Jonathan J. Price, *Thucydides and Internal War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3–5. For other cases of stasis, see the ones at Notion (III.34), Rhegion (IV.1.3), Leontini (V.4.3), and Messene (V.5.1).

10. War shapes human action; it is a necessary condition of stasis; yet stasis goes a step further as it affects the body (individual or collective) from within. No external war by itself can bring down a healthy organism; whereas stasis destroys the organism by disintegrating its living unity.

11. See Price, *Thucydides and Internal War*, 12 and 22ff., for the seamless transition in *History*, III.81–82 from the account of the events at Corcyra to the outlining of a "model both for the present and for all times," valid for "all *staseis*."

12. See Price, *Thucydides and Internal War*, 21f.

13. See the opposition of *gnomai* and *ergai* at III. 82.2: the cognitive position of judgment is dominant in peace, the extreme of passion and emotion in war; see also 84.1–2: in *stasis* "assaults of pitiless cruelty," often carried out by men, are performed "not with a view to gain," but as men "being on terms of complete equality with their foe, are utterly carried away by uncontrollable passion."

14. See Price, *Thucydides and Internal War*, 29, who rightly insists on this difference separating the two accounts against the literature that is overwhelmingly interested in stressing their similarities.

15. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, AA 4, 402f. (lying promise); 422 (borrowing money).

16. See *Groundwork*, AA 4, 423.

17. *Groundwork*, AA 4, 423.

18. See III.82.2: war is "a rough teacher."

19. Unless otherwise remarked, all the quotes in this section are from Gramsci's Quaderno 3, 1930, 34.

20. The "normal" solution implying a balance of consensus and force (see Antonio Gramsci, *Note sul Machiavelli* [Torino: Einaudi, 1966], 37).

21. Interestingly, in the Italian political vocabulary of the time, this is the core of *trasformismo*: governments remain the same by constantly changing on the surface, that is, by constantly adapting to the needs of the moment without truly addressing them. *Trasformismo* is also a sign of lack of hegemony.

22. Antonio Gramsci, *Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura* (Torino: Einaudi, 1966), 43.

23. Gramsci, *Gli intellettuali*, 43.

24. See Antonio Gramsci, *Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce* (Torino: Einaudi, 1966), 11.

25. Continuing in Bauman's aftermath, Étienne Balibar has for his part appealed to the concept of interregnum most recently to address the current European Greek crisis (<http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1987-etienne-balibar-the-relations-greece-and-europe-need>—May 12, 2015).

26. This debt goes through Keith Tester, "Pleasure, Reality, the Novel, and Pathology," *Journal of Anthropological Psychology* 21 (2009): 23–29, 25.

27. Zygmunt Bauman, "Times of Interregnum," *Ethics & Global Politics* 5, 1 (2012): 49–56, 51.

28. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

29. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000); Mark Davis, "Bauman's Compass: Navigating the Current Interregnum," *Acta Sociologica* 54, 2 (2011): 183–194, 188f.

30. See the end of the essay where this connection is specifically discussed, Nadine Gordimer, "Living in the Interregnum," in *The Essential Gesture: Writing, Politics and Places* (New York: Knopf, 1988), 261–284, 281f.

31. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 263.

32. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 262.

33. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 266.

34. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 262f.

35. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 263.

36. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 282.

37. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 262.

38. "The choice, for blacks, cannot be distanced into any kind of objectivity: they believe in the existence of the lash they feel" (Gordimer, "Interregnum," 280).

39. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 280.

40. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 263; see also 270.

41. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 273.

42. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 274.

43. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 264.

44. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 264, 272.

45. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 272.

46. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 278.

47. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 265.

48. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 281.

49. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 264f.; see 266f. for the quote from Bishop Desmond Tutu.

50. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 267.

51. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 269f.

52. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 265. In addition, writers as all artists have different senses and different perceptions; see 277.

53. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 266.

54. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 281.

55. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 268f., illustrates the point in a narrative way by chronicling the clash between the African National Congress, the Progressive Federal Party, and the Black Sash organization over the issue of maintaining a unitary South Africa in a meeting at Johannesburg City Hall.

56. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 269.

57. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 276.

58. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 278.

59. Gordimer, "Interregnum," 284.

Chapter 6

1. Carson, *Plainwater*, 88f.

2. Carson, *Plainwater*, 89.

3. Carson, *Plainwater*, 90.

4. The purpose is fulfilled when we go back to the beginning; we go back to the beginning when the purpose is fulfilled.

5. See Nuzzo, "The Truth of 'absolutes Wissen' in Hegel's *Phenomenology*."

6. For example, if we take "being" as the opening determination of the first logical sphere, it is only at this point, in the thematization of the end, that "being" can be discerned as the content of the beginning of the logic.

7. *Poetics*, 18, 1555b 23ff.

8. *Poetics*, 7, 1450b 25–30.

9. *Poetics*, 7, 1450b.

10. See the "but also" in the passage, which puts *Dasein* and *Wesen* on the same plane.

11. For the indifference of being at this point, the "abstract expression 'Indifferenz' has been used" (TW 5, 445).

12. F.W.J. Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke*, I, 10, 130.

13. F.W.J. Schelling, *Die Weltalter*, trans. J. Norman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977), 131–133, 143.

14. Also, "Die Bestimmung der endlichen Dinge ist nicht eine weitere als ihr *Ende*" (TW 5, 140).

15. See Stephen Houlgate, "The Logic of Measure in Hegel's *Science of Logic*," *Jahrbuch des deutschen Idealismus* (2016): 115–138, 118 (unfortunately, Houlgate does not address Absolute Indifference here).

16. See Michael Bauer, "Sublating Kant and the Old Metaphysics: A Reading of the Transition from Being to Essence in Hegel's Logic," *The Owl of Minerva* 9 (1998): 139–164, 146; see for the conclusion of Measure, David Carlson, "Hegel and the Becoming of Essence," in *The Spirit of the Age: Hegel and the Fate of Thinking* (Melbourne: re.press, 2008), 118–132; Friedrike Schick, "Die Entwicklung der

Kategorie des Maßes in seiner Realität und in seinem Übergang zum Wesen,” in *Hegel—200 Jahre Wissenschaft der Logik*, ed. A. Koch, F. Schick, K. Vieweg, and C. Wirsing (Hamburg: Meiner, 2014), 139–152; for a historical discussion of Hegel’s thought about measure from the Jena Logic to the *Science of Logic*, see Cinzia Ferrini, “On the Relation Between ‘Mode’ and ‘Measure’ in Hegel’s *Science of Logic*: Some Introductory Remarks,” *The Owl of Minerva* 20, 1 (1988): 21–49, and recently, Claudio Cesa, “Problemi della misura,” in *System und Logik bei Hegel—200 Jahren nach der Wissenschaft der Logik*, ed. L. Fonnesu, L. Ziglioli (Hildesheim: Olms, 2016), 177–192.

17. Simply put: “The negativity of essence is reflection” (TW 6, 15).

18. Terry Pinkard’s translation adds a “not *merely* as substance” in order to make the sentence flow grammatically. There is no “*merely*,” however, in Hegel’s claim but a direct negation, “*not* as substance.”

19. Essence is here “das *Lichtscheue*”: TW 6, 216.

20. See TW 6, 402.

21. T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, “Little Gidding II,” in *The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1971), 141.

22. Samuel Beckett, *Endgame: A Play in One Act Followed by Act Without Words: A Mime for One Player* (New York: Grove Press, 1958).

23. See Stanley E. Gontarski, “An End to Endings: Samuel Beckett’s End Game(s),” *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd’hui* 19 (2008): 415–417, 419–429, 420. *Endgame* “has too many [endings], or [. . .] it has only endings.”

24. See Dougald McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theater: The Author as Practical Playwright and Director* (London: Calder; New York: River-run Press, 1988), 224f.

25. Gontarski, “An End to Endings,” 424, for Beckett’s stage directions on Hamm’s “chronicle.”

26. Samuel Beckett, *Malone Dies* in *Three Novels* (New York: Grove Press, 1955, 1956, 1958), 171–282.

27. It is relevant that *Endgame: A Play in One Act* (with two players, or two couples) is “Followed by” *Act Without Words: A Mime for One Player*—the play for two/four players, playing with words, is followed by a “mime” for one player, without words. The course of *Endgame* exhausts the form of the play, exhausts the use of words in communication (see Theodor W. Adorno, “Trying to Understand *Endgame*,” in *Notes on Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), vol. 1, 241–276, 263), and is a *reductio ad unum* with regard to the characters.

28. There are, of course, two other pieces on the board, Nagg and Nell. *Endgame*, 25, 26, 76. See also at 23 Hamm: “My kingdom for a nightman!” The relationship between Hamm and Clov is obviously more complicated: family relationship, perhaps lovers, the game of the end applies to all these cases. See Adorno, “Trying to Understand *Endgame*,” 270, also with regard to the result of the game: “Whether the game ends in a stalemate or in an eternal check, or whether Clov

wins, is not made clear.” The play’s general setup has been interpreted in a variety of ways, among which a critical or post-colonial version of the master-slave relation, a variation on Noah’s ark’s survival story, a post-apocalyptic scenario or the scenario of survival after atomic war (Stanley Cavell, “Ending the Waiting Game: A Reading of Beckett’s *Endgame*,” in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 115–163, offers a good example of the array of possibilities involved; see Nels C. Pearson, “‘Outside of Here Is Death’: Co-Dependency and the Ghosts of Decolonization in Beckett’s ‘*Endgame*,’” *ELH* 68, 1 (2001): 215–239, for a post-colonial reading of the play with regard to the Irish situation). Gontarski (“An End to End to Endings,” 423) also brings to the fore the hammer-nails reference (Hamm’s hammer, three or four nails: Clov, Nell, Nagg, perhaps Mother Pegg) involved and their symbolism of human suffering and Christ’s crucifixion (which implies a death that is no real death, which entails a new beginning). Presently, I leave these interpretive questions aside and concentrate on the internal logic of the play. I believe that the artistic impact of this work is due, among other things, precisely to the fact that it leaves its time and place coordinates open.

29. The significance of the paradox is dismissed by Rolf Breuer, “Paradox in Beckett,” *The Modern Language Review* 88, 3 (1993): 559–580; comments on Beckett’s sources but no attention to the deeper significance of the paradox are in David Addyman and Matthew Feldman, “Samuel Beckett, Wilhelm Windelband and the Interwar ‘Philosophy Notes,’” *Modernism/Modernity* 18, 4 (2012): 755–770; Eric P. Levy, “Disintegrative Process in *Endgame*,” *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd’hui* 12 (2002): 263–279, 264f., mentions the heap paradox, which he does not, however, read as addressing the problem of the end but the connected issue of the disintegration of the whole; see also Gontarski, “An End to Endings,” 422, who mentions the “admittedly arcane [. . .] allusion” of the paradox.

30. In a similar vein, the millet grains appear in the 1946 *Mercier and Camier*: “every millet grain that falls, you look behind and there you are, every day a little closer, all life a little closer” (Samuel Beckett, *Mercier and Camier* [London: Faber, 2010], 62).

31. See Beckett’s letter to Alan Schneider, November 21, 1957, concerning his “Philosophy Notes” on the pre-Socratics, “the argument of the Heap and the Bald Head” in particular: “The leading Sophist, against whom Plato wrote his Dialogue, was Protagoras and he is probably the ‘old Greek’ whose name Hamm can’t remember. One purpose of the image throughout the play is to suggest the impossibility logically, i.e., eristically, of the “thing” ever coming to an end” (qtd. in Addyman and Feldman, “Samuel Beckett, Wilhelm Windelband and the Interwar ‘Philosophy Notes,’” 758). Herein Beckett confirms the key role played by the paradox of the heap for *Endgame in its entirety*. The paradox was Zeno’s. Although the paradox concerns the whole-parts relation, it is, more accurately in Beckett’s view, concerning the “impossibility” of the “thing” coming to an end.

32. The Beckettian double inversion is important: death is always there, we wait for life to be formed; but also, apparently more intuitively, life is already there, we wait for death to happen.

33. For a comparison of the different versions and editions of the play with regard to the issue of the beginning-end, see Evan Horowitz, “‘Endgame’: Beginning to End,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 27, 4 (2004): 121–128.

34. See *Malone Dies*, 218: “It’s vague, life and death”—vagueness being in effect the logical basis of the heap paradox. “I must have had my little private idea on the subject when I began, otherwise I would not have begun.”

35. See Gontarski, “An End to Endings,” 425.

36. For example, *Endgame*, 2: “Hamm: Me—(*he yawns*)—to play,” which is taken up at the end, at 77 by “Clov (*imploringly*): Let’s stop playing! Hamm: Never!”; and at the very end, at 82: Hamm: “Me to play (*Pause. Wearily.*) Old endgame lost of old”; Hamm’s hesitation at 3; Clov’s “trying” at 6 (see the following discussion).

37. And Nagg’s joke *Endgame*, 22f.

38. Christopher Ricks, *Beckett’s Dying Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 115.

39. It is the same paradox of the endgame: if the end comes, there is no endgame; if the end does not come, the endgame remains unfinished.

40. As in Henry’s case in Beckett’s *Embers: A Piece for Radio* (1959) (in *Krapp’s Last Tape and Other Dramatic Pieces* [New York: Grove Press, 1959], 57–76, 60), with regard to the story about the “old fellow called Bolton, I never finished it, I never finished any of them, I never finished anything, everything always went on forever”—the bad infinite. See also the same convergence of story told, life lived, and short-story-text in the conclusion of “The End” (in *The Complete Short Prose* [New York: Grove Press, 1995], 78–100, 99), whose character’s last words are: “The memory came faint and cold of the story I might have told, a story in the likeness of my life, I mean without the courage to end or the strength to go on.”

41. See also the double negation establishing the alleged indifference: “After all it is not important not to finish, there are worse things than velleities” (*Malone Dies*, 192).

42. Randolph Quirk, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, 599, qtd. in Ricks, *Beckett’s Dying Words*, 132.

43. Ricks, *Beckett’s Dying Words*, 132f.

44. If it is the survivor’s life that time ended, “in the shelter too,” that is, the survivor of the catastrophe that has already brought nature to an end, then the phrase is doubly ironic. To survive is then nothing else but to be condemned to the endgame (what is then the point of surviving or rather, what kind of survival is it?).

45. At the end of the play, the corresponding “words that remain—sleeping, waking, morning, evening,” will have “nothing to say” to Clov (*Endgame*, 81).

46. For the contradictory meaning of “last” in Beckett, which “may mean finality and extinction or, rather the reverse, endurance and continuance,” see Ricks, *Beckett’s Dying Words*, 144.

47. Emphasis is generally put on the lack of meaning within the Beckettian horizon; see for example Adorno, “Trying to Understand *Endgame*,” 261. I stress instead the intentional object as well, the “something.”

48. The significance of the difference between “gone” and “dead” is later on further undermined when Hamm, upon calling on Clov and seeing him coming, exclaims: “What? Neither gone nor dead?” (*Endgame*, 70). *Tertium datur*.

49. Adorno puts the point as follows: “In the realm between life and death, where it is no longer possible even to suffer, everything rides on the distinction between sawdust and sand”—an utterly indifferent distinction (“Trying to Understand *Endgame*,” 266).

50. See Ricks, *Beckett’s Dying Words*, 39: “As to ‘if I may venture the expression’: it is brought home that there are in this life two great ventures, both of them expressions: birth and death. We are expressed, once and then once and for all. And ‘expression’ meets [. . .] its answering ‘impression,’ a reminder that if we were once each of us expressed, it was naturally by force of impression.” Indeed, expression—*Äusserung* and *Entäusserung*—is the way of ending proper of essence but successful only with the absolute idea. Ultimately, expression is the “way out” from the logic (into nature).

51. Samuel Beckett, *Rough for Theater I*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 225–234, 229 (my emphasis).

52. As in Malone’s consideration of the possibility “that I am dead already and that all continues more or less as when I was not” (*Malone Dies*, 213).

53. Adorno, “Trying to Understand *Endgame*,” 274. Adorno’s interpretation of *Endgame* is in terms of “parody” as the “technique of reversal” that condemns all differences to indifference (274).

54. See, among the many *Zibaldone*’s texts, *Zibaldone* [1619ff.] (Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone di pensieri* [Torino: Einaudi], http://www.letteraturaitaliana.net/pdf/Volume_8/t226.pdf, 1135ff.), for Leopardi’s view of the absolute in an 1821 note.

55. See Cesare Luporini, *Leopardi progressivo* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1993), for an account of this problem from Leopardi’s early to the later writings. In Leopardi’s early thought, to put the point briefly, “indifference” is the product of reason, which dries out sentiments, passions, illusions, and hopes, and renders man insensitive, egoistic, even “insensitive toward himself” hence suicidal (see the early *Zibaldone* [87], 121). Moreover, indifference is a distinctive characteristic of modern man. Against reason, nature is compassionate and passionate, the source of positive hopes and illusions. In Leopardi’s later thought, by contrast, Indifference is the position of nature with all that follows (see the following discussion).

56. See also “La Ginestra,” vv. 158ff., for nature’s infinity and immensity against which man “is nothing” (v. 173).

57. Giacomo Leopardi, “Dialogo della Natura e di un Islandese,” in *Operette morali* (Milano: Mondadori, 1988), 115–122.

58. In the “Dialogo della Natura e di un’Anima” in stressing the same a-teleological and anti-anthropocentric view of Nature, Leopardi suggests that Nature herself is subject to “blind fate” in all her actions (see *Operette morali*, 75).

59. Presently, I want to stress the first (poetry and beauty) over the second point (solidarity: for this see Luporini, *Leopardi progressivo*, 83, 94).

60. See also *Zibaldone*, [4428], 2985 (dated Recanati, January 2, 1829): defending his “philosophy” from the charge of “misanthropy,” Leopardi sees nature or “the highest principle” as “culpable of everything”: “La mia filosofia fa rea d’ogni cosa la natura, e disculpando gli uomini totalmente, rivolge l’odio, o se non altro il lamento, a principio più alto, all’origine vera de’ mali de’ viventi.”

61. See for this shift Helen Vendler, *Last Looks, Last Books: Stevens, Plath, Bishop, Merrill* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 2, who quotes Stevens.

62. In this sense, I do believe that Bishop does not deny “the species immortality” but the individual’s, see Vendler, *Last Looks, Last Books*, 102, who references Keats’s immortal nightingale.

63. Vendler, *Last Looks, Last Books*, 103.

64. Ricks, *Beckett’s Dying Words*, 7.

65. Ricks, *Beckett’s Dying Words*, 8.

66. See Vendler, *Last Looks, Last Books*, 70–93.

67. See Vendler, *Last Looks, Last Books*, 76f.

68. Vendler, *Last Looks, Last Books*, 96.

69. Vendler, *Last Looks, Last Books*, 98.

70. Jeredith Merrin underscores the more troubled conclusion that goes hand in hand with the “happy ending” of “Sonnet,” a conclusion that is summed up in the “ominously ‘empty mirror’” (“Gaiety, Gayness, and Change,” in *Elizabeth Bishop: The Geography of Gender*, ed. M. May Lombardi [Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993], 153–172, 170f.).

71. Vendler, *Last Looks, Last Books*, 100. For an interpretation of this “gay!” as a reference to Bishop’s homosexuality, see Merrin, “Gaiety, Gayness, and Change,” 162ff.

72. *Endgame* has been interpreted, instead, as a form of Hegelian master-slave dialectic, with the post-colonial reference to the Irish condition included. Again, what concerns me is not a Hegelian reading of literary text but the opposite: to bring an utterly non-Hegelian text to bear on my reading of the logic.

73. See the previous discussion at 1.3.

74. “Life is as essential to it as is pure self-consciousness” (TW 3, 150).

75. See the *Unerschütterlichkeit* that the subject seeks in Hegel’s account of Stoicism in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (TW 19, 252).

76. See René Descartes, Fourth Meditation: “The indifference I feel when there is no reason impelling me in one direction rather than another is the lowest grade of freedom (*infimus gradus libertatis*); it is evidence not of any perfection of freedom, but rather of a defect in knowledge or a kind of negation” (AT, 7, 58). This is, for Descartes the predicament of human freedom. God’s freedom, instead, is the foremost case of *libertas indifferentiae*.

77. This third moment of the will—indifference to determination after determination has taken place—is indeed close to the absolute indifference that defines, for Descartes, divine freedom: God is not determined to create one way or the other (not even with regard to the eternal truths); he is indifferent to the determination leading to creation. See for example this passage from the Sixth Replies: “It is self-contradictory to suppose that the will of God was not indifferent from eternity with respect to everything [. . .] because it is impossible to imagine that anything is thought of in the divine intellect as good or true [. . .] prior to the decision of the divine will to make it so” (AT 7, 431f.). There is an underlying core issue that runs from Descartes to Schelling and connects God’s absolute indifference, freedom, and creation. Hegel fundamentally changes the structure of the problem. First and foremost, at stake is not creation as a beginning but the action of ending.

78. This is meant not historically but systematically in regard to the logical structures examined so far.

79. Kant, *Das Ende aller Dinge* (1794), in AA 8, 327–339.

80. Here we get to the thematic constellation that Hegel secularizes and renders immanent in history by appealing to Schiller’s image of the *Weltgericht*.

81. A similar image, this time with reference to tragedy, is evoked in the 1793 *Theory and Practice* essay in arguing against Moses Mendelssohn’s conception of history. See AA 8, 308.

82. See Zuckert, “Kant on Practical Fanaticism,” 291–318, 310, who addresses Kant’s critique of these positions as a critique of practical fanaticism.

83. This is the function of the “end” as “moment” of the method: “Die Methode selbst erweitert sich durch dies Moment zu einem Systeme” (TW 6, 567).

84. As I have argued in chapter 4, creativity is not a feature of the beginning but of the ending action. Herein lies a fundamental difference between Hegel’s dialectical account and Arendt’s notion of natality as proper of all beginning actions as such (see *The Human Condition*, 177–178).

85. G.W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1980).

86. I have addressed this issue in “‘What Are Poets For?’ Renewing the Question with Hegel and Heidegger,” *Philosophy Today* 59, 1 (2015): 37–60.

87. Nicolaus Cusanus, *Sermo 276*: “Christ’s death was a complete death because he knowingly viewed the death that he was resolved to suffer.” On this basis, the death he suffered has always already happened (in knowledge). See also *Sermo 270*: “Unum tamen notabis, quod mors Christi sola potuit mereri vitam aeternam, quia consummata mors meretur vitam immortalem” (*Codus Vaticanus*

Latinus 1245, fol. 227 ra, 10–12). See Walter Andreas Euler, “Does Nicholas Cusanus Have a Theology of the Cross?” *The Journal of Religion* 80, 3 (2000): 405–420, 415f.; more generally Rudolf Haubst, *Streifzüge in die cusanische Theologie* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1991).

88. See chapter 3.

89. For a textual reading of these sections, see my “Hegels Auffassung der Philosophie als System und die drei Schlüsse der *Enzyklopädie*.”

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*Unless otherwise noted, translations are always mine.

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In this book, Angelica Nuzzo proposes a reading of Hegel's Logic as "logic of transformation" and "logic of action," and supports this thesis by looking to works of literature and history as exemplary of Hegel's argument and method. By examining Melville's *Billy Budd*, Molière's *Tartuffe*, Beckett's *Endgame*, Elizabeth Bishop's and Giacomo Leopardi's late poetry along with Thucydides' *History* in this way, Nuzzo finds an unprecedented and productive way to render Hegel's Logic alive and engaging. She argues that Melville's *Billy Budd* is the most successful embodiment of the abstract movement of thinking presented in Hegel's Logic, connecting Billy Budd's stutter to the puzzlingly inarticulate beginning of Hegel's Logic, "Being, pure Being," identical with "Nothing," and argues that the Logic serves as an especially appropriate tool for understanding the sudden violent action that strikes Claggart dead. Through these and other readings, Nuzzo finds a fresh way to address interpretive issues that have remained unresolved for almost two centuries in Hegel scholarship, and also presents well-known works of literature in an entirely new light. This account of Hegel's Logic is framed by the need for an interpretive tool able to orient our understanding of the contemporary world as mired in an unprecedented global crisis. How can the story of our historical present—the tragedy or the comedy we all play parts in—be told? What is the inner logic of our changing world?

"Angelica Nuzzo presents an original interpretation of Hegel's Logic by representing it as a logic of action. This novel approach is supported by insightful readings of the literary texts she covers in the book."

— Andrew Cutrofello, author of *All for Nothing: Hamlet's Negativity*

Angelica Nuzzo is Professor of Philosophy at the Graduate Center and Brooklyn College, City University of New York. She is the author of *Memory, History, Justice in Hegel* and the editor of *Hegel on Religion and Politics*, also published by SUNY Press.

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