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Delight in Temporality: Temporality and absolute identity in the Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy

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Delight in Temporality

Temporality and absolute identity in the *Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*



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Delight in Temporality

Temporality and absolute identity in the *Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*

1. Introduction. Time, 'temporality', and absolute identity

The intention behind writing the present essay on the *Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy* was to find the guiding idea that, acting as a thread of Ariadne, could connect Hegel's early philosophical project with what across the following argument will be referred to as the *paradox of temporality*. Deliberately, the above title refers to 'temporality', and not to 'Time'. Temporality is not a term employed by Hegel in his writings. In a strict sense, what Hegel explicitly refers to as Time is limited to natural Time, and any other sense that might be associated with a temporality beyond natural Time is understood by Hegel as History —not as temporality. In Hegel's works, Time and History pertain to the different realms of Nature and Spirit. Nevertheless, at the same time, for Hegel Nature and Spirit constitute instances in the unfolding of the Absolute Idea. Far from being a merely pure or abstract form, the Absolute Idea exists and becomes concrete as both realms. Consequently, beyond the *letter* of Hegelian philosophy, there is a common element to 'Time' and 'History', in that they both are the *existing logical figure of finitude*, or of 'that which has its negation out of itself'¹. The central claim of the present essay is that, in Hegel's philosophy, there is this *larger and contradictory* logic connecting 'Time' and 'History' (a *paradox of temporality*), and that the paradoxical nature of this logic can be explained by an early concept found in the *Difference*: the notion of *absolute identity*. Therefore, the following argument will consider two main questions. Firstly: what are the main aspects of the contradiction of temporality in Nature and in Spirit? Secondly: how does Hegel's early notion of absolute identity account for this paradox of temporality?

The paradox of temporality. The contradictory nature of temporality consists of three interconnected layers.

Firstly, it is the contradiction of *natural Time*. In the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, Hegel characterizes natural Time as 'the being that, by being, is not, and that,

¹ Hegel, *EN.*, §262, 249Z. Also: Max Winter, "'Philosophy Is Its Own Time Apprehended In Thoughts': Hegel on Time and Concept," *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 72, no. 2/3 (2016): 341.

by not being, is'². This is: Time exists by not-being; it only *is* through its self-negation and its disappearance. Analogously to the logical figure of finitude, natural Time finds its being beyond itself, in a self-negation that is outside of itself and that entails both its being and its own destruction.

Secondly, the paradox of temporality is the similar contradiction that is present in Spirit as *History*. In this case, Hegel's account of this being-through-vanishing is more complex and is, to a certain extent, left incomplete by Hegel himself³. Nevertheless, the contradiction of temporality still remains in the fact that, on the one hand, History *is* the Idea in its necessary development, as the process of Spirit attaining its self-knowledge⁴; while, on the other hand, once philosophy grasps the rationality of its own time, it also overcomes this temporality and accesses an eternal Truth⁵. Similarly to natural Time, History consummates by not being; it is the Absolute Knowing of the Idea, yet, at the same time, this Absolute Knowing is also different from it. As Hegel comments at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*:

Consequently, spirit necessarily appears in time, and it appears in time as long as it does not *grasp* its pure concept, which is to say, as long as it does not erase time. Time is the pure self *externally* intuited by the self but not *grasped* by the self; it is only the intuited concept. As this concept grasps itself, it sublates its temporal form, conceptually comprehends the intuiting, and is conceptually comprehended and conceptually comprehending intuiting. — It appears as the necessity to enrich the participation self-consciousness has in consciousness and to set into motion the *immediacy of the in-itself* — the form in which the substance is in consciousness — or, conversely, if the in-itself is taken as inwardness, it is to realize and to reveal what is at first *inward*, or vindicate it for spirit's certainty of itself.⁶

Thirdly, there is the overall contradiction of a logic of *temporality* itself —of a logic connecting the Idea with Time and History. On the one hand, both Time and History constitute necessary instances of the Absolute Idea; yet, on the other hand, they are also instances in which the Idea is being 'reflected'⁷ and differenced from itself —self-sundered, self-negated. The Idea is in an *identity* and a *difference* in relation to temporality. Both Time and History are driven by a (finite) logic of self-negation and self-

² Hegel, *EN.*, § 258

³ This is a difficulty commonly pointed out by studies considering Hegel's explanation of philosophy's *temporal* access to the eternal Truth of the Idea. Hegel preliminarily addresses this problem in the 'Introduction' to the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* under the term of a 'metaphysics of time'. Cf.: Ziglioli, Lucia. "The Logic of Time. Hegel's Notion of Time Between Logic and System". In *System Und Logik Bei Hegel*, ed. Luca Fonnesu and Lucia Ziglioli (Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: Georg Olms Verlag AG, 2016), 251-253.

⁴ Hegel, *VPW*, 33-34

⁵ This is also introduced as the problem of the 'transition from representation to concept' at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in Susanna Lindberg, "From Finite Thinking to Infinite Spirit," in *Translating Hegel: The Phenomenology of Spirit and Modern Philosophy*, ed. By Brian Manning Delaney & Sven-Olov Wallenstein (Stockholm: Södertörn Philosophical Studies, 2012), 88.

⁶ Hegel, *PhG.*, 429 (801)

⁷ Hegel, *EL.*, §222.

destruction; and this sundering *is* the reflection of the Idea⁸. However, at the same time, in being self-negated, Time and History also vanish as being *different* from themselves and from the Eternal and Infinite Idea. Yet, in this self-negation, Time and History are also the Idea differencing itself from itself. Consequently, in a sense, temporality is itself also temporal: it is a *prevailing* logical figure, but it exists by ceaselessly *vanishing*—it is an *immanent* logic of being by being out of itself, self-negating.

The concept of absolute identity. Across the following essay it will be shown that the fundamental aspects of this paradox of temporality can be explained through a central notion appearing in the *Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*: the concept of *absolute identity*. Hegel characterizes absolute identity as an **identity of identity and difference** (or of 'identity and non-identity'⁹). Hegel's intuition is that an absolute and unconditioned identity—unity—only unfolds through incorporating difference and negativity as instances of itself, also being in and through separation. Like this, unity does not disappear in the face of non-unity and opposition, but rather endures and becomes itself through them. The prevalence of absolute identity presupposes its own limiting and negation:

The claims of separation must be admitted just as much as those of identity. When identity and separation are placed in opposition to each other, both are absolute, and if no one aims to maintain identity through the nullification of the dichotomy, they [identity and dichotomy] remain opposed to each other. Philosophy must give separation into subject and object its due. By making both separation and the identity, which is opposed to it, equally absolute, however, philosophy has only posited separation conditionally, in the same way that such an identity—conditioned as it is by the nullification of its opposite—is also only relative. Hence, **the Absolute itself is the identity of identity and non-identity**; being opposed and being one are both together in it.¹⁰

Hegel's early notion of absolute identity accounts for two central aspects of the contradiction of temporality.

Firstly, absolute identity explains why the Absolute Idea necessarily becomes concrete and unfolds as Nature and Spirit; and, consequently, why it unfolds as natural Time and as History. This unfolding is permeated by the contradiction that, on the one hand, the Absolute Idea is Infinite and Eternal; while, on the other hand, Eternity and Infinitude are in contradiction with the perishable and finite existence of Nature and Spirit. Nevertheless, for Hegel, an identity that abstracts from its opposite and remains completely separate and differenced from it is always limited and relative: it does not have a standing of its own, and is not absolute and unconditioned. Rather, identity is always led by its own immanent logic into negating and superseding itself as its opposite. Because of this, at the end of the *Science of Logic* Hegel describes how the Absolute Idea

⁸ Hegel's account of Time in connection with the Idea has been recently reconstructed by Lucia Ziglioli in: Ziglioli, "The Logic," 233-253. It has also been approached by Yeomans in: Christopher Yeomans, "Temporal Strata of Historical Experience in Hegel's Encyclopaedia", in Hegel's Encyclopaedic System, ed. Sebastian Stein & Joshua Wretzel (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 2021), 98-115.

⁹ Hegel, *D.*, 64.

¹⁰ Hegel, *D.*, 64

self-sunders and *reflects*¹¹ itself as Nature. In other words: the Infinite and Eternal Idea also *is* its opposite. *Identity entails difference*: it emanates¹² itself forth as its opposite or mirrors itself. For Hegel, true Infinity only exists in an absolute identity with finitude, not in an abstract separation and unresolved opposition; while true Eternity also only exists in a union with transient existence.

Secondly, the early concept of absolute identity accounts for the characteristic contradiction that temporality only exists by ceaselessly vanishing and self-negating itself. This contradiction rests upon the combination of two opposing aspects: difference and identity. The concept of absolute identity points towards the intuition that difference and identity are *mutually dependent* and equally necessary: one depends upon the other in order to endure, a difference presupposes an identity and an identity a difference.

On the one hand, temporality (either in Nature or in Spirit) unfolds as a self-difference, or as a negation¹³. In the case of Nature, Time is the continuous succession of moments, the endless disappearance of being and its vanishing into nothingness. To the degree that Time *is*, it is *not* Time; it is bound to negate its own being. In the case of Spirit, History is an instance of the absolute knowing of the Concept, in which the inward self becomes externally intuited. However, similarly to natural Time, to the degree that this self is only externally intuited and remains in this temporal-historical form, the Concept is not purely grasped by philosophy. This is: to the degree that historical time *is*, it is only an external intuiting, not the absolute knowing of the Concept. Consequently, it is also bound to negate itself.

On the other hand, at the same time, this negativity and self-differencing of temporality is also its identity. Both Time and History are the Idea; but in the self-sundered, self-differenced, and ‘reflected’¹⁴ form in which the Idea appears in Nature and Spirit. The self-differencing and finitude occurring in Time and History are the *existing logical figure of finitude* (‘that which has its negation out of itself’¹⁵). Consequently, the difference unfolding in Time and History is also conditioned to this unity. Natural Time *is* the being that only is to the degree that it is not, or to the degree that it continuously negates itself and becomes nothing. In being different from itself—in not being—it *is* itself. Similarly, in the case of Spirit, History only is the absolute knowing of the Concept to the degree that its temporal character is also nullified. In both cases, the concept of absolute identity accounts for the contradiction that temporality unfolds as a *nothingness* that is different to anything; and, yet, this absolute difference is also its identity.

Structure of the following essay. In order to present the details of the idea of temporality and how Hegel’s early notion of absolute identity grounds it, the following essay will consist of two major chapters.

The first chapter will be focused on presenting Hegel’s conception of natural and spiritual Time. The notion of a ‘temporality’ rests upon the intuition that there is a

¹¹ Hegel, *EL.*, §222.

¹² Hegel, *D.*, 31.

¹³ In the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel refers to natural Time as the ‘abstracting that is being’—an existing difference. Cf.: Hegel, *EN.*, §258, 240z.

¹⁴ Hegel, *EL.*, §222.

¹⁵ Hegel, *EN.*, §262, 249Z.

connection between Nature and Spirit, and between natural Time and spiritual Time (History). The aim of this chapter is to reconstruct this connection.

In order to do this, it will be divided into three sections. The first section will present and explain Hegel's point—found at the end of the *Science of Logic*—that the Absolute Idea self-sunders itself as Nature¹⁶. Establishing this is central to the argument, as the connection between the realms of Nature and Spirit lies, precisely, on this self-differentiation of the Idea. After this, the second section will focus on giving a detailed presentation of Hegel's characterization of natural Time, found in paragraphs §257-259 of the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*. Here, it will be shown how natural Time unfolds as what Lucia Ziglioli refers to as the 'objective determination of finitude'¹⁷—this is: as a logical figure that exists by both vanishing and remaining. Finally, the third section will focus on showing the similarities between natural Time and spiritual Time in the case of the history of philosophy. As mentioned earlier, Hegel does not extensively discuss how, exactly, does philosophical knowledge abandon its temporal strata. However, in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel does briefly address the question of the differences unfolding in the history of philosophy. The aim of this last section will be to show that, analogously to the case of natural Time, spiritual Time for Hegel is also fundamentally linked to the form of the self-exteriorization of the Idea.

The second chapter will be focused on presenting Hegel's notion of *absolute identity* in the *Difference*, and on showing how this notion could ground his later account of Time and the idea of temporality. Nevertheless, this presentation will be approached through a reconstruction of Hegel's critique of the faculty of *reflection* across the *Difference*. There are two reasons for this.

Firstly, there is the fact that, in the *Difference*, Hegel's debate over the notion of absolute identity is not explicitly directed at the specific understanding of Time. Rather, Hegel's notion of absolute identity is deeply embedded within his critique to the notion of reflection in the works of other philosophers, such as Reinhold or Fichte. Hegel's notion of absolute identity in the *Difference* is inseparable from his critique to reflection.

Secondly, Hegel's concept of reflection is also central to understanding the nature of temporality. Both in Nature and in Spirit, the perishable and transitory character of Time results from the fact that it represents the self-sundering of the Idea. This self-sundering Hegel refers to as the '*reflection*'¹⁸ of the Idea. As Eleane P. Miller has shown in a recent article, reflection for Hegel has both a *mental* and an *ontological* dimension¹⁹. The idea of a 'temporality' connecting natural and spiritual Time intimately depends upon the fact that, for Hegel, there is an ontological dimension to reflection: the Idea becomes concrete, exists, as its reflection. This idea finds its antecedent in the *Difference*, where Hegel argues against a purely abstract, mental, and subjective understanding of reflection. As it will be seen, Hegel's critique is articulated by his concept of absolute identity.

¹⁶ Hegel, *EL.*, §222.

¹⁷ Ziglioli, Lucia. "The Time of the Idea: An Inquiry into Hegel's Notion of Time." *Hegel-Jahrbuch* 2015, no. 1 (2015): 409.

¹⁸ Hegel, *EL.*, § 222.

¹⁹ Elaine P. Miller, "Hegel on Reflection and Reflective Judgement," *Hegel Bulletin* 42, no. 2 (2021): 201–226.

Consequently, the second chapter of the present essay will be divided into three sections: 1) an introduction to the different meanings associated to the term 'reflection', 2) Hegel's first critique to reflection as a method for philosophy, 3) Hegel's second critique to reflection as the form of philosophy and philosophical systems.

2. Time and temporality: *‘das seiende Abstrahieren’*²⁰, *Saturn Devouring His Son*



Saturno, Francisco de Goya, 1820-1823 (fig. 1)

The central claim of the present essay is that Hegel’s characterizations of natural and spiritual Time are connected by a contradictory logic of *temporality* —a paradox of temporality—, and that the difficulties presented by this logic could be explained by a concept found in his earlier works: the notion of *absolute identity*. The following chapter is focused on the first part of this argument: that there is a logic of temporality, or that there is a connection between Hegel’s account of natural Time and his understanding of Time in the realm of Spirit —History. The aim is to reconstruct this connection.

The key argument supporting the notion of a ‘temporality’ is that, for Hegel, both Nature and Spirit constitute instances of the characteristic self-exteriorization of the

²⁰ Hegel, *EN.*, §258, 240z.

Absolute Idea²¹. A logic of temporality depends upon this unity —*identity*— of natural and spiritual Time with the Absolute Idea.

However, this identity between the Idea and natural and spiritual Time is also itself open to a *contradiction*. Both natural and spiritual Time *are* the Idea, only that they are the Idea in its self-sundering and exteriorization, or in its negation in the form of *otherness*²². Precisely because it emanates as the *existing* self-differentiation of the Idea, Time is more than a merely subjective reverberation of a logical figure: it is also its negation. Consequently, Time is also a ceaseless vanishing and disappearing that is different and opposed to the Eternity and Infinitude of the Idea; and, yet, this vanishing is not something exterior and alien to the Idea itself. Consequently, *both natural and spiritual Time stand in an identity with the Idea, yet this same identity implies both an identity and a difference*. This fundamental contradiction permeates the notion of temporality, as well as Hegel's individual accounts of natural Time and of History.

The following chapter will aim to reconstruct this contradiction through three different sections.

The first section will focus on Hegel's account of the self-sundering and 'reflection' of the Absolute Idea as Nature, found at the end of the *Science of Logic* and in the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*. The aim of this section will be to explain why, for Hegel, this self-exteriorization and negation of the Idea is necessary, and why it leads to the contradiction that the Infinite and Eternal Idea must stand in both a unity and a difference with the transient and perishable existence unfolding in Nature and Spirit.

The second section will present Hegel's account of natural Time —found in paragraphs § 257-259 of the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*— and the idea that natural Time constitutes a figure in the self-sundering of the Absolute Idea as Nature. This argument will depend on explaining Hegel's key characterization of natural Time as the 'abstracting that is being' ('*das seiende Abstrahieren*'²³), and Lucia Ziglioli's suggestion that natural Time constitutes the '*objective determination of finitude itself*'²⁴.

Finally, the third section will focus on Hegel's account of the history of philosophy and what he refers to as a 'metaphysics of time'²⁵ in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* and in the *Difference*. The key point in this section will be to show how for Hegel, in the specific case of the history of philosophy, spiritual Time unfolds under a similar contradiction as that appearing in Nature. In the case of Spirit, it is the self-externalization of the Concept as History, and its own absolute knowing of itself, which

²¹ In fact, when referring to Nature and Spirit in the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel explicitly states that both are *interior* to the logical movement of the Idea, or that it is not the case that 'the logical Idea comes to receive an alien content that stems from outside of it; on the contrary, it is the proper activity of the logical Idea to determine itself further and to unfold itself into Nature and Spirit'. Hegel, *EN.*, §43. Cf.: Ziglioli, "The Logic," 234.

²² Hegel, *EN.*, §247.

²³ Hegel, *EN.*, §258, 240z.

²⁴ Ziglioli, "The Time," 409.

²⁵ Hegel, *VPW*, 33.

also nullifies this temporal aspect²⁶. Similarly to natural Time, it is by not being —‘by not being, is’²⁷—, or it is by its unity with an Eternal Idea that is also opposite to it.

2.1. The self-sundering of the Idea as Nature.

The contradiction of temporality rests upon the fact that, for Hegel, natural and spiritual Time constitute instances of the self-externalization of the Idea. Towards the end of the *Science of Logic* and in paragraph §244 of the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel famously presents this sundering:

But the idea is absolutely free: and its freedom means that it does not merely pass over into life, or as finite cognition allow life to show in it, but in its own absolute truth resolves to let the element of its particularity, or of the first characterization and other-being, the immediate idea, as its reflection, *go forth freely itself from itself as Nature*²⁸

This sundering is governed by the difficulty that, on the one hand, at the end of the *Logic*, the Idea is already presented as being Absolute, unconditioned (free), and completely self-transparent; yet, on the other hand, now this Absolute Idea seems to necessitate of a further development and a self-exteriorization in Nature and Spirit —a *concrete* existence.

Amongst a manifold of other examples, two major arguments could be given as an explanation for this movement.

On the one hand, Ziglioli has recently reconstructed the two major reasons explicitly given by Hegel in the *Logic* and in the *Encyclopaedia*²⁹. The first she presents as an *ontological* reason: beyond the totality attained by the Idea in pure thought, it is necessary for the Idea to also give itself concrete existence as the real totality of being —the totality of thought is also the totality of being. Thus, the Idea *releases* or *discharges itself* (‘*sich entlassen*’³⁰) as existence as part of its logical determination as a totality. Following this, Ziglioli presents the second reason explaining this movement as being *epistemological*: at the end of the *Logic*, the Absolute Idea already knows itself or is self-transparent; nevertheless, this knowledge is only *immediate*, it is only an *intuition* of itself³¹. As an unmediated intuition, this knowledge is still a unity in which there is no separation between a subject and its object. However, the self-knowledge or the self-transparency of the Idea also implies that there must exist this separation between subject and object. Consequently, the Idea self-externalizes and mirrors itself in self-knowledge; it introduces

²⁶ Hegel, *VPW*, 34

²⁷ Hegel, *EN.*, § 258

²⁸ Hegel, *EL.*, §222.

²⁹ Ziglioli, “The Logic,” 234-235.

³⁰ Hegel, *SL*, II, 253 (843)

³¹ ‘The Absolute Idea is for itself the pure form of the Concept, which intuits its contents as its own self’. *EL.*, § 237. Cf.: Ziglioli, “The Logic,” 235.

a separation (a difference) and gives itself to itself in the form of an otherness. This otherness is Nature³².

On the other hand, a second argument is that an absolute unity (the totality of the Idea that is already present in the Notion at the end of the *Logic*) only arises from the *unity of unity and non-unity*³³, or of *identity and difference*. This is Hegel's early notion of *absolute identity*, which will later be more extensively addressed in the following sections when considering the *Difference*. In essence, however, this intuition entails that the organic and unconditioned unity of the whole, as the Absolute Idea, must include within itself its concrete existence as a self-sublation and a mirroring of itself. True identity only unfolds in the unity between Absolute and its appearance, or between the immediate unity and the separation and differencing between subject and object³⁴. An Absolute that remains in a complete opposition and separation from concrete finitude, or from its appearance, does not constitute for Hegel a true Absolute unity, but rather a limited and incomplete figure conditioned by an opposite outside of itself³⁵. In turn, from the standpoint of difference, the idea of an identity of identity and difference further implies that difference only subsists as itself through its connection with identity. In general terms: it is only because two opposites are placed in a unity—as opposites—that their difference can be posited at all. Therefore, not only is it that true identity relies upon the integration of difference, but it is also the case that difference (like temporality) only truly subsists as itself once it is nullified as difference—negated—and put in unity. The unity of identity and difference is the intuition that *both are mutually dependent*.

In parallel to this, from the standpoint of the debate concerning *temporality*, the self-sundering of the Eternal and Infinite Idea also implies that it stands in a unity with its opposite: *transient* and *finite* existence. For Hegel, a *true infinity is not absolutely opposite to finitude* but, rather, in a unity with it. On the contrary, an infinity that remained in perennial and unsolvable opposition to finitude would be merely abstract and ideal. The idea that there exists a unity between the finite and the infinite recurrently appears across the totality of Hegel's philosophy³⁶.

From the standpoint of finitude, what is finite and limited only subsists as itself, in accordance with its own concept, through its unity and connection with the Infinite that

³² 'As subject, nature is not in opposition to consciousness, as natural consciousness would have it. It is the task of science not only to overcome the standpoint of natural consciousness, which knows objects only in their antithesis to itself, but also to demonstrate that spirit is not merely an inward in-itself, but is also united with an actual dimension, its externalization in the world'. Cf.: Miller, "Hegel on Reflection," 208.

³³ Hegel, *SF*, 312.

³⁴ In this sense, Miller points towards the importance of also ascribing an ontological dimension to reflection (as well as a merely epistemological or mental one) in order to account for this emanation of Nature and Spirit from the infinite Idea. Both Nature and Spirit constitute a separation, and this separation is also the ontological work of Reason through reflection. Cf.: Miller, "Hegel on Reflection," 209-212.

³⁵ 'A proper realization of the Self, for Hegel, comes always together with self-knowledge and therefore with the manifestation of itself as other'. Ziglioli, "The Logic," 236.

³⁶ For example, in the *Fragment of a System of 1800*: 'It is only because the finite is itself life that it carries in itself the possibility of raising itself to infinite life'. Hegel, *SF*, 313.

is simultaneously (and because of this unity) opposite to it³⁷. Consequently, Hegel's description of finitude in the *Logic* presents the finite as a *contradiction*: finitude only (truly) becomes itself through its own negation, through its unity with what is opposite and different to it: Infinity³⁸. The negativity that actually constitutes the identity of finitude is *immanent* (as its presupposed limit) but is also *external* to itself. Finitude is immanently bound to negativity for its subsistence; yet, at the same time, this negativity also represents its own death, because it always lies in an Infinite that is opposite to it:

The something, posited with its immanent limit as the contradiction of itself by virtue of which it is directed and driven out of and beyond itself, is the *finite*.³⁹

They are, but the truth of this being is (as in Latin) their *finis*, their *end*. The finite does not just alter, as something in general does, but perishes, and its perishing is not just a mere possibility, as if it might be without perishing. Rather, the being as such of finite things is to have the germ of this transgression as their in-itselfness: the hour of their birth is the hour of their death.⁴⁰

Accordingly, from the standpoint of Infinity, the Infinite does not represent an abstract and ideal separation from the finite, but it is only truly Infinite and unconditioned in its connection with the finite: in the unity with its opposite. Therefore, the unity between finitude and Infinitude rests upon a double and contradictory condition which reproduces Hegel's early characterization of absolute identity as an identity of identity and difference. First: that the two opposites of finitude and Infinitude only subsist as themselves (either as finite or as Infinite) because of their mutual difference. Second: that both opposites only truly become themselves, either finite or Infinite, through their union and their non-difference. Ultimately, the Idea mirrors itself and goes 'forth freely itself from itself'⁴¹ as objective finitude (as Time) because of an interior necessity of identity.

2.2. Natural Time: 'Das seiende Abstrahieren'⁴², *Saturn Devouring His Son*.

As it was previously seen, the notion of *temporality* arises from the fact that, for Hegel, the Absolute Idea necessarily becomes concrete and sunders itself as Nature and Spirit. The following section is focused on presenting how Hegel's central understanding

³⁷ This is also better understood by the idea that the finite is that unity which, on the one hand, is conditioned and so only subsists by having a limit to itself negating it yet, on the other hand, this negation that is essential to it is located beyond itself, as an exterior negation that is opposite to it and nullifies it. Consequently, the finite finds its being and life beyond itself, into its own death. Cf.: Ziglioli, "The Time," 408-409.

³⁸ '(...) absolute knowledge overcomes finitude —and conserves it; it shows the *truth of finitude*, its *eternity*'. Cf.: Lindberg, "From Finite Thinking to," 88.

³⁹ Hegel, *SL.*, I, 116 (129).

⁴⁰ Hegel, *SL.*, I, 116.

⁴¹ Hegel, *EL.*, § 222.

⁴² Hegel, *EN.*, §258, 240z

of natural Time as the ‘abstracting that is being’⁴³ derives from the idea that Time is an instance of the self-exteriorization of the Idea. Hegel refers to natural Time as ‘*das seiende Abstrahieren*’⁴⁴ in the working notes to §258 of the *Encyclopaedia*:

§ 258

Time, as the negative unity of self-externality, is similarly an out-and-out-abstract, ideal being. It is that being which, inasmuch as it *is*, is *not*, and inasmuch as it is *not*, *is*: it is Becoming directly *intuited*; this means that differences, which admittedly are purely *momentary*, i.e. directly self-sublating, are determined as *external*, i.e. as external to *themselves*.⁴⁵

At the beginning of the ‘Philosophy of Nature’, Hegel presents Nature as being the Idea, but the Idea in the form of *otherness*⁴⁶. This otherness is further presented as a *difference that is being different to itself*, or as a *difference reflected upon itself*. The following argument will show how, for Hegel, natural Time precisely constitutes an instance of this otherness by focusing on two interconnected ideas: 1) that Time arises as the specific negativity of Space reflected upon itself, 2) that, as the difference from difference, Time is the being of non-being.

Reflected negativity. Firstly, there is the fact that Time represents the immanent negativity of Space turned or *reflected* towards itself, or negativity ‘equally *for-itself* and so are [together with] its determinations’⁴⁷. In other words, Time is pure *difference* and *otherness*; it is the opposite of the identity of the Absolute Idea ($A=A$) in that, in Time, negativity is reflected towards its own product (the dimensions of Space) and differentiates itself from it. Despite the fact that, in the *Encyclopaedia*, Space and Time are presented as separate figures, Time is in unity with Space, because Space itself already unfolds as its own self-differentiation⁴⁸. This results from the fact that Space is subject to a central contradiction also affecting Time.

On the one hand, Space is a being-outside-itself (a ‘self-externality’⁴⁹). Space is first presented in §254 as an *ideal continuum*, or as the first and most abstract determination of Nature. Any determination of Space already seems to presuppose Space itself⁵⁰; therefore, Space constitutes an *indifferent*⁵¹ unity, or a unity that is prior and opposite to any qualitative differentiation within itself. However, this abstract character of Space also drives Space beyond itself. In order to unfold as itself, Space must include within itself the three dimensions that constitute Space: *height*, *length*, and *width*⁵². These three dimensions can be separated quantitatively in the concept of Space; yet, in this way, they

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Hegel, *EN.*, §258

⁴⁶ Hegel, *EN.*, §247-248.

⁴⁷ Hegel, *EN.*, §257

⁴⁸ ‘In pictorial thought, space and time are taken to be quite separate: we have space and also time; philosophy fights against this ,also’. Hegel, *EN.*, §257 Z. Cf.: Ziglioli, “The Time,” 407.

⁴⁹ Hegel, *EN.*, §254.

⁵⁰ Ziglioli, “The Logic,” 237-238.

⁵¹ Hegel, *EN.*, §254.

⁵² Hegel, *EN.*, §255-256.

remain interchangeable and equal, and cannot be fully determined⁵³. In order to determine the dimensions of Space and to fully unfold the concept of Space itself, a *qualitative difference* between its dimensions must be posited, but this qualitative difference immediately represents the negation of the indifference and ideality of Space⁵⁴. Thus, in analogy to the unfolding of finitude described by Hegel in the *Logic*, Space finds its being outside itself, into its negation.

Nevertheless, on the other hand, beyond its qualitative determinations, the ‘being-outside-itself’⁵⁵ —Space— remains different from the products of this negativity: Space survives its own negation, it remains as an indifferent and continuous ideality, it is always beyond its qualitative determinations. Because of this, Hegel argues that negativity is turned towards its own products (the point, the line, the surface), and differentiates itself from the difference introduced by the qualitative determinations of Space. It is in this sense that Time is presented as the ‘negative unity of the being-outside-itself’⁵⁶. *Time is the negation of the negation of indifference*, it is the differencing from difference itself — it is *Saturn Devouring His Son*, negativity negating its own products. Therefore, natural Time could be said to constitute a paradigmatic figure in the unfolding of the Absolute Idea in the form of otherness: on the one hand, Time is the differentiation of negativity from its product, or the *difference from difference*, or, simply, the unleashed and indiscriminate annihilation resulting from the existing difference; on the other hand, *the difference from difference is identity*, but in the form of its opposite. As a reflected negation, natural Time is the Absolute Idea in the form of otherness.

Being of non-being. Secondly, there is the description of natural Time as the contradiction of ‘the being that, by being, is not, and that by not being, is’⁵⁷. The connection between the self-externalization of the Idea and natural Time culminates in this understanding of the contradiction of Time found in paragraph §258 of the *Encyclopaedia*. Hegel’s conception of the contradiction of natural Time rests on two main ideas: 1) that Time is also a *continuum*, not a receptacle; 2) that Time is the contradiction between the *Now* and *nothingness*.

Time as a *continuum*. Firstly, like Space, for Hegel Time represents a *continuum*⁵⁸, or an ideality —an abstraction. As Hegel comments in the working notes to §258, usually Time is *mistakenly* conceived as a kind of container⁵⁹. Things are assumed to come to be and perish *in* Time⁶⁰, as if their finitude was something different from Time that only became effective when affected by the exterior law of Time. In this sense, the common understanding places Time as being an exterior element to finitude and the passing of Time itself —Time is conceived as a non-moving and abstract Eternity, different from its content. Time is, thus, placed as an Infinite in opposition to finitude.

⁵³ This idea is present in Hegel, *EN.*, §255, and also explained in detail in Ziglioli, “The Logic,” 237-238, and in Yeomans, “Temporal Strata”, 104-105.

⁵⁴ For Hegel, these negations are the point, the line, and the surface. Cf.: Hegel, *EN.*, §255, 236z.

⁵⁵ Hegel, *EN.*, §254.

⁵⁶ Hegel, *EN.*, §257.

⁵⁷ Hegel, *EN.*, §258. Also described in Ziglioli, “The Time,” 406-408.

⁵⁸ Ziglioli, “The Logic,” 242.

⁵⁹ Hegel, *EN.*, §258, 240z

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

There are two main reasons why, for Hegel, this constitutes a mistaken understanding of Eternity and finitude.

On the one hand, as it was previously seen, when Eternity is placed beyond the passing of Time, as an abstract and different Infinite that is completely separated from finitude, it is not truly itself. An abstract Infinity remains in an unsolvable opposition and separation from the passing and transient finitude that constitutes Time⁶¹. Rather, similarly to how true identity only arises for Hegel from the identity of identity and difference, and to how true Infinity only unfolds in its unity with finitude, Eternity must be thought as being in a unity with the perishing and vanishing of Time⁶². Time is not a receptacle or a container—things do not come to be and perish *in* Time.

On the other hand, following Hegel's previous understanding of *finitude* in the *Logic* as a figure that has within itself its 'immanent limit'⁶³ (its negation), the idea that Time might constitute a container for the vanishing of temporal existence overlooks the fact that finite and perishable figures include this finitude in themselves—*it is the finite existence itself what drives it into its own negation*, not an exterior form of 'Time'. Time is not a negation applied to finitude; rather, finitude already has this negation in itself. Time is itself finitude in its objective existence, or the being of finitude.

Consequently, because of these two reasons, Hegel presents Time as being precisely that passing and vanishing of existence⁶⁴; meaning that the abstract and undifferentiated *continuum* of Time is not an abstract and unmoving form, but a perennial and relentless movement of finitude, of negation of determination. Thus, Time is not simply an undetermined abstraction, but that 'abstracting that is being'⁶⁵: an indifferent abstraction that only *is* through the negation of its determinations, through *the difference from its own difference*—like Space, an *identity* in the form of otherness.

The Now and nothingness. Finally, the second main aspect of Hegel's determination of Time in §258 is that, as a *continuum*, Time culminates in the contradiction and unity between the momentary determination of Time—the *Now (Jetzt)*—and *nothingness*. Natural Time only exists in its disappearance, in its finitude; meaning that Time is the immediate negation of its momentary determination⁶⁶. On the one hand, the 'being' of Time unfolds through the figure of the *Now (Jetzt)*. Nevertheless, the *Now* is also presented by Hegel as being analogous to the point in Space⁶⁷: it is a qualitative difference and, as such, it introduces a negation of Time itself. Time is non-existent, it is contrary to presence and to the *Now*. To the extent that the *Now* 'is', the *Now* is not Time—Time overflows its determinate representation as a present 'Now'. Therefore, in the determinate being of Time—the *Now*—Time is not there, it is negated. On the other hand, precisely because of this difference from what is different to Time (the *Now*), Time endures as

⁶¹ 'The notion of eternity must not be grasped negatively as abstraction from time, as existing, as it were, outside of time; nor in a sense which makes eternity come after time, for this would turn eternity into futurity, one of the moments of time'. Hegel, *EN.*, §258, 240z.

⁶² Ziglioli, "The Logic," 241.

⁶³ Hegel, *SL.*, I/1, 116 (129)

⁶⁴ Hegel, *EN.*, §258, 240z.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Hegel, *EN.*, §259

⁶⁷ Hegel, *EN.*, §258, 240z.

being indifferent (as a *continuum*) to any negation⁶⁸. Thus, by ‘being’, Time is negated; and by the negation and annihilation of being, Time *is* and prevails as an undifferentiated *continuum*. ‘Now’ and ‘nothingness’ represent a unity and a difference.

In conclusion, it can be claimed that Hegel’s definition of natural Time in the *Encyclopaedia* as the ‘abstracting that is being’ is necessarily linked to the intuition that Time is a figure in the self-exteriorization of the Idea as Nature. As Ziglioli condensed it in her article: Time is the objective determination of finitude⁶⁹. This argument depended on showing that, for Hegel, Time unfolded under the figure of *otherness* or of a *difference to difference*. In order to prove this, two main aspects of Hegel’s understanding of natural Time were presented. Firstly, it was shown that, for Hegel, natural Time is not fundamentally different to Space but, rather, that it arises as the negativity of Space turned or reflected towards itself—a difference from difference. Secondly, it was shown that this led to the fundamental contradiction that Time *is* by *not being*. This contradiction further unfolded into two aspects. Firstly: that Time is a *continuum* or the self-negation of finitude itself, not a container of finitude. Secondly: that Time is the contradiction between the *Now* and its immediate vanishment into *nothingness*.

2.3. ‘Temporality’ in philosophy: the *Difference* and the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.

The overall object of the present chapter is to reconstruct the connection between the Absolute Idea and natural and spiritual Time. Until this point, it has been shown how Hegel presents the self-sundering of the Idea as Nature, and how the contradiction of natural Time represents an instance of this self-differentiation of the Idea. The aim of the following section is to show how Hegel also approaches spiritual Time as a self-exteriorization, and how spiritual Time is also permeated by the immanent contradiction of finitude and of natural Time: that it is by not being, or by being negated. In order to do this, the following argument will focus on Hegel’s early considerations regarding what he refers to as a ‘metaphysics of time’⁷⁰, found in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* and in the *Difference*. Here, Hegel briefly reconstructs the contradictory connection between the *history of philosophy* and the Eternal Idea. This contradiction can be separated into two opposing points.

⁶⁸ Houlgate argues that it is precisely this idea that the ‘Now’ self-negates itself what distances Hegel’s conception of Time from simply being a mere repetition of Aristotle’s conception in the *Physics*. From his standpoint, Aristotle is concerned with the fact that the Now is negated by other Nows, but not by itself, as an immanent negation. For Hegel, the Now of Time is *not* Time, and it is not negated by another Now, but by itself. Houlgate claims that this difference is overlooked by Heidegger’s and Derrida’s studies on both philosophers. Cf.: Stephen Houlgate, “Time for Hegel,” *Hegel Bulletin* 27, no. 1-2 (2006): 127-130.

⁶⁹ Ziglioli, “The Time,” 409.

⁷⁰ Hegel, *VPW*, 33.

Development of the Idea. On the one hand, beyond Nature⁷¹, the history of philosophy represents a temporal ‘development’⁷² of the Idea in Spirit and Thought:

For the Idea, thought of as being at rest, is, indeed, not in Time. To think of it as at rest, and to preserve it in the form of immediacy is equivalent to its inward perception. But the Idea as concrete, is, as has been shown, the unity of differences; it is not really rest, and its existence is not really sense-perception, but as differentiation within itself and therefore as development, it comes into existent Being and into externality in the element of Thought, and thus pure Philosophy appears in thought as a progressive existence in time.⁷³

For Hegel, the self-sundering and concretization of the Eternal and Infinite Idea also unfolds in Spirit —as History—, where the Idea also knows itself or becomes self-conscious:

(...) the activity of Mind is to know itself. I am, immediately, but this I am only as a living organism; as Mind I am only in so far as I know myself. *Γνῶθι σεαυτόν*, Know thyself, the inscription over the temple of the oracle at Delphi, is the absolute command which is expressed by Mind in its essential character. But consciousness really implies that for myself, I am object to myself. In forming this absolute division between what is mine and myself, Mind constitutes its existence and establishes itself as external to itself. It postulates itself in the externality which is just the universal and the distinctive form of existence in Nature. But one of the forms of externality is Time, and this form requires to be further examined both in the Philosophy of Nature and the finite Mind.⁷⁴

The self-consciousness of the Idea implies that there is a moment of self-differentiation, in which the differences that are within the Idea itself appear or are presented as laying separate and unconnected. Consequently, the history of philosophy is populated by a diversity of different systems and thoughts, through which Reason would appear to be developed. Similar to how analysis dissects the parts from a whole and presents them separately, there is a self-sundering of the Idea giving rise to a temporality in the history of philosophy. According to Hegel, philosophy is responsible for bringing about the differences of the Idea in distinct and separate thoughts:

Philosophy in its concrete Idea is the activity of development in revealing the differences which it contains within itself; these differences are thoughts, for we are now speaking of development in Thought. In the first place, the differences which rest in the Idea are manifested as thoughts. Secondly, these distinctions must come into existence, one here and the other there; and in order that they may do this, they must be complete, that is, they must contain within themselves the Idea in its totality. The concrete alone as including and supporting the distinctions, is the actual; it is thus, and thus alone, that the differences are in their form entire.⁷⁵

⁷¹ ‘But spirit does not remain such a pure I detached from nature. On the contrary, it creates time again as its own dimension, and henceforth time is regarded as spirit’s own dimension in reality’. Lindberg, “From Finite Thinking to,” 88.

⁷² Hegel, *VPW*, 33.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Hegel, *VPW*, 33-34

⁷⁵ Hegel, *VPW*, 34.

Eternity of the Idea. Nevertheless, on the other hand, the history of philosophy is also permeated by a contradiction. Analogously to natural Time, *spiritual Time becomes itself through a negation that also nullifies its being*⁷⁶⁷⁷. As it was previously seen, the history of philosophy arises from the externalization of the differences contained in the Idea. These are the differences of the variety of thoughts and individual philosophical schools. Nevertheless, for Hegel, these differences in philosophy are not truly differences *of philosophy* (or of the Idea) as long as they remain unconnected amongst themselves. Rather, they only *become* differences *of philosophy* to the extent that they are connected to the *whole* of philosophy, or to a larger unity that encompasses them. In turn, this connection with other schools in philosophy immediately entails their own negation as different and separate schools. In order to appear as being different schools of philosophy, this difference must be negated by the fact that these schools stand in a unity with the whole of philosophy; meaning that different schools must also appear as being *different to their own difference*. Insofar as the differences in the history of philosophy lie unconnected amongst themselves, they are not complete; insofar as they are complete, their temporal aspect is negated, for they are no longer mere fragments of the Idea, but the Eternal Idea itself in its reconstructed totality:

They are the determinations of the original Idea, which together constitute the whole; but as being outside of one another, their union does not take place in them, but in us, the observers. Each system is determined as one, but it is not a permanent condition that the differences are thus mutually exclusive. The inevitable fate of these determinations must follow, and that is that they shall be drawn together and reduced to elements or moments. The independent attitude taken up by each moment is again laid aside. After expansion, contraction follows—the unity out of which they first emerged.⁷⁸

As it can be intuited in the previous reference, this contradiction has a major implication for Hegel's understanding of the history of philosophy: that Truth is not

⁷⁶ Hegel, *PhG.*, 429 (801).

⁷⁷ This is the problematic condensed in Hegel's later famous expression in the *Elements for the Philosophy of Right*, that 'philosophy too is its own time apprehended in thoughts' (Cf.: Hegel, *PR*, 21). As Max Winter points out, this expression follows from the intuition that to apprehend a finitude in one's Time is to apprehend it in its Concept, this is: as an eventually vanishing moment of the Concept. Nevertheless, towards the end of his article, Winter also reaches the conclusion that, for Hegel, every finitude only constitutes an illusion —also Time. Contrary to this, the present idea of a paradox of temporality holds fast to the intuition that finitude and Time, in being negated, also persist as being more than an illusion, even on Hegel's account. Nothingness is also more than it claims to be. Certainly, Hegel argues for the unity of Time with the Idea; yet, by doing so, he also consciously maintains this contradiction. Thus, the insistence of this thesis upon the difficulty presented by the notion of 'temporality' partly reproduces the simultaneity, noted by Lindberg, between a 'rationalization' of Time in absolute knowledge (its negation or separation from finitude) and an opposite account of a rationality *in* finite reality (a union, a permanence). Temporality is in a unity and a difference with the Idea. Cf.: Max Winter, "Philosophy Is," 347-348 & Lindberg, "From Finite Thinking to," 88.

⁷⁸ Hegel, *VPW*, 34.

condensed in the form of one specific thinker or one particular philosophy⁷⁹. Rather, the Truth lies in the organic rationality of the whole⁸⁰, which both constitutes and nullifies the temporal-differences of philosophy⁸¹. In early texts such as the *Difference* this idea is further elaborated into the argument that there is *no progress* (thus, no ‘development’⁸²) unfolding in the history of philosophy⁸³. For Hegel, the notion of a progress in philosophy results in a discontinuity in the concept of philosophy itself: the Truth of philosophy is assumed to be condensed by an individual school, while the rest of schools are relegated to the status of mere errors and are denied participation in philosophical Truth. Rather, Hegel understands the diversity in philosophy as the ‘history of the one, eternal Reason’⁸⁴. This can be seen in his critique to Reinhold’s view that the history of philosophy represents the strive to ground ‘the reality of human cognition’⁸⁵:

But if the Absolute, like Reason which is its appearance, is eternally one and the same—as indeed it is— then every Reason that is directed toward itself and comes to recognize itself, produces a true philosophy and solves for itself the problem which, like its solution, is at all times the same. In philosophy, Reason comes to know itself and deals only with itself so that its whole work and activity are grounded in itself, and with respect to the inner essence of philosophy there are neither predecessors nor successors.⁸⁶

Therefore, in conclusion, it can be claimed that there is a temporal and contradictory unity connecting the Idea with natural and spiritual Time. Both Nature and Spirit arise from the reflection and externalization of the Idea in the form of *otherness*⁸⁷. In the case of natural Time, this self-externalization resulted in the figure of the negativity of Space turned towards itself. This reflected negativity was natural Time, and it was permeated by the contradiction of *being through vanishing*, or of being by means of a negation which also implied its own annihilation. As a result of this, natural Time represented the contradiction of being identical to the externalized Idea while, at the same time, being its own negation and, thus, a difference from the Idea itself. In the case of spiritual Time, it arose from the self-knowledge and self-appearance of the Concept in the diversity of

⁷⁹ As Rühle points out, this early intuition contrasts with Hegel’s late reconstruction of the history of philosophy during his last years, in which history is presented as undergoing a series of superseding epochs, ultimately culminating in his system. Cf.: Volker Rühle, “G.W.F. Hegel y la transformación de la metafísica”, in Hegel, G.W.F., *Diferencia entre los sistemas de filosofía de Fichte y Schelling*, trans. Joaquín Chamorro Mielke (Madrid: Gredos, 2010), 57.

⁸⁰ Rühle, “G.W.F. Hegel y,” 43.

⁸¹ Consequently to this, philosophy is later understood by Hegel as an activity of grasping the existing rationality within one’s Time. For Hegel, philosophy is not a prophetic divination of the future. Philosophy is absolute self-knowing of the Idea; therefore, it is directed at grasping the Absolute in its appearance as Reason, which unfolds in the history of philosophy. Cf.: Terry Pinkard, “Hegel’s Own Time Grasped in Our Thoughts after Two Hundred Years.” *Critical Review* 33, no. 3-4 (2021): 378-380.

⁸² Hegel, *VPW*, 33.

⁸³ Rühle, “G.W.F. Hegel y,” 57.

⁸⁴ Hegel, *D.*, 31.

⁸⁵ Hegel, *D.*, 10

⁸⁶

Ibid.

⁸⁷ Hegel, *EN.*, §247-248.

thoughts and schools of the history of philosophy. Nevertheless, this History was also subject to the contradiction that the self-knowledge originally giving rise to its temporality also implied its negation. As the ‘development’⁸⁸ of the One and Eternal Idea, History stood in a unity with the Idea itself; at the same time, this same ‘development’⁸⁹ entailed a fundamental difference with it. In both cases there exists an identity between temporality and the Idea; nevertheless, this identity only unfolds in a contradiction, as *the simultaneity of identity and difference*.

⁸⁸ Hegel, *VPW*, 33.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

3. Reconstruction of Hegel's critique to *reflection* in the *Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*

As anticipated in the introduction, the central argument of the present essay consists of two main ideas: 1) that, in Hegel's works, there is a contradictory logic of *temporality* that is reproduced both in Nature and in Spirit; 2) that the contradictory aspects of this logic can be explained by considering a central concept in the *Difference*: Hegel's early notion of *absolute identity*⁹⁰. Until this point in the essay, the argument has been focused on presenting the details of the contradiction of temporality. Here, the argument rested on the intuition that both natural and spiritual Time resulted from the *reflection* or the self-differentiation of the Absolute Idea. Consequently, natural and spiritual Time unfolded as a self-negation and as a reflected difference. Ultimately, this implied that natural and spiritual Time were permeated by the contradiction of finitude: having their negation outside of themselves, only *existing* through being negated and ceasing in their temporal aspect. Finally, this contradiction further implied that natural and spiritual Time stood both in an *identity* and a *difference* with the Eternal and Absolute Idea.

The following chapter is focused on showing how Hegel's early notion of *absolute identity* in the *Difference* accounts for the contradictory *reflection* of the Absolute Idea. The aim is to prove the core argument that the Absolute Idea necessarily becomes concrete and exists as natural and spiritual Time because, for Hegel, a unity (identity) that does not also encompass negation and difference as an instance of itself always remains a *relative*, limited, and *abstract* unity —not the unconditioned unity of the Absolute Idea. From Hegel's standpoint, true Infinity only unfolds in a unity with finitude, and true Eternity is not separate from transitoriness and duration but in a unity with it. Both, Infinity and Eternity, are for Hegel a unity of opposites, i.e., a contradiction.

⁹⁰ The notion of absolute identity constitutes a key aspect articulating Hegel's philosophy, and it underlies many of the contemporary approaches to his works. For example, Robert Stern distinctly separates Hegelian philosophy from the standpoint of the authors at the origin of analytic philosophy (Bradley, Moore, Russell) precisely by pointing towards the fact that, by 'identity', Hegel does not intend a merely *propositional* or *correspondence* theory of Truth but, rather, a 'material' one, based on the accordance of a being with its own concept (an identity that also includes an ontological dimension, not merely epistemological correctness). Another more recent example is Tobias Dangel's comparison between Aristotle's and Hegel's teleology, in which Hegel's conception of Truth is also introduced as 'an objective coincidence of a notion or an intelligible form with a being'. Cf.: Robert Stern, "Did Hegel Hold an Identity Theory of Truth?" *Mind* 102, no. 408 (1993): 646 and Tobias Dangel, "Hegel's Reception of Aristotle's Theology." *Hegel Bulletin* 41, no. 1 (2020): 107.

The method will consist in a reconstruction of Hegel's critique and limitation of the faculty of *reflection*⁹¹, when thought as a merely *subjective* activity. Unfortunately, across the *Difference*, Hegel does not extensively consider the specific relation between absolute identity and Time. Nevertheless, absolute identity constitutes a key concept articulating his early critique to a purely *mental* or *subjective* understanding of reflection. In turn, this early critique already opens the possibility for his later understanding that the self-sundering and reflection of the Idea—as Nature and Spirit—should unfold objectively, as a real difference and opposite to the Idea; not as a merely abstract negation of pure thought⁹². As it was already seen, the idea that natural and spiritual Time stood in an *identity* and a *difference* with the Idea constituted the essence of the contradiction found in both. Consequently, this early critique proves central to Hegel's later understanding of Time⁹³.

Hegel's critique to reflection rests upon proving that its differentiating and separating activity is always dependent upon a unity beyond itself. This is: *that difference is conditioned by identity (unity)*, and that difference only subsists by being itself also negated by unity. Consequently, Reason is both appearing in reflection and negating it; and the subsistence of reflection relies upon this simultaneous unity and difference.

The reconstruction of Hegel's critique to reflection in the *Difference* will be divided into three sections.

The first section will present the two main characterizations of reflection found in Hegel's writings: an *epistemological* operation of thought, and an *ontological* aspect also present in being.

The second section will present Hegel's first critique to reflection in the *Difference*. This first critique is driven by the idea that reflection is, in reality, only a limited and conditioned activity of Reason, and that it reveals itself as being limited and insufficient when it attempts to reconstruct the Infinite Idea. Here, reflection enters what Hegel refers

⁹¹ A detailed account of the central notion of reflection in modern philosophy can be found in Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 13-109.

⁹² In her article, Miller argues that, in order to account for the self-sundering of the Absolute Idea described in the *Science of Logic* and in the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel's early understanding of reflection as a merely 'mental' activity should be paired with an *ontological* understanding of reflection, which Hegel would progressively elaborate across these later works and in his assumption of the Kantian notion of 'reflective judgement'. Despite the fact that this development does unfold across the maturation of Hegel's thought, the elements for explaining the self-sundering of the Idea as Nature are also already contained, *in nuce*, in this early approach to identity and reflection. Cf.: Miller, "Hegel on Reflection," 207-212.

⁹³ In fact, in *Faith and Knowledge* (published only one year after the *Difference*), Hegel's critique to Jacobi's philosophy as being intellectualistic (and, thus, overly dependent upon the notion of reflection) also derives in his critique to Jacobi's separation between Infinity and finitude and between Eternity and time. Because Jacobi conceives Infinity and Eternity under the intellectualistic form of reflection, his philosophy is incapable of explaining how finitude and time are connected to the Absolute. Cf.: Ziglioli, "The Time," 409.

to as a *false infinity*: an Infinity that remains in perennial opposition to finitude, or an Infinity that is only illusory.

The third section will present Hegel's second critique of reflection in the *Difference*. This critique is focused on showing that reflection is, by itself and in isolation, incapable of expressing the absolute unity of the Idea in thought, because the products of reflection are always separated opposites. This critique is condensed in the intuition that, while reflection is bound to unfold by obeying the law of non-contradiction, in reality, its products are always an *antinomy* and a contradiction —this contradiction is the condition for its activity.

3.1. Two uses of the term 'reflection' in Hegel's writings

When, in 1801, and after spending a year of patient preparation in Frankfurt, Hegel finally landed in the effervescent life of the Jena of Goethe, Schiller, Fichte, Schelling, and the Schlegel, his first contact with the academic public opinion came together with his first publication: the *Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*. Despite the apparent neutrality of its title, the *Difference* is a highly polemic text in which Hegel distances himself from Kant, from post-Kantians such as Reinhold, from Fichte and, implicitly, from Schelling. This distancing, as well as Hegel's overall exposition of the systems of Fichte and Schelling, results from the debate concerning the status of *reflection* as the unconditioned and absolute ground for the unity of subject and object —this is: of thought and being, of intellect and the intelligible.

In the *Difference* and other early writings, the concept of reflection has at least two distinct and interdependent uses: one *epistemological* and other *ontological*. In both cases, reflection consists of a double movement: 1) it is a *splitting*, an introduction of a difference; 2) it is also a splitting with a purpose or an end (an *immanent teleology*), a splitting that eventually *nullifies* and *supersedes* itself as only constituting one (necessary) aspect of absolute unity.

Reflection as a method for knowing. Firstly, there is the idea of reflection as a *method* in philosophy and in knowing. This is the sense in which reflection is primarily employed by Hegel across the *Difference*. The term 'reflection' derives from the Latin translation of the Greek *analuein*: to *split*, to separate into parts⁹⁴. Reflection represents the *analytic* method of considering an organic unity through separating it into its parts. Because of this, it could be argued that reflection focuses, not on the unity as it is in itself, but in its appearance to thought⁹⁵. The form of this appearance depends upon a *fixating* of the separations between the different parts that constitute the organic unity. An organic unity is pre-supposed by reflection, but analysis brings forth the difference within that organic unity and presents it beyond the unity itself —reflection negates the unity. When separating the parts from the whole and considering them as individuals, reflection is

⁹⁴ Miller, "Hegel on Reflection," 203.

⁹⁵ Miller, "Hegel on Reflection," 204.

bound to fix these parts as unconnected individuals, or to maintain them as being indifferent to each other.

Therefore, similarly to the previous case of spiritual Time, the activity of reflection necessarily unfolds through a contradiction that ultimately leads reflection, by its own immanent logic, to negate or sublimate itself in order to achieve its own end. On the one hand, reflection is only possible because an organic unity of parts and whole is presupposed; and the aim of reflection is to attain a knowledge of this organic unity through its separation. On the other hand, this unity is dissected and negated by analysis. When the parts are presented and fixed as being separate, the unity between them is negated: the parts lose their status as ‘parts’ of the whole and become dead and empty figures. Therefore, in order to prevail as a dissection or an analysis of the whole, reflection is forced into reconstructing this same unity that is lost in its own differentiating activity. Nevertheless, precisely because the product of reflection is always a further splitting and differencing, reflection does not recombine the organic whole, or does not show how these parts also constitute ‘parts’ of the organic whole⁹⁶. Rather, reflection requires of a synthetic and comprehensive unity which is opposite to its positing and fixating of differences —thus, it is bound to negate itself⁹⁷.

As Hegel notes in the ‘Preface’ to the *Difference*⁹⁸, the contradiction involving reflection and analysis can already be found in Kant’s deduction of the categories of the understanding; specifically, in his intuitions regarding the notion of a pure apperception (self-consciousness)⁹⁹:

Therefore it is only because I can combine a manifold of given representations in one consciousness that it is possible for me to represent the identity of the consciousness in these representations itself, i.e., the analytical unity of apperception is only possible under the presupposition of some synthetic one.¹⁰⁰

Similarly to Kant’s intuitions regarding the conditions for self-consciousness, Hegel’s critique to reflection rests on the idea that reflection (analysis) only constitutes *one* conditioned aspect of knowing, the other being the immediate unity represented by the *intuition* of unity¹⁰¹. In this sense, his critique constitutes a limitation of reflection:

⁹⁶ Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 203

⁹⁷ Hegel, *D.*, 17.

⁹⁸ Hegel, *D.*, 5.

⁹⁹ For Kant, on the one hand, the activity of consciousness is conditioned by the unity of the pure apperception, or by self-consciousness. The understanding is capable of attaining knowledge of its objects through a combination of different concepts and judgements. Nevertheless, this combination of difference depends on the fact that a previous unity is presupposed: self-consciousness, the fact that, potentially, every representation of consciousness can be intuited by consciousness as being its own representation. However, on the other hand, this unity of self-consciousness (the condition of the activity of consciousness) only arises through a combination, or through a presupposed difference between subject and object. Only when, in actuality, consciousness makes itself its object, does this potentiality arise. There is an immediate co-dependence and co-implication between analysis and synthesis, difference and unity. Cf.: Kant, *KrV.*, B 130 – B 134

¹⁰⁰ Kant, *KrV.*, B 133 – B 134

¹⁰¹ Hegel, *D.*, 17.

reflection is not unconditioned, it is not capable of independently expressing the absolute unity. For Hegel, reflection only constitutes a moment in the unfolding of absolute identity: the moment in which the differences that are already contained in absolute identity are exteriorized by thought, presented as being different and separate parts of the whole, only to then be retracted back into their absolute unity by showing how each of these parts immanently becomes itself a ‘part’ of the whole in actuality.

From Hegel’s standpoint, the incapacity of reflection to reconstruct the absolute unity of the Idea derives from the fact that its characteristic *form* obliges reflection to conceive identity in merely *abstract* terms. In analysis, reflection presents and fixes as being separate what in the absolute unity is different but also organically united as a ‘part’ of the whole. This is: *in analysis, difference* (i.e. the parts of the whole) *is conceived as being separate from unity*, different from it and opposed—it is split from the whole. Analysis eviscerates the difference from the unity and presents it. Consequently, *reflection rests upon the movement of presenting identity and difference as being contrary to each other*. This implies that the form of reflection itself is bound to mistake an absolute identity (an identity of identity and difference) with a merely abstract identity. This is why, across Hegel’s critique to reflection in the *Difference*, the notion of absolute identity is presented as contradicting what Hegel refers to as either ‘formal’, ‘analytic’ or ‘abstract’ identity. Contrary to the case of absolute identity, abstract identity could be defined as an understanding of *identity as the exclusion of difference*. This is: as the One¹⁰², as a unity which subsists and endures as such unity to the extent that it remains within itself, coherent and immediately equal to itself, deprived of all opposition or difference with itself. Here, difference or separation results in the annihilation of unity. This second idea is further condensed and developed in the understanding of identity as mere *sameness*; as a sameness that endlessly prevails as the exact reproduction of the same unity, without variation. This is the standpoint that Hegel attributes to Reinhold in the first chapter of the *Difference*:

Reinhold sets up identity as “the essence or inward character of thinking as such”: “the infinite repeatability of one and the same as one and the same, in and through one and the same”.¹⁰³

Reflection and being. Secondly, there is also an *ontological* aspect implicitly attributed to reflection in Hegel’s early writings—i.e., the *Difference*—and fully elaborated in later works such as the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*¹⁰⁴.

¹⁰² There exists a similarity between Hegel’s critique to abstractness and his divergence from the forms in traditional mysticism which deny the intelligibility of the ‘Mystery’ or of the unitary Truth (*coincidentia oppositorum*) that lies beyond the pairs of opposites. Cf.: Glenn Alexander Magee, “Hegel and Mysticism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 270-272.

¹⁰³ Hegel, *D.*, 18

¹⁰⁴ ‘(...) reflection is not only a logical but also a natural structure. While logic is the science of the truth (the Idea) considered abstractly in terms of thinking, the philosophy of nature concerns the same truth embodied in its otherness, and the philosophy of spirit expresses its return to itself out of its otherness (...). Reflection is both the movement of splitting into two and the overcoming

This meaning of reflection is more closely linked to Hegel's later account of Nature as a reflection of the Absolute Idea and, consequently, to his conception of natural and spiritual Time. In both cases, temporality represented: 1) a difference *of* the Idea, a self-externalization of absolute identity as its negation ($\neg A$); 2) a difference *from* the Idea, or a real, concrete, and existing difference beyond the pure logical form of negation $\neg A$, an actual negation of the Idea: a difference of difference. The contradiction of temporality consists of a reflected difference: in Nature, temporality is 'the being that, by being, is not, and that by not being, is'¹⁰⁵; in Spirit, it is the historical development of the self-consciousness of the Concept which also erases Time¹⁰⁶. Thus, the contradiction of temporality lies in the fact that reflection not only has a 'mental' or epistemological status, as an activity of thought, but also an ontological one¹⁰⁷. For Hegel, reflection exists both in thought and in being. As Hegel notes in the *Fragment of a System of 1800*—written ten months before the publication of the *Difference*—, it is the Life itself of the organism that is 'divided against itself'¹⁰⁸: Being (either Nature or Spirit) is, simultaneously, an organic unity and a unity that continuously self-sublates and self-reflects itself. In the logic of the whole and the part, identity and difference are present in both poles of the dichotomy:

Within this organization, every part is at the same time the whole; for its standing is its connection with the Absolute.¹⁰⁹

In the *Difference*, the idea that there is an ontological dimension to reflection underlies Hegel's critique to the 'letter' of Kant's philosophy¹¹⁰. From Hegel's standpoint, Kant strays from the notion of speculation and presents an overly intellectualistic conception of reflection¹¹¹, in which thinking remains absolutely separated from its object¹¹², or in which Reason's knowledge of its objects is limited to the form of their appearance to finite intellect (as *phenomena* of intuition). As a consequence of this unresolved separation between object and subject of the merely subjective conception of reflection,

of this opposition (...), and the concept of reflection is both mental ('external') and immanent in nature. Miller, "Hegel on Reflection," 210.

¹⁰⁵ Hegel, *EN.*, §258

¹⁰⁶ Hegel, *PhG.*, 429 (801).

¹⁰⁷ 'The reason why spirit is unrestrainedly with itself when it thinks its own determinations is that these determinations that seem to have the status of intelligible objects are not separate from spirit, because they are spirit's internal determinations. The latter allows Hegel to speak of this spirit as absolute spirit. Spirit thinks its intelligible objects and at the same time produces them. Thus, when absolute spirit thinks intelligible objects, it is identical with them in the very actuality of its thinking'. Cf.: Dangel, "Hegel's Reception," 108.

¹⁰⁸ Hegel, *SF*, 309.

¹⁰⁹ Hegel, *D.*, 19

¹¹⁰ Rühle, "G.W.F. Hegel y," 35-40.

¹¹¹ Miller, "Hegel on Reflection," 205-206.

¹¹² In fact, at the end of the 'Transcendental Analytics', in the 'Amphibology of reflection', Kant does present the notion of reflection as 'the consciousness of the relation of given representations to our various sources of cognition, through which alone their relation among themselves can be correctly determined'. This is: reflection does not deal directly with objects; rather, reflection is the act of connecting the different combinations of representations unfolding in the understanding with the particular faculty in Reason that can ground the truth of those combinations—with its subjective conditions. Cf.: Kant, *KrV.*, B 16

Hegel identifies two contradictory aspects in Kant's understanding of the object as a thing-in-itself:

The things in themselves—which are nothing but an objective expression of the empty form of opposition—had been hypostasized anew by Kant, and posited as absolute objectivity like the things of the dogmatic philosophers.¹¹³

On the one hand, the thing-in-itself constitutes a 'pure empty form opposition',¹¹⁴ produced by Reason. Kant refers to this aspect as the idea of a concept of an object in general taken 'problematically',¹¹⁵. For Kant, the pure concepts of the understanding (the categories) refer a priori to the objects of experience, so they constitute a synthesis by which it is possible for thought to attain a knowledge of its objects. Nevertheless, every synthesis (every unity of two separated elements) presupposes a unity of those elements; a unity that, in this case, is located beyond the determinations of a possible knowledge of objects. Therefore, every combination of concepts in the understanding also presupposes this opposite indeterminable unity: the notion of *nothingness*, the empty form of opposition.¹¹⁶

The highest concept with which one is accustomed to begin a transcendental philosophy is usually the division between the possible and the impossible. But since every division presupposes a concept that is to be divided, a still higher one must be given, and this is the concept of an object in general (taken problematically, leaving undecided whether it is something or nothing).¹¹⁷

On the other hand, through several points in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the thing in itself is considered by Kant as being something more than a pure form of opposition emerging from Reason. For Kant, the thing in itself also represents an indecipherable and somehow 'subsistent' unity, something 'X' standing beyond the understanding, and beyond the productivity of Reason, as an unknowable yet necessarily presupposed 'origin' of the intuitions in experience¹¹⁸.

In conclusion: the notion of reflection in the *Difference* entails two different meanings. The first one is the *epistemological* understanding of reflection as a method of knowing through analysis. Here, Hegel argues that the differencing and separating introduced by reflection is conditioned to a previous unity, and that reflection is incapable of, by itself, reconstructing this unity in thought. The second use of the term reflection is concerned with the *ontological* dimension of reflection and with the idea of an absolute unity between thought and being. Here, Hegel's argument is directed against the subjective or intellectualistic understanding of reflection, which ultimately fixes an unsolvable differentiation between the subject and the object. In both cases, the notions of natural and spiritual Time are not directly addressed but are collaterally implied. As the self-differentiation of Reason in the history of philosophy, reflection constitutes a part of the self-consciousness unfolding in Spirit; moreover, as the natural Time that exists

¹¹³ Hegel, *D.*, 5

¹¹⁴ Hegel, *D.*, 5

¹¹⁵ Kant, *KrV.*, B 346

¹¹⁶ Kant, *KrV.*, B 348

¹¹⁷ Kant, *KrV.*, B 346

¹¹⁸ Rühle, "G.W.F. Hegel y," 35-40.

and prevails through self-negation and disappearance, reflection is also in unity with natural being.

3.2. Hegel's first critique to *reflection*

The manifoldness of being lies between two nights, without support.¹¹⁹

Across the *Difference*, Hegel presents two major critiques to the notion of reflection. His argument in both cases is focused on showing how reflection only constitutes a limited —yet, necessary— appearance of absolute identity. In order to do this, reflection is presented by Hegel as unfolding an immanent purpose or teleology that, ultimately, drives reflection into its own negation and limitation¹²⁰. As a part of the absolute identity, the part also shows or becomes itself a part: it differentiates itself from the whole and self-negates itself. This teleological aspect of reflection can be condensed in two points. On the one hand, reflection is in unity with the absolute identity, in that it is the strive to present and grasp the absolute unity of the whole by dissecting and separating it into its constituent elements. As such, reflection represents the strive of the absolute unity to present itself through its inner difference, or to *mirror* its differences. On the other hand, the grasping of the absolute unity requires of a reconstruction of the unity and connectedness amongst the different parts that are separated by reflection. Reflection proves incapable of reconstructing this unity, because its analysing and separating only perennially divides this unity against itself. Therefore, in order to comprehend the absolute unity, negation is also bound to elevate itself into Reason and, consequently, it is bound to abandon the separating and fixing of differences that is essential to its activity. By its own concept and immanent logic, reflection is bound to negate itself.

As anticipated in the previous sections, Hegel's critique to reflection across the *Difference* is mostly concerned with the epistemic dimension of reflection, as an activity of knowing occurring in thought and, particularly, in philosophy¹²¹. Nevertheless, this focus on reflection and the conditions for self-consciousness is not unrelated to the ontological dimension of reflection. Rather, a fundamental consequence to his critique and limitation of reflection lies in showing that Nature (and, in general, the object of thought) cannot be understood as simply constituting the opposite of thought and consciousness¹²². Contrary to, particularly, Fichte's standpoint¹²³, for Hegel the object is

¹¹⁹ Hegel, *D.*, 17.

¹²⁰ Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 35-38.

¹²¹ Miller, "Hegel on Reflection," 204.

¹²² Stern, "Did Hegel," 646-647.

¹²³ For Hegel, Fichte's understanding of the object as an opposite produced by the subject (a '–I') constitutes a reduction and nullification of the concept itself. The reality of the object is not only its unity with the subject, but also its difference. The object does not simply constitute a positing

both ideal and real, as it is also the case for the subject: it is both the identity with the subject and its difference from it.

For example, in Hegel's later account of both natural and spiritual Time, there is simultaneously a unity and a difference. On the one hand, Time is the figure of finitude of the Idea, or the unity with the Idea by being the Idea itself in the form of otherness¹²⁴ (the finitude opposed to the Infinity and Eternity of the Idea). On the other hand, and precisely because of this, Time is an actual and existing difference beyond the pure repetition of a subjective figure of difference, it is a difference from itself as $\neg A$, a difference reflected and turned towards itself¹²⁵ and in a continuous self-negation. The contradiction of Time lied, precisely, in the simultaneity of its ideal and real dimensions: Time is the being that only is by its negation of being; but, in this negation, it both vanishes into nothingness and unfolds the self-differentiated Idea itself. Temporality is the difference of difference. In the *Difference*, this simultaneity of identity and difference also derives from Hegel's critique to reflection.

Hegel's first critique of reflection in the *Difference* involves two points: 1) showing that reflection is a *finite* and conditioned activity, by showing that reflection potentially strays into what Hegel refers to as a *false infinity*; 2) showing that this finite reflection also has a stand within the Infinite life of the Absolute. This first critique results in an intuition that, as was previously seen, is central for Hegel's later description of natural and spiritual Time: that the Infinite (and Eternity) also encompasses the finite within itself, or that the finite only subsists as itself in its unity with the Infinite¹²⁶.

Reflection and *false infinity*. For Hegel, the task of philosophy lies in comprehending and bringing to consciousness the absolute identity of the Idea. This is: in philosophy, the Absolute Idea elevates itself to its own absolute knowing of itself¹²⁷. As Hegel expresses it: the task of philosophy is 'to construct the Absolute for consciousness'¹²⁸. Nevertheless, this task is also faced by the fact that the form of consciousness and thought is that of reflection (the 'faculty of being and limitation'¹²⁹), or of difference —not of unity¹³⁰. Consciousness only unfolds through a series of limitations and finite representations.

of the subject, but a *real* and *concrete otherness* to it. Cf.: Miller, "Hegel on Reflection," 205-206.

¹²⁴ Hegel, *EN.*, §247.

¹²⁵ Hegel, *EN.*, §257.

¹²⁶ Ziglioli, "The Time," 408-409.

¹²⁷ Following Hegel, absolute spirit is the totality of its determinations, being its parts or moments, while each moment is itself the presence of the totality, i.e., the presence of the unity of all moments. In this organological unity of the thinking of spirit, moment and totality mutually pervade one another, so that spirit is an infinite unity that possesses itself in all of its moments. Cf.: Dangel, "Hegel's Reception," 108.

¹²⁸ Hegel, *D.*, 16

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ 'Novalis, as is well known, ironically quipped that whereas we everywhere seek the unconditioned, *das Unbedigte*, all we find are things (*Dinge*)'. Terry Pinkard, "From Finite Thinking to Infinite Spirit", in *Translating Hegel: The Phenomenology of Spirit and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Brian Manning Delaney & Sven-Olov Wallenstein (Stockholm: Södertörn Philosophical Studies, 2012), 73.

Consequently, when the Infinite and unconditioned Absolute is posited in consciousness, it is also negated:

The Absolute is to be posited in reflection. But then it is not posited, but cancelled; for in having been posited it was limited [by its opposite]. Philosophical reflection is the mediation of this intuition.¹³¹

The question arising from this contradiction is: to what extent can philosophy elevate itself to the absolute knowing of the Idea by means of maintaining the separating and fixating of differences that characterizes reflection and consciousness?

What must be shown above all is how far reflection is capable of grasping the Absolute, and how far in its speculative activity it carries with it the necessity and possibility of being synthesized with absolute intuition. To what extent can reflection be as complete for itself, subjectively, as its product must be, which is constructed in consciousness as the Absolute that is both conscious and non-conscious at the same time?¹³²

Here, Hegel's critique and limitation of reflection relies on the intuition that reflection, when attempting to reconstruct by itself —without self-sublating— the Infinite and absolute unity of the Idea, it strays into what Hegel refers to as a *false infinity*: an Infinity that is only illusory.

The idea of a false infinity could be presented as a case of infinite recurrence. In the understanding —intellect—, consciousness operates with finite representations and their combinations. Because of their *finitude* (because their negativity lies beyond themselves¹³³), the truth of these representations is always conditioned by something beyond them. In the same way that, for the intellect, the truth of an argument is only justified or grounded by the truth of another argument preceding it, finite figures are thought of as being conditioned by the limit imposed by other —separate— finite figures. In turn, because every positing of a figure in consciousness is, at the same time, a separation, a scission, or a conditioning, the grounding of the truth of an individual representation leads consciousness into considering another, more fundamental, representation; and, as a successive ground to this, another one, and so on indefinitely¹³⁴. Thus, the idea arises of an infinite chain of determinations in a strive to reconstruct the absolute unity of the Idea:

Reason seduces the intellect into producing an objective totality. Every being, because it is posited, is an opposite, it is conditioned and conditioning. The intellect completes these its limitations by positing the opposite limitations as conditions. These need to be completed in the same way, so the intellect's task expands *ad infinitum*.¹³⁵

From Hegel's standpoint, as long as the form of the intellect —of finitude— is not sublated, this strive of reflection proves futile. The activity of the intellect only unfolds through finite figures. If, under the form of the intellect, reflection attempts to reconstruct

¹³¹ Hegel, *D.*, 16

¹³² Hegel, *D.*, 16

¹³³ Hegel, *EN.*, §262, 249Z.

¹³⁴ Hegel, *SF.*, 313.

¹³⁵ Hegel, *D.*, 17

in consciousness the Infinite Idea, it is bound to reduce this Infinity to an endless progression of finitudes¹³⁶. Nevertheless, because the condition of these finitudes always constitutes for the intellect something beyond the finitudes themselves, the Infinite is equally reduced to an unattainable horizon located beyond finitude. This horizon opposing the finite and determinate figures of consciousness is the inexpressible indeterminate: an abstract unity, an absolute negation of differences, or an elusive *nothingness*¹³⁷. The scissions and separations of the intellect and of reflection are conditioned by an opposite to them. Thus, reflection unveils as being incapable of reconstructing the unity between the finitudes of consciousness and the Infinite Idea:

For every being that the intellect produces is something determinate, and the determinate has an indeterminate before and after it. The manifoldness of being lies between two nights, without support. It rests on nothing—for the indeterminate is nothing to the intellect—and it ends in nothing. The determinate and the indeterminate, finitude and the infinitude that is to be given up for lost, are not united. The intellect stubbornly allows them to subsist side by side in their opposition. And stubbornly it holds fast to being as against not-being; yet being and not-being are equally necessary to it. The intellect essentially aims at thoroughgoing determination. But what is determinate for it is at once bounded by an indeterminate. Thus its positings and determining never accomplish the task; in the very positing and determining that have occurred there lies a non-positing and something indeterminate, and hence the task of positing and determining recurs perpetually.¹³⁸

Reflection as *finite life*. Following the idea of a false infinity, Hegel presents the view that *reflection and finitude are not unconnected to the Infinite Life of the Absolute*¹³⁹. Rather, reflection is both in a *unity* and a *difference* with the Absolute, as an instance of the Absolute and as its negation and sublation. Similarly, the contradiction underlying temporality relied precisely on this: its unity with the Idea as its otherness (self-separation), and its real difference and immediate self-negation and disappearance. Like this, reflection is encompassed as an instance of the Infinite and unconditioned unity:

Reflection, the faculty of the finite, and the infinite opposed to it are synthesized in Reason whose infinity embraces the finite within it.¹⁴⁰

For Hegel, the unity between the Absolute (Reason) and reflection unfolds in three steps.

Firstly, according to Hegel, Reason pushes reflection into attempting to reconstruct the Absolute Idea through a false infinity¹⁴¹: through an endless chain of finite and conditioned determinations¹⁴². As it was previously seen, this attempt of reflection is condemned to failure. Whether in thought or in reality¹⁴³, finite determinations such as ideas or particular beings are always conditioned by other determinations beyond

¹³⁶ Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 36-39.

¹³⁷ Hegel, *D.*, 17

¹³⁸ Hegel, *D.*, 17

¹³⁹ Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 36.

¹⁴⁰ Hegel, *D.*, 18

¹⁴¹ Hegel, *D.*, 17

¹⁴² Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 37-38.

¹⁴³ Miller, "Hegel on Reflection," 208.

themselves; meaning that reflection is drawn into endlessly positing new conditions and new finite determinations. Furthermore, reflection's own activity—the ceaseless positing of new conditions—is itself equally conditioned and limited by the fact that every positing of a new and differenced idea or a being also presupposes a previous undifferentiated unity. This is: every determination presupposes an indetermination; any difference and separation presuppose an undifferenced unity. Consequently, reflection not only fails in reconstructing the Infinite Idea through multiplying finitude, but it also is led by Reason into eventually negating itself and its own activity as being insufficient and conditioned to an abstract identity opposite to it. In this self-negation, reflection is sublated: 'every positing then appears to Reason to be non-positing, its products to be negations'¹⁴⁴:

Reflection in isolation is the positing of opposites, and this would be a suspension of the Absolute, reflection being the faculty of being and limitation. But, reflection as Reason has connection with the Absolute, and it is Reason only because of this connection. In this respect, reflection nullifies itself and all being and everything limited, because it connects them with the Absolute. But at the same time, the limited gains standing precisely on account of its connection with the Absolute.¹⁴⁵

Secondly, once the insufficiency and dependence of reflection is unveiled, Reason attempts to reconstruct the Absolute Idea through the opposite to reflection: the undifferenced and abstract Infinite. Hegel refers to this as a 'subjective totality'¹⁴⁶ (opposed to the previous objective totality), as the 'realm of freedom'¹⁴⁷ or as 'Reason's pure positing without opposing'¹⁴⁸. Here, contrary to the previous case of reflection, the positings of Reason are supposed to be absolutely free of limitation: Reason does no longer unfold through a succession of relative and conditioned finitudes. In this case, Infinity abstracts from all finitude and determination. Nevertheless, as a result of this, abstract Infinity also unveils as being conditioned, relative and incapable of grasping by itself the absolute totality of the Idea. Similarly to the previous case of reflection, this abstract Infinity is also conditioned by an opposite, namely: its opposition and abstraction from finitude and opposition itself. This undivided unity only subsists as being divided, differenced, from the differences introduced by reflection. Consequently, like reflection, abstract identity and abstract Infinity are also limited and are subject to a self-sublation.

The third and final aspect of the unity between the Absolute (Reason) and reflection consists in the idea that there exists both an *identity* and a *difference* between the finite determinations of reflection and the abstract and undivided Infinite. Across the previous two moments, reflection and abstraction constituted two opposite and interdependent poles. However, their unity does not only imply a separation between a dichotomy of opposites. Rather, the unity of reflection and abstract unity—of finitude and Infinitude—entails that the dichotomy between both opposites is also reproduced individually within each pole itself¹⁴⁹. Analogously to the contradiction of Time, each opposite

¹⁴⁴ Hegel, *D.*, 17

¹⁴⁵ Hegel, *D.*, 16-17

¹⁴⁶ Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 39-40.

¹⁴⁷ Hegel, *D.*, 17.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ For example, Miller comments that reflection is also a fundamental dynamic in Nature: Miller, "Hegel on Reflection," 203.

simultaneously *is* and *is not* the other. On the one hand, reflection is the positing of difference and separation and, because of this, it is also the posited and presupposed undivided unity conditioning its determinations¹⁵⁰. On the other hand, the Infinite and abstract unity is the unconditioned freedom beyond the finite and conditioned determinations of the intellect; yet, at the same time, it is the unity emerging from the difference with the intellect: it is a difference. In Hegel's later account of Time: Time is both the objective figure of finitude and its real, concrete, existing self-difference: it *is* and it is *not* the Idea. Infinite Reason does not appear unilaterally, as either opposed to difference or as opposed to abstract unity. Rather, Reason is both its finite manifestation and, simultaneously, its superseding, negation and nullification as being 'finite' and different to the Infinite Idea:

It nullifies both of the opposed realms by uniting them; for they only are in virtue of their not being united. Within the union, however, they subsist together; for what is opposite and therefore limited is, in this union, connected with the Absolute. But it does not have standing on its own account, but only insofar as it is posited in the Absolute, that is, as identity. The limited is either necessary or free, according to whether it belongs to one or the other of the mutually opposed and therefore relative totalities. Insofar as the limited belongs to the synthesis of both totalities, its limitation ceases: it is free and necessary at the same time, conscious and nonconscious. This conscious identity of the finite and infinite, the union of both worlds, the sensuous and the intelligible, the necessary and the free, in consciousness, is knowledge.¹⁵¹

Consequently, Hegel's first critique to reflection in the *Difference* arrives at the conclusion that *true Infinity only unfolds through a unity and a difference with finitude*. Despite the fact that Hegel's account of natural and spiritual Time is only extensively elaborated in later works such as the *Encyclopaedia*, this early conclusion anticipates the idea that reflection and finitude only subsist through a movement of self-negation and self-sublation, implying both an identity and a difference with the Absolute Idea. As a result of this, Time later constitutes both the unfolding of the Eternal Idea in the form of otherness and its negation, its otherness turned towards itself and negated. Hegel's argument arrives at this conclusion through combining two points. First: that reflection is only a limited and conditioned element of Reason. He shows this by presenting the insufficiencies of reflection and the idea of a false infinity. Second: that, nevertheless, negation constitutes a necessary part of the Absolute Idea, in that it represents the differentiating activity of the Idea itself.

¹⁵⁰ As Gasché notes, reflection is also the activity of Reason. Cf.: Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 39.

¹⁵¹ Hegel, *D.*, 17-18.

3.3. Hegel's second critique to *reflection*

They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them.¹⁵²

Hegel's first critique to reflection showed that Infinity stands in a unity and a difference with finitude; and, consequently, that natural and spiritual Time could also be understood as the moving contradiction between finitude and Infinity. In order to prove this, his argument focused on showing how reflection —the faculty of finitude and difference— proved incapable of reconstructing the Infinite Idea in consciousness. Hegel focused on presenting the limits and insufficiency of reflection, and the idea that, in Reason, reflection was also bound to sunder and negate itself¹⁵³.

Hegel's second critique to reflection is focused on counter-arguing the idea that philosophical Truth should derive from the truth of an *apodictical and absolute basic proposition*¹⁵⁴. For Hegel, philosophical Truth and knowledge consist in the *absolute identity* between subject and object¹⁵⁵, or between thought and being. Nevertheless, the idea that philosophical Truth might be condensed in the form of a single basic proposition directly contradicts this intuition. From Hegel's standpoint, if Truth is reduced to a basic proposition, then philosophical knowledge is equally reduced to the mathematical act of deriving this apodictical truth and simply extending its conclusions avoiding any contradictions. In turn, this implies that the absolute identity between thought and its object is transformed into a mere *application* of the forms of thought into the object. This is: for Hegel, there is no absolute identity nor Truth in the mere application of thought, because this simply entails the degradation of the object into being a copy of the subject. The objective pole of knowledge is simply vanished away.

Despite appearances, this critique concerning the *method* of philosophy anticipates a major idea of Hegel's later account of Time. This is the intuition that both natural and spiritual Time arise from a *mirroring* or *reflection* of the Absolute Idea. This is: natural and spiritual Time *do not* arise as a mere *copy* of the Idea. Hegel's account of the transition from the *Logic* to the Philosophy of Nature does not describe the Idea's *production* of Nature, nor the mere *application* of its figures to Nature. Rather, the figures of thought are described as being *mirrored, reflected*¹⁵⁶, in their *concrete and self-externalizing existence* either as Nature or Spirit. This implies that, for Hegel, Time stands in an *identity* with the Idea and yet, at the same time and to the same degree, in a *difference* from it. Idea and Time *are not the same*; rather, they are two poles in an absolute identity amongst themselves.

¹⁵² Luke 16:29, quoted from: Hegel, *PR*, 10-11.

¹⁵³ Hegel, *D.*, 16-17

¹⁵⁴ Hegel, *D.*, 23.

¹⁵⁵ Dangel, "Hegel's Reception," 107-108.

¹⁵⁶ Hegel, *EL*, §222.

The following section will present Hegel's second critique to reflection through two main points. Firstly, it will be shown how the idea that philosophical Truth might be condensed in the form of a basic proposition is derived from the notion of reflection. Consequently, Hegel's critique is directed at a specific understanding of reflection. Secondly, it will be shown how Hegel argues against the idea of a basic apodictic proposition through a *reductio ad absurdum* where, similarly to the previous chapter, reflection is exposed as a limited and conditioned element within Reason. Here, Hegel's argument will depend on showing how every positing of reflection (and, thus, any proposition in philosophy) is already an *antinomy* or a contradiction: never a basic, self-consistent and apodictical proposition.

The idea of a basic principle of philosophy. The idea that Truth might be condensed by an absolute basic proposition results from the influence of *reflection*. Philosophical Truth and absolute identity (identity of identity and difference) can be expressed in thought by the proposition 'A=A'¹⁵⁷. Nevertheless, because the activity of thought only unfolds as a succession of finite representations, the expression of absolute identity in thought could be said to result in a discontinuity between the meaning and the formula of 'A=A'. While the formula 'A=A' might symbolize the notion of absolute identity, its expression is also subject to the form imposed by *thought* and the *intellect* (of which reflection is a function). This form is that of *finitude*. As it has been previously seen, a characteristic of finite figures is that their negation is located *beyond* themselves and represents the annihilation of their being¹⁵⁸. Consequently, from the standpoint of the *form* of the intellect, the potential truths expressed in finite thoughts only remain such truths to the degree that they are not opposed or that they are non-contradictory. From the standpoint of finitude, negation entails the annihilation of Truth.

Because of this, reflection becomes blind to the meaning behind the expression of 'A=A', and assumes that philosophical Truth is to be contained in a single, basic, and non-contradictory proposition. Contrary to the case of absolute identity, this truth of reflection abstracts from negation and contradiction. Furthermore, philosophical thinking is consequently transformed by reflection into an activity of consistently deriving conclusions from an original and apodictic proposition. Like this, the absolute identity between the subject (thought) and the object is displaced by a merely abstract identity, in which the difference of the object of thought is not sublated and conserved, but *suppressed*. Due to its aversion to contradiction and negativity, reflection only conceives identity and Truth through the annihilation of difference; and this unfolds in philosophy as the mere *application*¹⁵⁹ of a form of thought into an extant matter. Finally, this straying of reflection results in the idea that philosophical knowledge consists in the structuring of a *coherent system of propositions*¹⁶⁰. Like this, similarly to the previous case of false infinity, reflection strives to reconstruct the Absolute through the conglomeration of finite instances and the endless reproduction of differences —in this case, finite thoughts and propositions.

¹⁵⁷ Hegel, *D.*, 24.

¹⁵⁸ Hegel, *SL.*, I, 116 (129)

¹⁵⁹ '(...) a system of the reality of cognition is supposed to be erected by analysis of the application of thinking'. Hegel, *D.*, 26.

¹⁶⁰ Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 36-39.

From Hegel's standpoint, this represents an intellectualistic¹⁶¹ understanding of thought and knowledge. The absolute identity that philosophy aims to reconstruct for thought is here lost to a mere *sameness* between subject and object, between form and matter¹⁶². When considered as mere sameness, absolute identity is reduced to a *false* and *illusory* identity, an identity in which the object is nullified as simply being the same as the subject, produced or resultant from it. It is an identity between subject and object in which one of the different poles is simply eliminated; an identity that excludes difference and is, therefore, merely abstract:

In this way thinking has become something purely limited, and its activity is an application [of the identity] to some independently extant material, an application which conforms to a law and is directed by a rule, but which cannot pierce through to knowledge.¹⁶³

Philosophical Truth: from the proposition to the antinomy. The aim of Hegel's second critique to reflection is to counter-argue the claim that the Absolute might be reduced to the form of a non-contradictory and basic proposition. In order to do this, Hegel employs a *reductio ad absurdum* that consists in showing how every finite proposition of the intellect depends on a *different* and *opposite* proposition that conditions its own truth:

Suppose that the Absolute is expressed in a fundamental proposition, validated by and for thinking, a proposition whose form and matter are the same. Then either mere sameness is posited, and the inequality of form and matter is excluded, so that the fundamental proposition is conditioned by this inequality. In this case the fundamental proposition is not absolute but defective; it expresses only a concept of the intellect, an abstraction. Or else the fundamental proposition also contains both form and matter as inequality, so that it is analytic and synthetic simultaneously. In that case the fundamental proposition is an antinomy, and therefore not a proposition.¹⁶⁴

Analogously to how, previously, every determinate positing of the intellect was described as standing 'between two nights'¹⁶⁵, here Hegel shows how the proposition $A=A$ is *not apodictical but antinomical*. Expressed in the form of reflection, identity necessarily constitutes an *antinomy*: a unity of two contradictory and mutually exclusive propositions. Identity, $A=A$, is never in any case a non-contradictory truth; in order to be constructed in thought, it involves a contradiction that is neglected or overlooked by reflection.

Hegel's argument is condensed by the following three moments.

¹⁶¹ Miller, "Hegel on Reflection," 204-206.

¹⁶² Contrary to this, the idea that there exists a unity between form and matter *that does not exclude their difference* but that, rather, depends upon it, is an intuition found in the annex on reflection at the end of the 'Transcendental Analytics' in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cf.: Kant, *KrV.*, B 322 – B 323) and in Hegel's 'Preface' to the *Elements to the Philosophy of Right* (Cf.: Hegel, *PR*, 10).

¹⁶³ Hegel, *D.*, 19

¹⁶⁴ Hegel, *D.*, 23-24

¹⁶⁵ Hegel, *D.*, 17.

First, the ‘principle of identity’¹⁶⁶ is expressed by the intellect under the formula $A=A$:

In $A=A$, as principle of identity, it is connectedness that is reflected on, and in this connecting, this being one, the equality, is contained in this pure identity; reflection abstracts from all inequality. $A=A$, the expression of absolute thought or Reason, has only one meaning for the formal reflection that expresses itself in the propositions of the intellect. This is the meaning of pure unity as conceived by the intellect, or in other words a unity in abstraction from opposition.¹⁶⁷

Secondly, reflection is faced with the difficulty that the formula $A=A$ does not express an indivisible and non-contradictory unity¹⁶⁸. From the standpoint of reflection, the unity expressed by the formula $A=A$ consists of an abstract unity: a unity that rests on the fact that there are no differences between its elements. Therefore, for reflection, the unity between a subject and an object consists of an indifferent *sameness*, or of an exact *replication* of one into the other.

Nevertheless, for Hegel¹⁶⁹, this abstract unity is conditioned by the fact that it is only possible if a *difference* between the two elements is presupposed. This is: $A=A$ is never a non-contradictory formula; rather, it is an identity conditioned to difference and contradiction. The formula $A=A$ consists of two different and separate elements: a subject ‘A’ and an object ‘A’. Despite the fact that both poles are expressed as an ‘A’, subject and object are not the same. The formula $A=A$ expresses their unity, but this unity is not *sameness*. The unity expressed by the formula $A=A$ is a synthesis of opposite elements. In order for these opposite elements to be synthesized as $A=A$, a *difference* between both is presupposed. Difference is the condition to the unity of subject and object, expressed as $A=A$; the positing of *identity* immediately entails the positing of a *difference*. Consequently, it can be said that if an ‘A’ is posited as being identical to another ‘A’, a difference between both is also posited, this is: a $\neg A$ is posited. In turn, this implies that the formula $A=A$ is itself conditioned by an opposite proposition expressing the difference between subject and object. Every proposition $A=A$ presupposes and is conditioned by a proposition $A \neq A$, or $A=B$. Thus, $A=A$ is not a basic and unconditioned formula of Truth:

One A is subject, the other object; and the expression of their difference is $A \neq A$, or $A=B$. This proposition directly contradicts the first. It abstracts from pure identity and posits the non-identity, the pure form of non-thinking, just as the first proposition is the form of pure thinking, which is not the same thing as absolute thinking, or Reason.¹⁷⁰

Thirdly, Hegel shows that the identity symbolized by the formula $A=A$ is only properly grasped by thought in the form of an *antinomy*, not of an individual and basic proposition. An antinomy is the unity consisting of two propositions that are, at the same time, *contradictory* and *mutually dependent*¹⁷¹. In the case of identity, this is the antinomy

¹⁶⁶ Hegel, *D.*, 24

¹⁶⁷ Hegel, *D.*, 24-25

¹⁶⁸ Hegel, *D.*, 25

¹⁶⁹ See Hegel’s previous critique to Reinhold: Hegel, *D.*, 18-19.

¹⁷⁰ Hegel, *D.*, 25

¹⁷¹ ‘This connection of the two propositions expresses the antinomy; and as an antinomy, as an expression of the absolute identity, it makes no difference whether we posit $A=A$ or $A=B$ as long

formed by *identity* and *difference*, which is expressed as the opposite and mutually dependent propositions of $A=A$ and $A\neq A$.

For Hegel, the interest in showing that Truth can only be thought through an antinomy lies in the fact that this entails the sublation and limitation of the form of reflection¹⁷². As it was previously seen, reflection is constrained by the fact that all contents of thought are *finite* thoughts. Because of this, reflection attempts to impose the form of finitude to Truth itself; and, therefore, attempts to reduce Truth to a basic, apodictic and self-grounding proposition. However, by insisting on the idea of the antinomy, Hegel's argument is that the expression of Truth ($A=A$) is never in any case a self-standing proposition; rather, it symbolizes an identity that is only grasped in itself once it is thought together with its opposing and contradictory proposition $A\neq A$. Consequently, in order to grasp philosophical Truth, reflection is bound to negate itself and its own finite activity.

In order to prove this, Hegel shows that the proposition expressing difference ($A\neq A$)—which, as it was just shown, constituted the condition for $A=A$ — is itself also conditioned and dependent on its opposite¹⁷³. In other words: that $A\neq A$ also presupposes and is conditioned to $A=A$. Regardless of the difference between its elements, the proposition $A\neq A$ (or $A=B$) is conditioned to the fact that, in order to express a difference between a subject and an object, it relies on a previous connectedness between both. Only because object and subject are placed in a unity is it that they can be presented as being different and, yet, connected by an identity '=':

This second proposition is as unconditioned as the first and qua unconditioned it is condition of the first, as the first is condition of the second. The first is conditioned by the second in that it is what it is through abstraction from the inequality that the second proposition contains; the second conditioned by the first, in that it is in need of a connection in order to be a proposition.¹⁷⁴

Therefore, in conclusion, Hegel's second critique to reflection is focused on counter-arguing a specific understanding of philosophical knowledge and of the relation between thought and its object. This is the idea that philosophical knowledge derives from a basic and apodictic proposition, and that its relation with its object is that of an *application* of this Truth to the object. Contrary to this, Hegel defends that Truth can only be grasped by thought in the form of an antinomy; and, consequently, that this entails the negation of the form of reflection.

As advanced in the introduction to this section, there is an implicit ontological consequence from Hegel's critique which proves relevant for the debate concerning temporality. By considering the nature of thought, Hegel has finally established that the object is not a merely extant matter or a passive receptacle of the free activity of thought. Rather, the object stands in both a *unity* and a *difference* with the subject. This entails a

as each of them, $A=B$ and $A=A$, is taken as the connection of both propositions. $A=A$ contains the difference of A as a subject and A as object together with their identity, just as $A=B$ contains the identity of A and B together with their difference'. Cf.: Hegel, *D.*, 26.

¹⁷² Hegel, *D.*, 26

¹⁷³ 'Only because non-thinking too, is thought, only because $A\neq A$ is posited through thinking, can it be posited at all'. Cf.: Hegel, *D.*, 25.

¹⁷⁴ Hegel, *D.*, 25

fundamental contradiction: the object *is* and is *not* the subject, it includes in itself difference and unity, reflection and its opposite¹⁷⁵. Furthermore, this is the same contradiction involving the Absolute Idea and Time: Time appeared as a figure of the self-differentiation (reflection) of the Idea; yet, at the same time, as a difference to this. As it was previously seen, Time *is* the Idea (as self-negated, $\neg A$) *and* its opposite. In Temporality, its unity *is* immediately its non-unity: *its existence is evanescence*.

3.4. Conclusion

The present essay has tried to show that, in Hegel's conception of natural and spiritual Time, there is an ongoing and *contradictory* logic of *temporality*, and that the essential elements of this temporality can be explained by considering Hegel's early notion of *absolute identity*, found in the *Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*.

In order to show this, the argument has relied on the fundamental intuition that the contradiction of Time arises from the fact that it stands in both in an *identity* and a *difference* with the Absolute Idea.

On the one hand, both in Nature and in Spirit, Time represents the self-exteriorization of the Idea, or its unfolding in the form of *otherness*. Hegel referred to this exteriorization by the key concept of *reflection*¹⁷⁶. In the case of Time, this is the reflection of the Eternal and Infinite Idea as its opposite: *finitude*. In this sense, Ziglioli referred to (natural) Time as the 'objective determination of finitude'¹⁷⁷.

However, on the other hand, precisely because it emerges as the self-differentiation of the Absolute Idea, Time also implies a *real* and *existing difference* from the Idea, a negation of its purely logical determination. As Hegel presented it in the *Logic*, Nature is the Idea going 'forth itself *from* itself'¹⁷⁸. For Hegel, finitude is the (*logical*) figure which only is in itself by means of a negation that is located beyond its unity¹⁷⁹, and which entails both its own *annihilation* and its own constitution or *consummation*. Finitude *is* by ceasing to be, or by the self-difference and negation of its being. Having its negation outside of itself, finitude is bound by its own immanent logic to negate itself in order to become itself.

Consequently, it was argued that Time is defined by Hegel as the contradiction of transient and passing existence as a result of this simultaneous identity and difference

¹⁷⁵ 'For Hegel, the order of nature is both material and rational, indivisibly body and mind. Nature and mind are so completely intertwined that to think of them separately renders nature an aggregate and mind an abstraction. Both can be thought of as possessing a reflective activity and a speculative one'. Miller, "Hegel on Reflection," 209.

¹⁷⁶ Hegel, *EL.*, §222.

¹⁷⁷ Ziglioli, "The Time," 409.

¹⁷⁸ Hegel, *EL.*, §222.

¹⁷⁹ Hegel, *EN.*, §262, 249Z.

with the Idea. In Nature, Time represents the ‘the being that, by being, is not, and that, by not being, is’¹⁸⁰; in Spirit, Time is the development of Reason through the concrete diversity of the history of philosophy, and its erasing by philosophy itself after the grasping of the Concept¹⁸¹. In both cases, Time simultaneously represented a *difference*—the Idea itself in its reflection, an otherness to Eternity and Infinity—and a *reflected difference*—like Saturn, a difference turned towards itself and self-annihilating, a difference from difference.

Across the essay, this argument was divided into two major chapters.

The first chapter focused on reconstructing the idea of a temporality across Hegel’s description of the ‘reflection’¹⁸² of the Absolute Idea and his accounts of Time in Nature and in Spirit. Here, it was shown that the idea of reflection already entailed the contradictory combination of identity and difference, because neither natural nor spiritual Time emerged as the mere copy or replication of the Absolute Idea. As their reflection, they *were* the Idea (as its self-exteriorization) and, consequently, were *not* the Idea, but its negation. The identity of the Idea itself implied this self-negation and contradiction: the Absolute Idea only became itself through its unity with difference, negation, and opposition.

The second chapter focused on presenting how this intuition was already anticipated in Hegel’s early notion of *absolute identity*, found in the *Difference*. As it was shown, this depended on arguing that Hegel’s early critique to a purely mental or epistemological conception of reflection also implicitly entailed the later understanding of his mature works: that reflection unfolded as both a difference and an identity with the Idea. Hegel’s early critique to (epistemic) reflection was focused on showing that the *object* of thought also has a real, different, and ontologically separate existence in relation to the thinking subject; and, therefore, that the union between subject and object occurring in knowledge is a union between identical and, simultaneously, different elements, not a mere *sameness* produced by the thinking subject. Hegel proved the limitations of merely mental reflection through two arguments. First, he showed how mental reflection inevitably entered a *false infinity* when attempting to reconstruct the absolute identity between object and subject. Second, he showed how all products of reflection were already necessarily an *antinomy*, or a contradiction of identity and difference.

Therefore, in conclusion, it can be argued that Hegel offers an account of temporality that is fundamentally positive—hence the title of the present essay: ‘Delight in Temporality’. Indeed, for Hegel, Time does constitute the inexorable disappearance of being, its relentless vanishment into nothingness and negation. Time is the cruel nature of Saturn (Chronos), who finds sustenance in consuming his own offspring. Nevertheless, after showing the connection between the Absolute Idea and Time, it can be claimed that, precisely, this endless disappearing of Time finds its foothold in Eternity. Time is the relentless and infinitely rich existence of the negative activity of the Idea. In Time, *Nothing* lasts. Only existing as nothingness, Time is more than it claims to be. Time is the life and consummation of the Idea: there is a perennial rationality expressed in its

¹⁸⁰ Hegel, *EN.*, §258

¹⁸¹ Hegel, *PG.*, 429.

¹⁸² Hegel, *EL.*, §222.

vanishing. Therefore, similarly to how, according to Aristotle, Heraclitus invited the two curious strangers to join him by the fire, Hegel's conception of Time is condensed in this observation: 'Come in; don't be afraid; there are gods even here'¹⁸³.

[Total words: 19986]

¹⁸³ Aristotle, *De part. anim.* A5 645a 17.

Abbreviations

- De part. anim. Aristotle. *Parts of animals. Movement of animals. Progression of animals*, translated by A. L. Peck, M. London: Harvard University Press, LOEB Classical Library, 1937.
- D. Hegel, G.W.F. *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*, translated by H.S. Harris & Walter Cerf. New York: State University of New York Press, 1977.
- EL. Hegel, G.W.F. "G.W.F Hegel, The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences, with the Zusätze," Translated by T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting and H.S. Harris, in *Hegel Bulletin* 13, no. 1 (1992): 51–55. doi:10.1017/S0263523200004845
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