IX

The Category of Contingency in the Hegelian Logic

by

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I

The immediate aim of the present study is the relatively narrow one of analyzing a section of Hegel's "greater Logic" which deals with the modal categories in order to understand what Hegel means by "contingency". The study should be viewed, however, in the context of a problem which is as old as the history of Hegelian criticism; but which recently has been brought again to the centre of scholarly attention because of new research done on the development of Hegel's thought during the crucial formative years of the Jena period. I shall now try to indicate the problem, and to show how the study that follows relates to it.

It appears that even at the beginning of his stay at Jena, when Hegel was closely collaborating with Schelling, he had already assumed an attitude towards philosophy that set him quite apart from his mentor, and even put him on the side of Fichte. In the *Differenzschrift* Hegel had assigned to philosophy (not to art, as Schelling had) the function of reconciling thought with nature, reflection with immediacy.[1] However, as Heinz Kimmerle has rightly pointed out, in taking this step Hegel had in fact accepted Fichte's criticism of Schelling.[2] He had admitted to the futility of trying to gain a standpoint that transcends the limits of reflection. Schelling's Philosophy of Nature still remained *philosophy*; and his appeal to art was done from the side of thought and in order to resolve a problem created by reflection. At best Schelling had mediated the thought of thought with the *thought* of nature. He had left untouched the issue of how reflection can overcome the disproportion that separates it from the *fact* of nature. It does not follow, of course, that Hegel could have accepted Fichte's notion of na-

ture as a surd which perpetually eludes the reflection of thought. For him, just as much as for Schelling, thought must be able to recognize itself in nature. However, the subtle modification brought to Schelling's position in the *Differenzschrift* indicates that for Hegel the ground for the reconciliation (i.e., the moment of identity between thought and nature) must be sought from within the standpoint of reflection.

Now, we know that at Jena Hegel repeatedly lectured on Logic and Metaphysics; and that at first he conceived the Logic as an introduction to Metaphysics. We also know that he quickly came to the realization that the two sciences ought to be combined into a single one (a new "Logic") which would be at once logic *and* metaphysics. Hegel thus withdrew from the Logic its introductory role; and assigned it to a Science of Experience on which he had been working, and which finally took the form of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.[3] It is clear, therefore, how Hegel moved to counter Fichte's objection. To Schelling's philosophy he opposed the idea of a science which, as the elaboration of the concept of thought (viz., as logic), would equally be science of being (viz., metaphysics). In order to break out of Fichte's impasse *vis-à-vis* nature, he did not try to assume a standpoint that transcends thought. He proposed to show, instead, that it is possible for thought to recognize the *fact* of nature as a moment of its life as thought.

At Jena, therefore, the idea is already present for the later System. Also present, however, are the elements for the objection that the critics of the System have constantly raised against it.[4] If it is granted to Hegel that the essence of nature is thought, it is indeed undeniable that the difficulty facing both Schelling and Fichte disappears. No opposition is possible between *real* mediation of thought with nature and the merely reflective synthesis of the concept of one with the concept of the other, for the distinction between real and ideal has lost its force. However, Hegel's feat in removing the difficulty is accomplished only at the price of idealizing even the *fact* of nature. And while to Hegel's eyes the idealism of Fichte and Schelling might have appeared inconsistent for having allowed the difficulty to stand, Hegel's own System can be charged with lack of seriousness precisely because it pretends to have made the mediation between thought and nature complete. The System undercuts all problems of mediation by the simple device of removing within the magic circle of idealistic thought all the material we normally look for in the real world.[5]

I am ready to introduce at this point the theme of the paper. In classical metaphysics contingency has always denoted a limitation of reason. A contingent event (as contingent) is an element of reality impervious to full rationalization. Its occurrence must be accepted without explanation; and any theory suggesting that it is possible to account for it would in fact be denying that "contingency" has objective meaning. However, as Dieter Henrich has so well argued in an article of 1958, Hegel's philosophy is unique in that it maintains the necessity of contingency.[6] It claims that it is possible to comprehend it in thought. Hegel thus tries to avoid the classical alternative posed by contingency (viz., either "contingency" has only subjective meaning, or reality is not fully rational) in the same way in which he tries to resolve the impasse reached by the idealism of his contemporaries. He re-introduces *within* reason what would otherwise appear as a limitation affecting it from without. And this move is only to be expected. For contingency is the essential feature that distinguishes the fact of nature from the thought of it. And if Hegel's System is to comprehend the fact of nature, it must be able to comprehend it precisely as contingent.

The case of contingency thus offers an excellent test by which to measure the seriousness of Hegel's claim to "complete mediation". It also provides, however, a criterion by which to judge the accuracy of whatever notion *we* might have of what Hegel means by that claim. If Hegel can show that contingency need not be merely presupposed, but that the inevitability of its presence can be understood; moreover, if he can show that in thus comprehending contingency, he does not reduce it to necessity—then Hegel has managed to break free from the circle of idealistic thought. He has demonstrated that it is possible to recognize the *reality* of contingency without having to step outside the limits of logical reflection. But a reflection that accomplishes a feat of this sort must be of a very special kind. And one can enquire in all fairness whether, rather than bringing to its logical conclusion the idealism of his contemporaries, Hegel has not in point of fact grounded it on a completely new basis.[7]

There are indications that clearly point in the latter direction. Consider, for instance, how thought develops in the Logic. Its movement depends on the tension created within each category between what the category *intends* to signify (or signifies *formally*, or *explicitly*), and what it signifies *in actual fact* (or *implicitly*). Let me elaborate on this point,

using an example which will also allow me to introduce the two categories of *possibility* and *actuality* with which we shall be concerned later.[8] Consider how these two categories differ from two others—viz., the categories of *essence* and *immediacy*, which appear at an earlier stage of the Logic. There is obviously very much in common between the two sets of categories. Both presuppose, as a condition for signifying an object, that a distinction be recognized between the *presence* of the object as mere fact, and the *reflection* which justifies its being present. However, the degree to which the distinction has become part of the formal signification of the four categories differs considerably from one set to the other. The explicit intention of essence and immediacy is to each signify one side of the distinction to the total exclusion of the other. Essence intends to signify the object exclusively as reflection within itself: as pure explanatory ground; immediacy, for its part, intends to signify it exclusively as mere fact. But the formal intention of the two categories is clearly self-defeating. For if it were ever realized, it would destroy upon realization the context within which alone it makes sense to refer to an object as either essence or mere fact. The two categories, therefore, are made to suffer a strange fate at the hands of Hegel's dialectic. Although each *means* to express one side alone of the distinction, in actual fact both are shown to signify one side as well as the other. Essence can just as well be mere fact, while any fact can be taken as the basis for an explanation. In the course of the dialectic, in other words, a disproportion is revealed between the *formal* intention of the two categories and what they signify in *actual* fact.[9]

With actuality and possibility, the situation is quite different. The object they both signify is one which, on presenting itself to an observing subject, does not remain mere fact but proffers a reason for its presence. But possibility refers to the object taking its starting point from the explanatory ground which the object would offer were it to become actually present. Actuality, on the other hand, refers to it starting from the opposite direction. It signifies the object as already present—but with a presence achieved on the basis of a ground which (albeit not obvious in some cases) can in principle always be adduced. The relation that holds between the two categories is *explicitly ambiguous*. Their meaning is definitely not identical. On the contrary, it is true to say that to the extent that an object is only possible, it is not actual; and to the extent that it is actual, it is no longer merely possible.

The meaning of one category excludes that of the other. Yet, it is equally true to say that the two categories are complementary—that each points to the other as completing its own line of signification. Actuality is still possibility: but possibility as achieved; and possibility is already actuality: but actuality as merely adumbrated. One can also legitimately claim, therefore, that the more possible something is, the closer it is to being actual; and the more actual, the more entitled to the claim of being possible.

Possibility and actuality thus overcome the abstractness of essence and immediacy. They include in their formal signification the ambivalence which for the other set of categories had been a *de facto* result. In this way they manage to express *formally* what they would otherwise signify only in *actual fact*; and are no longer subject, therefore, (at least, not in the same sense) to the same process that has reduced to mere abstractions the previous expressions of the logical object.

Now, a discrepancy between the intention of any given category in the Logic, and the determination which it actually brings to the logical object, manifests itself under one form or another at every stage of the Logic. The discrepancy conditions the logical development by injecting into it an element of immediacy. I do not mean to say that the movement of thought in the Logic is subject to the same historical vicissitudes as the development of consciousness in the *Phenomenology*.[10] The Logic is the science of pure thought. From beginning to end it is nothing but a reflection of thought upon itself. However, I must stress that for Hegel even pure thought is at first present to itself only immediately. In fact, its appearance at the beginning of the Logic is so immediate that it can be articulated only indirectly.[11] Moreover, until the final reflection takes place which reinterprets all the categories that have appeared up to that point as the content of the Idea,[12] the logical movement tends to fall (because of the immediacy by which it is affected) into a series of abstract thought expressions only implicitly connected with one another. The sense of the whole movement is made explicit only by the comments provided by the concrete subject engaged in the Logic—viz., the philosopher.

The whole effort of the Logic is directed at shaking off the immediacy of its beginning, and at incorporating within the explicit content of the Idea all the unofficial comments made along the way by the philosopher. It would be wrong, however, to take lightly either the

immediacy with which logical reflection is affected; or the presence (albeit unofficial) of the philosopher. The two provide the link between thought and reality which is at issue in the System. I should indicate that I am assuming at this point a crucial position with regard to the Hegelian System. Hegel's Logic is a moment in the experience of an individual (viz., the philosopher) engaged in history and nature. It is not a thought-construction which, starting from *a priori* principles, should rejoin a concrete set of experiences which stand outside of it. In fact, Hegel's Logic has hardly anything in common with the Transcendental Logic of Kant, or the constructions of either Fichte or Schelling. It is to be understood, rather, as the re-enactment in the medium of pure thought of experiences which have already been lived. In the play between immediacy and reflection witnessed in the logical movement, the philosopher should recognize his own effort as a historical individual engaged in overcoming the immediacy of nature. It is only in the Logic that the possibility of his experiences is finally understood. It is important to stress, however, that the Logic operates from the start within the limits of those experiences; and that it is not intended to comprehend anything else but their possibility. The transition, therefore, from thought to reality which Hegel's Logic is supposed to perform is not as formidable a task as it might appear to be at first—not because Hegel has idealized reality, but because with his Logic he only intends to complete an experience which has begun in the immediate presence of history and nature.

These comments bring us back to the problem of contingency. For the immediate is contingent; and if the logical movement is affected by immediacy, it follows that it is in some sense contingent. The essential task of the Logic is to overcome the contingency to which its beginning and its progress are subject. But what does Hegel mean by contingency, and in what sense does one overcome it? This is the question to which we must now turn.

II

The dialectic to be considered falls into the three stages common to the Logic. The first consists in the exposition of the formal meanings of *possibility*, *actuality*, *necessity*, and *contingency*. At this first stage, the

four concepts are considered *in abstracto*—only inasmuch as they form a system of related meanings and provide the basis for the thought of an object in general. At the second stage, a distinction is introduced between the object and the categories. The object thus begins to function as a material to which the categories bring particular determinations. In the third and final stage, an attempt is made at overcoming the distinction introduced in the second. The meaning of the categories is so reformulated as to allow them to regain the generality they enjoyed at the first stage, but without losing the concreteness they gained when operating in relation to an assumed content.[13]

I have already commented indirectly on the formal meaning of actuality and possibility. I have pointed out that the two categories have independent meaning; yet each expressly points to the other for the fulfillment of its own signification. The existence of what is actual should be justifiable; and what is justifiable, should be actual. However, it does not necessarily follow from the fact that something is possible, that it will actually exist. Nor does it follow from the fact that it exists that an explanation for its existence can actually be given. At the formal level of analysis, the transition from one category to the other (even though expressly required by both) remains immediate. It must be performed on the strength of considerations extrinsic to the logical play of the categories. Hegel argues, moreover, that the immediacy is due to the present abstractness of the two categories. Possibility signifies a mere self-reference on the part of an object (a justification only in principle); and actuality, a mere presence. Neither category characterizes an object concretely enough to reveal just *how*, on being possible, it must be actual; and on being actual, possible. And the abstractness of each is directly related to the abstractness of the other.[14] It is because the possibility of an object is a *mere* possibility, that the object will appear only as a "possible" (". . . nur ein Mögliches . . .")—the sort of actual, in other words, that might as well have not been. Conversely, it is because an actual is (as Hegel puts it) an *immediate first*[15] (i.e., something merely present and still open to determination) that the possibility it establishes remains formal.

The first result, therefore, of the dialectic of actuality and possibility is an ambiguity regarding the character of the object which the two categories signify, and which they are both expected to

determine. The object is neither quite actual yet, nor possible; or again, it is at once actual and possible, precisely because it is neither of them determinedly. This ambiguity is expressed by Hegel with the category of *contingency*: "The unity of possibility and actuality is contingency."[16]

I ask you to look at this text carefully, because it is in passages like this that one can appreciate the distance that separates Hegel's Logic from classical metaphysics. In classical metaphysics, contingency was thought to be the result of a discrepancy between possibility and actuality. Hegel now defines it as the unity *(die Einheit)* of the two. Implied by this move is a radical innovation in the understanding of the nature of possibility, and also of the relationship that thought (which expresses the possibility of reality) holds to reality itself. For Hegel, possibility is not a ground that transcends actuality. It is not (if I may make my own a comment of G. R. G. Mure)[17] like a reservoir of yet unrealized being upon which God chooses either to draw or not to draw. It is instead a determination of formal actuality. It is actuality inasmuch as it is expected to result in yet more actuality. And formal possibility is a determination of actuality. It is actuality inasmuch as it is still open to determination. For Hegel, in other words, the distinction between actuality and possibility falls exclusively within the limits of phenomenal existence, and is a characteristic of its phenomenality. To express the possibility of reality in thought, therefore, does not mean to transcend its immediate appearance (as if there were anything to reality except its appearing), but to give a description in pure thought form of its structure precisely as appearance. The formal play of the categories of possibility and actuality which Hegel has just unfolded must be understood as the conceptual expression of the unrest of phenomena which leave undetermined on their first appearing exactly what form they will finally take.

Hegel proceeds, therefore, to develop the concept of contingency in terms of the ambiguity inherent in all phenomenal existence.[18] A phenomenon, upon its first appearing, cuts itself off from the process that has led up to it. As Hegel puts it, it abstracts from the reflection that establishes its possibility. For this reason (". . . insofern sie [viz., the reflection] in ihm aufgehoben ist . . ."), it appears as something which has no ground. Like anything which *de facto* is, it

parades itself as self-sufficient. It has its own presence to guarantee for its possibility; and seems to dispense, therefore, with any reference to anything outside of it justifying its existence. It is, simply because it is. However, a simple self-reference is hardly a satisfying justification for the existence of anything. The same abstraction, therefore, that brings out the irrevocability of a phenomenon once it has occurred also detracts from the completeness of its appearance. It bestows upon it the character of something, the reality of which is still in need of developing. The phenomenon is thus a mere possible which must find its fulfillment in something else (*in Gesetztsein*). Now, this ambiguity inherent in the first appearance of anything—its cutting itself loose from justifying grounds, and yet its need for such grounds—is what the category of contingency signifies.

The ambiguity of phenomenal existence is not, however, altogether unmitigated. After the analysis of the category of contingency, Hegel goes on to argue that anything contingent is in principle something necessary.[19] His argument can be re-phrased in this way.[20] The simple self-reference of immediate existence, in spite of the ambiguity that it generates, is nonetheless a real one. However abstract and admittedly insufficient as a principle of explanation, it entails a real distinction within a given event between the event "in itself" and a manifold of determinations which, although belonging to it, cannot be identified with it *tout court*. It also entails a real distinction between the given event and some other possible one. And on the basis of these distinctions, one can begin to relate one determination to another, and the event to yet another event; and obtain thereby a more satisfactory explanation for the presence of the original event than any previous appeal to its mere self-reference. The immediate presence of the event on its first appearing can thus be developed into an explanatory system—viz., a system of explanatory references such as the category of necessity signifies.

Hegel's first explicit statement, therefore, on the nature of contingency and necessity is that both follow with equal strength from the interplay of formal actuality and possibility.[21] Contingency is the result of the abstractness of the two categories which makes their determination of an object a mere adumbration—the first sketch for an object rather than a concrete determination. Contingency, however, does not stand exclusively for irrationality. For the ambiguity with

which it is synonymous is such that all the elements are already present in it for the development of an explanatory system. *Contingency is the matrix out of which necessity arises*. As developed so far, in other words, possibility and actuality establish the possibility for the determination of an object in general. The system of thought that they define ensures that, upon being given, an object will have *some* explanation for its being. But they leave unspecified exactly what form such an explanation will have to take. The system still fails to yield the idea of an actual world.

The task that Hegel must face next is to remedy the abstractness of the formal play of categories. This he does in the second stage of the dialectic by introducing the notion of a material content to which the formal categories of actuality and possibility are applied. In being thus related to it, the two categories are expected to be concretized, and finally to yield the idea of an individually recognizable world.

I shall have to call your attention again later in the paper to this material content. Right now I only want to bring out the function that it plays in the new stage of the dialectic that follows. Hegel subsumes its notion under the general rubric of actuality. Since the content is something merely present, it is something actual. However, as applied to it, "actuality" carries explicitly the extra note of "indifference to determinations". It means a manifold of existents, each indifferent to the presence of any other.[22] The formal categories of actuality and possibility are now expected to introduce within it the first determinations. And they, in turn, will become *real* to the extent that they discharge their determining function.

First, what do possibility and actuality come to mean when they are referred to a manifold of existents and become *real* possibility and *real* actuality. In the transition, the two concepts must retain all the notes included in their formal signification—viz., actuality: the immediate presence of an object which is nonetheless referred to a process of mediation; possibility: the reflection of a thing upon itself (its lack of contradiction) which should yield actual presence. Yet, they must also be so modified as to function effectively as the determining principles of a given content.

Now, Hegel introduces two new concepts which he believes will fill the bill. One is the notion of a "power to effect", with which he replaces the formal category of actuality; the other, the notion of

"circumstance", with which he replaces the former possibility.[23] These two new concepts, while still signifying actuality and possibility, add to them connotations which the previous two failed to convey on their own. A power to effect is something actual—but with an actuality that can be measured by given results. And a circumstance is a source of possibility—but one immediately related to a particular situation.

What is, moreover, the nature of the relationship that obtains between possibility and actuality thus re-interpreted? The crucial question is whether the new relationship can avoid the ambiguity of the previous formal one. Hegel proposes two formulations for it. According to the first, the relation is one of "identity of content".[24] The same manifold of existents which can serve as manifestation of a power (i.e., as real actuality) can also be determined as a set of conditions and circumstances which occasion certain events to take place (i.e., as real possibility). It is clear, however, that material identity cannot suffice as an exhaustive determination of the relationship—for it abstracts altogether from the distinction between the two notions which it is supposed to relate. When we say that a given manifold can be determined either as something already actual or as a possibility for things to come, we introduce the alternative by reverting back to the formal level of signification. It is to the formal distinction that we appeal. And the same element of indefiniteness present at the formal level makes its appearance again. Insofar as the material content of either one of the two notions is concerned, it is a matter of indifference which side of the distinction is made to apply. The choice remains subjective.

With the second formulation, Hegel tries to introduce the distinction *within* the manifold of existents, and to free it in this way of its formality. He appeals to the notion of a situation in which all the conditions and circumstances are present that fully determine the coming to be of a certain event. Apparently Hegel has in mind the case of a process which is so far advanced as to have become irreversible. And its results, therefore, albeit not actually present, are already irrevocably committed to existence.[25] The determination of a process that has reached such a stage of development would call for both the concepts of possibility and actuality. The process itself would constitute the real possibility for certain events to take place. However, since the process is so complete that its reality is virtually

equivalent to the presence of the event or events it is supposed to usher in, it can also be determined as real actuality. Moreover, the process needs *both* concepts for its determination. It retains, therefore, a distinction between the two. But again, it retains it only in a relative sense—for as real possibility, the process is taken precisely as ushering in something actual; and as something actual, as immediately resulting from a possibility. Hegel, in other words, tries to concretize the formal interplay of possibility and actuality by re-interpreting it as the moment of tension in the transition from an antecedent cause to a subsequent effect, when the effect has not yet acquired full independence *vis-à-vis* its cause, and precisely for this reason its whole reality consists in its being related to a cause. And the cause, for its part, is also totally defined (*qua* cause) by its effort to achieve an effect. The two terms (cause and effect) are indeed distinct. But they are *significantly* distinct precisely because the reality of each is exhausted by its relation to the other; and apart from the distinction, it would disappear.

There is nothing formal, therefore, about the necessity that binds the two terms. In a situation such as we have just defined, real possibility is already equivalent to real necessity.[26] When the possibility is at hand, the actuality which it determines *must* come to be. Any hesitation as to which term should be given primacy of determination—whether actuality determines possibility or contrariwise—is strictly academic. For the one significant reality is the emergence of an event as process; and not the abstract determinations under which the event can be subsumed either before or after its advent.

Yet even real necessity does not remain unaffected by contingency.[27] Hegel has easy play showing how the latter makes its appearance again. For we must remember that real necessity is conditioned by the presupposition of a manifold of existents which lacks *per se* all limits. And while it is true that the notion of dynamic tension between power and its manifestations introduces a form which affects it intrinsically, the structure which is thus realized does not extend beyond limits which are still accidental. The amorphousness of the manifold is not absorbed by form; its indifference not dissolved in dynamic tension. The material content still persists as a general matrix in which the coincidence of form and content occurs only sporadically. Outside the

immediate limits of any such occurrence, the manifold remains an aggregate of material elements *which might have been* or *might yet be* actual cause or effect, but which are *per se* neither cause nor effect. The determinations of actuality and possibility apply to them only formally.

Real necessity is equivalent, therefore, to an indefinite series of events—none of which counts as ultimate limit. The "reality" of any of them is recognizable only on the strength of an abstraction—i.e., only on condition that an observer limit his field of observation to a given situation, and consider *it* as if it were a complete world. Hegel argues that real necessity is essentially relative. It is predicated only on the assumption of a situation, the presence and limits of which remain in point of fact contingent.

The situation, therefore, at the end of the second stage of the dialectic of actuality and possibility stands as follows: the formal categories of actuality and possibility have provided the limits within which any object can be determined *in principle*. They have provided the basis for a system. However, exactly *which* world (in terms of individual, actual objects) is the system they establish an expression of, still remains an open question. In the first stage of the dialectic, in other words, the possibility of *determinateness* in general has been established—not of individual determinations. In the second stage, on the other hand, the real categories of actuality and possibility have indeed provided the basis for the conceptual determination of individually recognizable objects—but only on condition that the latter be taken as single events which never quite amount in actual fact to a complete world. At the end of the second stage of the dialectic, we are faced by the unhappy choice between a world which is complete as world, but must remain only a possibility; and an indefinite number of situations which are recognizably real, but which do not necessarily belong to a world of which we recognize the possibility.

Contingency erupts, therefore, at every level and in every respect of the dialectic. The world of which the formal categories are the expression is such that no distinction within it has more than a merely momentary (i.e., strictly relative) significance. The structure for which the real categories provide the schema admit of sharpness of detail only on condition that the background be blocked out. In either case, the connection between any category and the reality it intends to

define remains *per se* indeterminate; and requires for its completion the intervention of a subject (viz., the philosopher doing the Logic) whose relation to the categories remains in turn also accidental. Translated into the language of the *Phenomenology*, the play of logical notes we have just witnessed would correspond to the busy work of a consciousness which believes itself to have grasped the essence of reality simply because it has developed a system of concepts which exhaust among themselves all the possibilities of being; and alternates between formally applying the concepts in question to every object at hand, and being concerned with the detailed mechanism of certain situations. And when challenged to produce concrete results from its theory, the consciousness would point to the single situations it has analyzed. And upon being further challenged to show how its particular explanations amount to a complete theory, it would point back to the formal system—without realizing that the system and the particular explanations belong to different orders of reflection, and that the actual connection between the two is due *in point of fact* to its own subjective contribution.

Of course to an enlightened observer of all this busy work of explanation, it is clear that abstract theory and detailed analysis of situations do in some sense coincide. And the same applies for the philosopher doing the Logic. To him it is clear that the first and the second stage of the dialectic have a common intention. But its true nature is first made explicit only in the category of absolute necessity which Hegel introduces in the third stage. And, as we shall now see, it is quite different from anything that a consciousness might expect which simply operates with the modal categories without bothering to trace their logical origin.

III

The move with which Hegel rids the logical process of its contingency is so simple that it runs the risk of going unnoticed. Hegel's claim is simply this: ultimately, reality needs nothing else but itself in order to account for its own presence. To conceive it absolutely, therefore, means to define it precisely as a presence that constantly re-asserts itself. The immediacy that affects our experience

of it should not be looked upon as detracting from rationality, but as providing for it the limit which alone makes it possible. Reality is the immediate presupposition *(Voraussetzung)* from which all our reasoning must start; and which, upon returning to it as the result *(Gesetztsein)* of a reasoning process *(setzen)*, will appear precisely as that which necessitated our presupposing it *(gesetzt als vorausgesetzt)*.[28] Or again, reality would not be conceived absolutely were it not understood both as the source as well as the resolution of any problem of determination. *Qua* absolute, it must generate its own irrationality—viz., the need for explanation. The ultimate test of any system of thought is not whether it dispels irrationality, but whether it shows that irrationality is contained within reality itself.

In *actual fact*, therefore, by the end of the first stage of the dialectic of actuality and possibility, the point has already been made that the relation that holds between the two categories is a constant source of indetermination because the two categories have indeed defined reality absolutely—not because (as hitherto assumed) they still fall short of a true system of thought. Still needed, before the point is accepted as official doctrine, is only a change in expectation as to what it means to determine reality absolutely. It does not mean to enumerate exhaustively the ready-made qualities which supposedly make up its content, but to define it precisely as generating *its own* problems of determination. Or again, it means to define the terms of the general problem of determining it; and to establish, therefore, the limits within which any particular problem of determination must remain in order to be a significant problem.

The new awareness of what thought accomplishes in determining the concept of reality is forcefully brought home at the end of the second stage of the dialectic. At that point, the frustration that the philosopher doing the Logic can envisage as following upon the endless process of overcoming the contingency that re-asserts itself at the end of any process of explanation forces a change in expectations. It leads to the realization that the contingency does not derive from factors extrinsic to whatever line of necessity has been established. It is instead the result of such a line *having been* established. As Hegel puts it, the philosopher sees that contingency *becomes* in necessity; that it is the contingency *of* necessity.[29]

The category of absolute necessity which is thereupon introduced

proceeds to express reality precisely as generating its own irrationality[30]—as giving rise to contingency as well as necessity:

> Absolute necessity is, therefore, the truth into which actuality and possibility as such, and formal and real necessity withdraw. That which is simply necessary only *is* because it *is* [hence, the contingency] it has neither condition nor ground; but equally it is pure *essence*, its being is simple reflection-into-itself, it is, *because* it is [Hence, the necessity][31]

It does not follow from this definition of "absolute necessity" that it is not possible for Hegel to comprehend reality in some ultimate sense. But it is important to realize that any such final comprehension is possible only in the medium of pure thought—i.e., as Logic. The commentators who have seen in Hegel's idealism the most dogmatic of all dogmatic positions have very likely failed to give this point its due weight. I suspect that they all suffer from the same misapprehension which is also the lot of the busy consciousness we described at the end of the preceding section. They seem to believe (like the busy consciousness) that to explain the occurrence of any single event (be it of nature or of history) is the same as to fill out one more detail in a system of explanatory causes for which the abstract categories of the Logic give a first outline, and which leaves no room for any element of indetermination.

In point of fact, Hegel's Logic does not add anything to the content of the knowledge acquired by either the scientist or the historiographer.[32] Its only contribution is the *concept* of the experience gained while acquiring such knowledge—i.e., the purely reflective awareness of the nature and the limits of the experience. And essential to the awareness (this is the all-important point) is the realization that the immediacy that affects all experience of reality, far from detracting from its rationality, is in actual fact both its ground and consequence.[33] The Logic itself is the exhaustive comprehension of reality that it is claimed to be—the system of thought unbroken by any residue of unrationalized content—precisely because in it the recognition is made of the true speculative value of immediacy. In other words, in the Logic Hegel avoids the classical alternative of either denying that contingency is real or merely acknowledging it as a fact which does not admit comprehension but expresses it as a genuine category of thought, and finds the proper place for it in the universal idea of reality.

We are now in a position to understand why Hegel could start the second stage of the dialectic we have been examining (in fact, the second stage of the dialectic in any section of the Logic) with the notion of a content which he claims to derive from the interplay of formal categories just completed in the first stage. The move has at first a certain air of mystification about it. It gives the impression that Hegel is trying to conjure up a material reference out of purely formal considerations by a play of conceptual trickery. Yet, all misgivings disappear once we understand exactly what Hegel does at the first stage of every dialectical cycle. He simply defines reality (with varying degrees of explicitness) as the inescapable context within which all problems of determination must fall. But once we have understood reality in this way, we can proceed without further ado to presuppose it as fact; and to devise techniques which will bring out the rationality implicit in it. Or again, once we have understood why reality must appear as fact, we have comprehended it absolutely. And there is nothing left for us to do except to deal with the problems that its immediacy presents. The point is indeed obvious. But it is not trivial—for losing sight of it might lead to the illusionary belief that thought needs fulfilling (as thought) in a medium other than conceptual; or conversely, to the equally illusionary belief that the fulfillment of thought on reflective terms alone would render superfluous any non-conceptual apprehension of reality.

As the dialectic of actuality and possibility concludes, therefore, the philosopher detects a new order emerging out of the apparent state of disarray into which the logical process had landed itself by the end of the second stage. At that point, the intention of the formal categories (which was to provide a complete determination of reality) seemed checked by the immediacy that erupted from within their play. And the real categories, which were expected to remedy the abstractness of the formal ones, seemed in fact to lose sight of any systematic plan. Now, at the end of the third stage, the singleness of purpose of the logical process re-asserts itself. It is clear now that the intention of the formal categories has indeed been realized—but not in the manner one might have hitherto expected. It has been realized by the formulation of a complete disjunction (e.g., something is either possible or actual), the terms of which define the limits of any significant problem of determination. As for the real categories, our busy consciousness (to return once more to it) was not altogether misguided when it believed

that upon explaining any single event, it was fulfilling the intention of the system of thought defined by the formal categories. It only failed to realize how close indeed is the connection between formal and real level of reflection. The latter simply repeats the former. It does not complete it or extend it—as if the formal categories had not already expressed reality *in toto*. The real categories only elaborate on the special problems of determination that arise granted the definition of reality given at the formal level.

Moreover, the disproportion between the official results of the play of categories and the unofficial comments made by the philosopher regarding their meaning is overcome. For the realization is finally made that the determinations which have accrued to thought unexpectedly in spite of its efforts to be pure thought have been in fact the result of its own reflectivity. The immediacy of the determinations were in fact contained within the reflection of thought. In the third book of the Logic, therefore, the dialectic folds upon itself. All the previous categories reappear, but modified in order to appear explicitly as the determination *of* thought. And the immediacy which accompanied their previous appearance is now revealed as the freedom that thought has with regard to itself while determining its own appearances. But in that immediacy one can also recognize the facticity with which reality presents itself to any observer. In one single stroke, therefore, official cognizance is made of the sense in which reality must remain an ultimate presupposition; and any alleged opposition between the reflection of thought and the immediacy of being is also removed. As the thought of thought, logical thought is recognized as the thought of reality.[34]

V

In Chapter 9 of *De Interpretatione* Aristotle calls attention to the case of events, such as a battle at sea, which are contingent up to their occurrence, but which become necessary once they have taken place.[35] Their "having occurred' then becomes an irrevocable fact. Within the context of Aristotelian philosophy, this circumstance leads to the recognition of two different meanings of necessity. There is a necessity that follows upon the rational ordering of the cosmos—e.g., the

necessity that accompanies the cyclical movement of the heavenly spheres; and a necessity which follows upon the indetermination of matter—i.e., the blind necessity of chance. The two meanings (I must add) are for Aristotle quite disparate.

Now, if I were asked to state in a few words the result of the dialectic of actuality and possibility, and also what I believe to be the main thesis developed by Hegel throughout the Logic, I would say that Hegel has shown the interdependence of the two meanings of necessity. Both are required in order to conceive reality as a self-contained process. For Hegel reality would not be self-sufficient if it did not contain its own irrationality. The only order which it exhibits is one which takes shape out of the contingency of facts; and which, upon being realized, leads to a renewal of immediacy. And the only wisdom possible lies in the recognition that there is no situation too irrational to serve as the basis for a new order; and no degree of order which does not generate its own opposite.

NOTES

1. Cf. *Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie*, in *Jenaer Kritische Schriften*, eds. H. Buchner and O. Pöggeler, pp. 75-76. Also, the interpretation of this passage by H. Kimmerle in *Das Problem der Abgeschlossenheit des Denkens*, *Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 8 (Bonn, 1970), pp. 27-28.
2. *Das Problem der Abgeschlossenheit* . . ., pp. 29-30.
3. See the work of O. Pöggeler on the development of Hegel's thought at Jena; e.g., "Hegels Jenaer Systemkonzeption", *Philosophisches Jahrbuch*, LXXI (1963-1964), pp. 286-318; "Die Komposition der Phänomenologie des Geistes", *Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 3 (Bonn, 1966), pp. 27-74.
4. For a statement of the objection as it has been recently raised again, cf. L. Puntel, *Darstellung, Methode und Struktur*, *Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 10 (Bonn, 1973), pp. 15ff; note 7a (p. 18) is particularly interesting. The problem that the system of Hegel poses is especially felt in the relationship of the *Phenomenology* to the System. It seems that upon reaching the idea of the System, Hegel in fact withdrew the possibility of an introduction to it such as the *Phenomenology* is supposed to provide. Fulda's book, *Das Problem einer Einleitung in Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik* (Frankfurt/Main, 1965), is dedicated to this problem. For a criticism of his approach to the problem and the conclusions he reaches cf. Puntel, *Darstellung, Methode und Struktur*, pp. 308 ff. See also, Stanley Rosen, *G. W. F. Hegel*. (New Haven and London, 1974).

5. C. L. Reinhold had already raised this objection against the idealism of Fichte and Schelling. Cf. Pöggeler, "Hegels Jenaer Systemkonzeption", pp. 296-97.
6. Dieter Henrich, "Hegels Theorie über den Zufall", *Kant-Studien*, L (1958-1959). Henrich's article deals with contingency at every level of the System, but only briefly with its meaning in the Logic. The article is admirable. However, it leaves the definite impression that Hegel only adds to the position of Kant and Fichte a better reflective understanding of what that position entails. It is certainly true (as Henrich points out) that "Die Notwendigkeit setzt sich wohl selbst die Bedingungen, *aber sie setzt sie als zufällige* . . Die Notwendigkeit kann gerade deshalb gleichgültig sein dagegen, welche besonderen Dinge an ihr zugrunde gehen, weil schon, ehe sie gesetzt sind, es gewiss ist, dass sie ihr nicht widerstehen können . . " (p. 135). Necessity is identical with the negative power of reflection, and contingency is its immediate result. It must be added, however, that contingency is the *only content of necessity*. Unless this point is made clear, Hegel's full position is not appreciated. Thus, in Henrich's article it is difficult to see exactly how Hegelian ethics differ from Stoicism. It does not suffice, in order to remedy the abstractness of the Stoic attitude, simply to add a public dimension to the personal virtues of self-control. What must be overcome is the very attitude of indifference to the contingent. The prototype of Hegel's moral ideal must be sought rather in Christian doctrine. In both cases salvation is to be sought in some historical (and contingent) event. Or again, for Hegel it is not possible to dispose of sin simply by rendering it indifferent to the plan of salvation. Sin itself must be incorporated within that plan through redemption.
7. But then, of course, "system" would have to mean something very peculiar. I am inclined to accept the position that the whole *Enzyklopädie* represents only the first of the famous three Hegelian mediations (viz., the logical one); and that the other two would have to be sought in some more historical and empirical science. (Cf. Puntel, *Darstellung, Methode und Struktur*, pp. 322 ff.) However, when a system becomes so broad and inclusive that its limits are difficult to determine, it ceases being a system. Emil L. Fackenheim has also a very "unsystematic" view of Hegel's System. (Cf. *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought* (Bloomington, 1967), pp. 15-30, 214-15.)
8. WL II, 169 ff. By "greater Logic" or "Logic" I shall mean *Wissenschaft der Logik*, and shall refer to it in the notes as WL in the edition of G. Lasson (Hamburg, 1963, reprinted from the edition of 1934). References to the English translation by A. V. Miller, *Hegel's Science of Logic* (George Allen & Unwin, London, 1969) will be designated SL. Hegel uses the term "actuality" in two senses, a broader and a narrower one. According to the broader meaning, "actuality" means a process of self-manifestation. It denotes an object, in other words, the only content of which is its own process of manifestation. (WL II, 169: "So *ist die Manifestation* . .") One could say that its essence consists in its being *present*. According to its narrower sense, "actuality" is used by Hegel in contradistinction to "possibility". Together with "possibility" and also "contingency" and "necessity", it then appears as a moment in the dialectic of "actuality" understood in the broader sense. In the present paper, we shall use "actuality" in the narrower sense alone.
9. For a detailed analysis of "reflection", "essence", and "show" (*der Schein*), cf. my paper, "Reflection and Contradiction: A Commentary on Some Passages of Hegel's Science of Logic", *Hegel-Studien*, VIII (1973), pp. 131-61. Hegel compares "actuality" (understood

in its broader sense) with earlier categories in WL II, 169: "Das *Sein* ist noch nicht wirklich; . . . "SL, 541: "*Being* is not yet actual. . . ."

10. There is no question of the presence in the *Logik* of a dialectic of the *subjective* "meinen" as in the *Phenomenology*. Cf. H. G. Gadamer, *Hegels Dialektik* (Tübingen, 1971), p. 57.
11. Cf. Dieter Henrich, "Anfang und Methode der Logik", *Hegel-Studien* I (1964), p. 28.
12. Cf. WL II, 485 ff.
13. Cf. Hegel's general remarks about the dialectic in WL II, 494 ff: "Ganz allgemein aufgefasst . . ."; SL, 834: "Taken quite generally . . ." WL II, 498: "Näher ist nun das Dritte . . ."; SL, 834: "Now more precisely than the third. . . ."
14. WL II, 173: "Das Wirkliche als solches ist möglich . . ."; SL, 544: "The actual as such is possible. . . ."
15. WL II, 173; SL, 544.
16. WL II, 173; SL, 545.
17. *A Study of Hegel's Logic* (Oxford, 1959), p. 136.
18. WL II, 174: "Das Zufällige hat also darum . . ."; SL, 545: "The contingent, then, has . . .", WL II, 173-74: "Das Zufällige bietet daher . . ."; SL, 545: "The contingent therefore presents. . . ." I am using "phenomena" and "phenomenal existence" in a rather broad sense not to be confused with the meaning of the category of *Erscheinung* which Hegel has analyzed and superseded earlier in the Logic. By "phenomenon" I mean any event or state of affairs precisely as it occurs or is given. A phenomenon does not make pretense of revealing any reality but its own. In brief, I am using the term synonymously with "actuality" in Hegel's broad sense of the category (cf. note 3 above).
19. WL II, 174: "Aber darum weil jede unmittelbar in die entgegengesetzte . . ."; SL, 545: "But just because each immediately. . . ."
20. Cf. WL II, 174-75: "Das Notwendige ist ein *Wirkliches*; so ist es . . ."; "Das Zufällige ist also notwendig . . ."; SL, 545-46: "The necessary is an *actual*; as such it is . . ."; "The contingent, therefore, is necessary. . . ."
21. Cf. WL II, 174: "Dies *absolute Unruhe* des *Werdens* . . ."; SL, 545: "This *absolute unrest* of the *becoming*. . . ."
22. WL II, 175: "Aber eine solche, die, – . . ."; SL, 546: "But one which .
23. WL II, 175-76: "Die reale Wirklichkeit *als solches* ist . . ."; "Die formelle Möglichkeit ist die . . ."; SL, 546-47: "Real actuality *as such* is . . ."; "Formal possibility is . . ."
24. WL II, 176: "Diese Mannigfaltigkeit des Daseins . . ."; SL, 547: "This existing multiplicity . . ."
25. WL II, 178-79: "Was daher real möglich ist, das kann . . ."; SL, 549: "Therefore what is really possible . . ." The whole of WL II, 178 is relevant (cf. SL, 548-49).
26. WL II, 179: "Reale Möglichkeit und die Notwendigkeit sind daher . . ."; SL, 549: "Real possibility and necessity are therefore . . ."
27. WL II, 179-80: "Die Relativität der realen Notwendigkeit . . ."; SL, 550: "The relativity of real necessity . . ."
28. For the play in the Hegelian dialectic between "positing" and "presupposing", see Di Giovanni, "Reflection and Contradiction", especially pp. 148-51.
29. WL II, 181: "So enthält die reale . . ."; ". . . Sie ist daher es selbst . . ."; SL, 551: "Thus real necessity . . ."; "It is therefore necessity itself . . ."
30. Hegel points out that the notion is absolute precisely because it contains contingency.

WL II, 248: "Er ist die absolute Macht gerade darum . . ."; SL, 608: "The notion is absolute power ."

31. WL II, 182; SL, 552

32. For the purely reflective character of the Logic, cf. WL II, 230 ff.: "Indem es zunächst die *Logik* . . ."; 485: "Die absolute Idee selbst hat näher . . ."; SL, 592ff.: "Since it is primarily logic . . ."; 825: "More exactly the absolute Idea itself . . ." On the nature of the Logic and its relation to Hegel's '*Realsystem*', I find L. Puntel's recent work very helpful: *Darstellung*, . .; see footnote 4 above.

33. Thus, at the end of its reflection upon itself, thought is back to the immediacy with which it began - except that now the nature of the immediacy has been understood. Cf. WL II, 499: "Dies *Resultat* ist daher die *Wahrheit* . . ."; SL, 837: "This *result* is therefore the *truth* . . ."

34. Cf. WL II, 213 ff

35. 19a, 23-24.