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Hegel on Leibniz and Individuation¹

by David Ingram, Cedar Falls/Iowa

The cardinal principle of Hegel's metaphysics is that reason constitutes the essence of reality. Taken in conjunction with Hegel's notorious endorsement of Leibniz's identity of indiscernibles doctrine (P. 1), the principle would seem to imply that we must turn to the internal conceptual determinations of a thing if we are to find the sufficient reason for its being the particular thing that it is.² Now if one were to combine the doctrine with the principles of sufficient reason (P. 2) and contradiction (P. 3) in the way that Leibniz does, then what is proper to a thing's identity would be just those properties that are truly predicated of it, or more precisely, contained in its complete notion as ascertained by conceptual analysis (either terminating or non-terminating depending on the apperceptive capacity of the intellect in question). The complete notion of a substance (or monad), consisting as it does for Leibniz in the totality of its relations to other substances, is *internally* connected to the aggregate of individuals maintained in perfect harmony by God in accordance with the eternal essences and the principles of logic. Such a view of identity is not unproblematic for Hegel; the theory of internal relations agrees with his own critique of "bare particulars" and he finds Leibniz's notion of substance attractive, especially inasmuch as the monad is conceived as a self-determining entelechy which reflects the Absolute.³ But Hegel's assessment of the extent to which the monad exhibits a spiritual propinquity is hardly univocal. He observes elsewhere that the monad is but an *external, passive reflection of the world* and he likens its flow of perceptions to the mechanical necessity of steam rising from a coffee cup or of bubbles rising through water – this despite the fact that Leibniz himself advanced a teleological ground of sufficient reason to supplement explanations based upon efficient causality.⁴ Symptomatic of the above defect are Leibniz's tendency to

overcompensate for the atomistic nature of his system by reducing accidents to essences and his inability to account for phenomenal contingency and mutability.⁵

The preceding difficulties bear upon the problem of individuation accordingly: if one reduces all accidental properties to essential ones – an implication which follows from the principle of sufficient reason, or the principle which asserts that the predicate of any true proposition is analytically contained in the concept of the subject – then the deprivation of a single property from a thing, no matter how insignificant that property may appear to be, entails that the thing in question necessarily no longer is what it was. Moreover, the inclusion of relational predicates among the pool of properties entails a reductive monism. Thus, we find in Leibniz's metaphysics the typical post-Cartesian duplication of the classical essence/accident conundrum in the dualism of essence and appearance; the essences of things as they exist in the divine intellect *sub specie aeternitatis* are unchanging and logically indiscernible, but when manifested as *phenomena* such things have properties which are continually changing under conditions of mutual opposition.

The thesis I wish to defend, which runs counter to the interpretation advanced by Bradley and others, is that Hegel is neither a reductive monist in the way that Spinoza is nor a sometime monist, sometime pluralist in the way that Leibniz is. Hegel is certainly closer to Leibniz on this score, for he is a strong defender of the metaphysical reality of individuals, contingency, freedom, and change; yet like a good rationalist, he no less than Leibniz aspires to conviction founded upon sufficient reason. Unlike that of his predecessor whom he accuses of inconsistency, Hegel's metaphysics subordinates *analytic* rationality and its concern with non-contradiction to a higher principle of reason. This reassessment was in large part inspired by what many feel to be a tendentious reading of Kant's discussion of the dialectical nature of pure reason.⁶ But Hegel's reading, however idiosyncratic it may be, owes more to Kant's pioneering discovery of transcendental apperception conceived as *synthesis*-activity which posits its own self-identity while constituting its object. Hegel dubs this activity determinate reflexion, or thought which establishes its self-identity as an immanently contradictory relation between a posited other and itself. Now in Book II of his *Logik*, Hegel attempts to overcome the classical and contemporary dichotomies mentioned above and to explain how identity is compatible with phenomenal change. His argument purports to show both that the sufficient reason for a thing's identity resides in its immanent, conceptual determinations, which are *grounded* in *unitary* determinate reflection (his defense of P. 1 and a dialectical version of P. 2), and that any *given* thing's *particular* identity is nonetheless *indeterminate*, i.e., *groundless* (contingent) and *mutable* – 'other' with respect to the totality of beings and with respect to itself.

⁵ *Logik* I, pp. 476–78; *Logic*, pp. 383–85.

⁶ See Martial Gueroult, *Hegel's Urteil über die Antithetik der reinen Vernunft*, in: *Seminar: Dialektik in der Philosophie Hegels*, ed. R. P. Horstmann, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1978, pp. 261–82.

¹ I would like to thank Professor Robert Pippin at the University of California, San Diego and members of the Philosophy/Religion Department at the University of Northern Iowa for their helpful criticism of earlier drafts of this paper.

² G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, in: *Sämtliche Werke*, Band 19, ed. Hermann Glockner, Stuttgart, 1927, pp. 458 & 473. English translation by E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simpson, *Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. III, Humanities Press, London, 1972, pp. 334–35 & 348.

³ G. W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Vol. I, in: *Sämtliche Werke*, Band 4, pp. 675–76. English translation by A. V. Miller, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, Humanities Press, London, 1969, pp. 539–40.

⁴ *Logik* I, pp. 489, 554–55 & *Logik* II (Band 5), p. 270; *Logic*, pp. 396, 446, & 781.

My argument shall proceed as follows: First I shall argue that the problem of individuation raised in Book I of the *Logik* is only resolved in Book II, where Hegel examines the categories of reflection. I shall then discuss the importance of Kant's earlier treatment of the amphibolies of reflection for an understanding of Hegel's disagreement with Leibniz over the problem of identity. Finally, I shall endeavor to show how the problem of identity gets resolved in the manner I have hitherto indicated by briefly adumbrating the key arguments in Book II.

I

Hegel's critique of Leibniz's theory of individuation is closely interwoven with some of the opening arguments in Book I of the *Logik* and therefore we would be well advised to get clear about the overall structure of this work before proceeding further. The *Logik* is a transcendental deduction of categories arranged in ascending order in which those that are the most abstract and least penetrating are shown to presuppose those that are progressively richer and deeper in meaning. The *nisus* toward greater concreteness and semantic coherence corresponds to the realization of categorical rationality, conceived as the comprehensive grounding and reconciliation of opposed moments of reality. Because ordinary thought is regarded by Hegel as possessing the least developed and most superficial conception of reality, the *Logik* will initially be concerned with describing and critically reconstructing its categories.⁷ Significantly, the *vollständig entwickelte Widerspruch* which Hegel detects in Leibniz's theory of individuation is also identified by him as the theoretical expression of those antinomies which pervade *der gesunde Menschenverstand*.⁸ These contradictions are not mere logical *faux pas*, but have ontological validity. We ought not to spare things the agony of transient existence out of some misguided *Zärtlichkeit* for them by blaming the fallacious use of reason for all antinomies in the way that Kant did.⁹

The contradictions implicit in Leibniz's monad revolve around the following three commonsense beliefs: (1) P. 2: the predicate of any true proposition is contained in the subject (where subject and predicate terms are taken to refer to the actual thing and its properties respectively), (2) the *Principle of Continuity* (P. 4): each thing stands in

relation to an indefinite multiplicity of other things, thereby generating an innumerable set of relational properties which may be truly ascribed to it and (3) P. 1: each thing is complete and sufficient unto itself.¹⁰ Taken together, these propositions produce two related antinomies. The first concerns the contradiction between the absolute self-subsistence of things and their relational dependence upon one another.¹¹ The second stems from the internalization of the above contradiction within the individual thing so that the identity, or *essential unity*, of a thing is opposed to its indefinite mutability.¹² In order to understand the dialectical relationship between these two antinomies it is imperative that we briefly survey the relevant passages in Book I of the *Logik*.

The portion of the text which primarily concerns us is contained in the chapter entitled, "Das Dasein", where Hegel presents his initial demonstration of the plausibility of the aforementioned antinomies. Despite the etymological connection between *Dasein* and spatial location, Hegel seeks to vindicate the Spinozistic dictum, *omnis determinatio est negatio*, or the claim that qualities (*Bestimmtheiten*) individuate by limiting, or negating being. The metaphysical *topos* of the *Logik* is not constrained by conditions of sensibility and so, *ex hypothesi*, Hegel is perforce a defender of P. 1. If Hegel has a retort to Kant's well known caveat against P. 1, it can only be a variation of Leibniz's view that difference *solo numero* as ascertained by comparative observation is indifferent to individuation.¹³ Hegel's version of this argument runs as follows: The basis for saying, for example, that the leaves of a book are one unitary entity as opposed to a multitude of unrelated bits of paper is not that, in the former case, the sheets of paper are somewhat more contiguous than in the latter (the leaves of my book can be scattered throughout my house and still be parts of the same thing). Abstract units do not *eo ipso* reveal any unifying principle at all.¹⁴

Now it can be objected that this argument does not adequately refute Kantian reservations with respect to P. 1. P. F. Strawson has developed a powerful argument along Kantian lines that acknowledges the validity of Hegel's point,¹⁵ namely that spatial continuity is insufficient to establish the *formal* identity of discrete totalities, without abandoning Kant's major contention that two co-existing, formally well-defined things, such as two virtually indiscernible drops of water, are sufficiently differentiated relative to the abstract, *partes extra partes* continuum of space and time. Hegel, however, could respond with some justification that the position defended by Kant and Strawson pertains, by their own admission, to the *transcendental* problem concerning the possibility of identifying objects *within the peculiar ambit of human sensory experience* and does not address the *logical* question with which he and Leibniz are concerned, i. e., whether complete descriptions containing nothing but general

⁷ As Terry Pinkard has observed (*The Logic of Hegel's Logic*, in: *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. XVIII, No. 4, 1980, p. 420) Hegel's *Logik* does not fit either the descriptive or revisionary models of metaphysics which Strawson talks about in his study, *Individuals*. In the Introduction to the *System der Philosophie* Hegel says that the *Logik* is a descriptive ontology of timeless categories which display varying degrees of truth. Though all categories (and philosophies) express a universally valid content, they differ with respect to the formal rationality in terms of which they articulate it.

⁸ *Vorlesungen*, p. 454; *Lectures*, Vol. III, p. 330. Here Hegel explicitly accuses Leibniz of deriving his ideas from *allgemeine Vorstellung*.

⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, *System der Philosophie*, in: *Sämtliche Werke*, Band 8, p. 140. English translation by W. Wallace, *The Logic of Hegel*, Oxford, 1971, p. 98 ff.

¹⁰ *System*, p. 403; *The Logic of Hegel*, p. 334.

¹¹ *Logik* I, p. 199; *Logic*, pp. 169–70.

¹² *Logik* I, pp. 676–77; *Logic*, p. 540.

¹³ *Logik* I, p. 458; *Logic*, pp. 334–35. On the necessity of a framework of individuation, see Strawson, *Individuals* Garden City, N. Y., 1963, p. 12.

¹⁴ *Logik* I, p. 611; *Logic*, p. 490.

¹⁵ P. F. Strawson, *Individuals*, p. 23.

terms referring to intrinsic properties (including non-spatial and non-temporal relations) are sufficient to differentiate individuals.¹⁶ Despite Strawson's hypothetical thought experiments concerning auditory worlds, the logical question at the center of Hegel's and Leibniz's concerns is given but perfunctory treatment by him and then only insofar as it figures within Leibniz's metaphysics. Strawson admirably exposes the metaphysical obstacles preventing Leibniz from making good his inclusion of P. 1 as a logical principle in his system without having recourse to *extra-logical*, theological assumptions.¹⁷ I shall argue below that these obstacles, which principally revolve around Leibniz's linking of P. 2 to P. 3, are circumvented by Hegel. Of course, one might still be tempted, again following Strawson, to delimit the range of conceivable objectivity to spatio-temporal existence, thereby excluding such entities as 'private' particulars and 'theoretical constructs' from membership.¹⁸ The decision to exclude imperceptible entities, concrete universals, and monads from membership in the class of conceivable objects, however, is not without need of further justification – a fact which once again recalls standard misgivings with respect to the implicit circularity of transcendental arguments.¹⁹

The aforementioned issues are too complicated and controversial to be pursued here. However, I shall assume that it is at least an open question whether Kant or Strawson has succeeded in disposing of P. 1. Returning to Hegel's opening argument in Book I, we immediately confront a new problem, namely, that the discussion here appears to be patterned after that contained in the *Phänomenologie*,²⁰ which is not a logical analysis at all, but is rather a quasi-descriptive account of primitive experiences of referring – a strategy which has misled some commentators into believing that Hegel, like Strawson

¹⁶ Strawson himself admits that the possibility of differentiating discrete spaces may depend on the possibility of differentiating objects and vice-versa. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁷ Strawson observes that if monads are only differentiated by their point of view, then one must introduce something like Leibniz's principle of plenitude with all of its attendant theological assumptions in order to guarantee nonduplication of perception. If, on the contrary, monads are regarded *sub specie aeternitatis* as complete notions, or sets of concepts, then all such notions would be analytically contained within the richest of all notions, namely that of the existing world. Not only does this harmonious conceptual schema follow from the postulate of a God who chooses the 'best possible world', i.e., one which ostensibly maximizes the greatest diversity of phenomena compatible with the greatest simplicity (and vice-versa), but it has the unintended result of reducing the claim 'is an actual individual' to 'is a member of the richest set of concepts.' *Ibid.*, pp. 124–131.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 31–35.

¹⁹ See, R. Rorty, *Strawson's Objectivity Argument*, Review of *Metaphysics* 24 (1970), p. 218.

²⁰ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Verlag Ullstein, Frankfurt, 1973, pp. 65–73. English translation by A. V. Miller, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford, 1979, pp. 58–66. See C. Taylor, *The Opening Arguments of the Phenomenology*, in: *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. A. MacIntyre, Garden City, N. Y., 1972, pp. 151–187, for an account which compares Hegel's critique of *sinnliche Gewißheit* with Wittgenstein's refutation of ostensive definition in the *Philosophical Investigations*.

and Kant, is concerned with the *limited* transcendental problematic.²¹ I shall not detain myself here by giving a detailed exposition of Hegel's argument except to note that it conforms to Strawson's own position, which holds that identification presupposes a framework – whether it be spatio-temporal or conceptual – *against which* individuals are situated.²²

Briefly, Hegel argues that each thing (*Etwas*) is differentiated via negative reference to all other things (*Anderes*). Now something (A) is *both* 'not-other', i.e., it is just *this* thing and *no* other, *and* 'other', since the 'other' (B) in terms of which A is differentiated as this, is likewise a particular *this* which is, *as such*, only if A is 'other' to it. This immanent 'contradiction' can be rephrased in the following manner. The 'distinctiveness' which sets something apart as *this self-subsistent, self-identical* individual (*Ansichsein*), contains implicit reference to its other (*Sein-für-Anderes*), but this reference outside of itself, or dependence upon otherness, is just as much a negation of its *Ansichsein*. Ordinary understanding tries to circumvent this contradiction by positing a distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic properties. The result of Hegel's abstruse argument is that intrinsic properties (*Bestimmungen*), which comprise the simple identity that remains unscathed by entanglements with other things, implicate extrinsic properties (*Beschaffenheiten*), and vice-versa.²³ Whether Hegel has in fact demonstrated such a reciprocity is doubtful and this has led some commentators to believe that he is guilty of committing a facile *petitio principii*.²⁴ The primary difficulty, however, stems from Hegel's desire to effect a dialectical transition, the foundation of which is laid in a more advanced stage of the *Logik*. Hegel's treatment of categorical distinctions underlying a multi-level conception of reality weighs heavily on his present attempt to forge an interdependence that clearly testifies to a reflective correspondence (between inner and outer, essence and accident, form and matter, necessity and contingency, etc.) while yet denoting the kind of asymmetrical distinctions which, at the level of one-dimensional being, frustrate such a correlation. Nevertheless, it is Hegel's contention that an object-level understanding of phenomenal qualities presupposes some kind of reflective, meta-understanding of unity. Essence, identified as substrate, ground, sufficient reason, etc., must be invoked in order to offset the

²¹ See H. F. Fulda, *Unzulängliche Bemerkungen zur Dialektik*, in: *Seminar: Dialektik in der Philosophie Hegels*, ed. R. P. Horstmann, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1978. Fulda considers the dialectic of the *Logik* as pre-eminently one of progressive meaning modification whereby abstract philosophical categories, which lack an ordinary linguistic referential context, have their *vagueness* reduced through a rational reconstruction of such terms. Fulda maintains that some basic transitions cannot be interpreted as attempts to eliminate semantic ambiguity. *Werden*, e.g., is not part of the meaning of *Sein*, but rather denotes a necessary condition for specifying a range of successful, non-antinomial application.

²² Hegel argues that primitive *referring* expressions such as 'something' and 'other' depend for their efficacy on *descriptive* predicates which denote properties, a position which is also shared by Strawson and Wittgenstein (see n. 20 above).

²³ *Logik* I, pp. 141–42; *Logic*, pp. 124–25.

²⁴ See P. Guyer, *Hegel, Leibniz, und der Widerspruch im Endlichen*, in: *Seminar*, pp. 254 ff.

II

perpetual variability of surface phenomena and to explain the persistence of identity amidst radical qualitative change without, as in the case of Leibniz, demoting the phenomenal world to the status of mere illusion.²⁵ Conversely, Hegel must show how essence *appears* without disintegrating into discrete qualia.

If, as Charles Taylor has observed, the dialectic of being cannot be expounded without recurring to the dialectic of essence, then the contradictions encountered at the object-level between self-subsistence and internal relatedness to otherness on the one hand and essential unity and phenomenal change on the other can only be understood in terms of Hegel's discussion of identity in Book II.²⁶ Significantly, attempts to articulate Hegel's retrieval of Leibniz *solely* within the parameters of Book I have misled some commentators to identify Hegel's ontology with Spinozistic monism.²⁷

Apropos of the above, we note, finally, that the denouement of "Das Dasein" already anticipates a reflective understanding of the problem of identity. The category that expresses the unity of *Ansichsein* and *Sein-für-Anderes* is limit (*Grenze*) which, according to Hegel, is the "middle between (the something and the other) wherein they cease."²⁸ It is in a thing's limit that it has already passed over the evanescent boundary separating itself from the other that 'bounds' it. Stated in non-spatial, semiological terms, every identifying description contains general terms whose meanings are bounded or defined in reference to other meanings. If we view language as the general frame of semantic reference, then it is plausible to imagine the totality of linguistic meaningfulness as implicitly implicated in every description. The reference to otherness would then extend *ad infinitum*.²⁹ But a new contradiction now surfaces which plays upon the reciprocity (*Wechselbestimmung*) of finite and infinite. The progress to infinity has as its *ideal* limit the complete self-contained totality (true infinity) which gathers the series of references together and provides fixity of identification. This quest is never finished due to the irrepressible re-emergence of limitation (the reciprocal definition of the whole vis-à-vis its innumerable parts), which, lapsing indefinitely into otherness, or dispersion, continually rescinds any closure (bad infinity) – hence Hegel's reference to the *Zerstreute Vollständigkeit* of the monad.³⁰

²⁵ *Logik* II, pp. 38–39; *Logic*, p. 602.

²⁶ C. Taylor, *Hegel*, Cambridge, 1975, p. 384 n.

²⁷ Guyer, in *Hegel, Leibniz, und der Widerspruch im Endlichen*, takes Hegel to be criticizing ontological individualism by exposing its inner contradiction – a critique which putatively establishes the thesis that "... es schließlich nur *einen* Begriff gegeben wird, und somit für *einen* Idealisten wie Hegel, auch nur einen Gegenstand" (232). Contrary to Guyer's reading of Hegel, I wish to contend, along with J. N. Findlay (*Hegel: A Re-examination*, London 1958, p. 203) that Hegel's idealism, though undermining a naive belief in the absolute *Selbständigkeit* of individual phenomena, seeks to avoid the undialectical conceptual reductionism of Spinoza and Leibniz.

²⁸ *Logik* I, pp. 147–48; *Logic*, p. 129.

²⁹ *Logik* I, pp. 150–81, 676; *Logic*, pp. 131–54, 540.

³⁰ *Logik*, p. 675; *Logic*, p. 539.

Kant's animadversions regarding Leibniz's metaphysics are of primary concern to us because they indicate a central weakness in the Leibnizian doctrine of individuation which Hegel is anxious to avoid, namely, the reduction of real identity to abstract logical identity. Furthermore, as Yvon Belaval has admirably demonstrated, Kant's discussion of the concepts of reflection, which influenced the structural design of Book II of the *Logik*, is pivotal for grasping the filiation of Hegel's metaphysics with Kant's Copernican revolution in epistemology.³¹ Briefly, Leibniz's *apperceptio*, like Descartes' *cogito*, is a species of *external reflection*. In the former case, a multiplicity of distinct ideas is immediately given to apperception. In the case of the *cogito* it is the absolute identity of the self. What is common to both modes of reflection is that they analyze ideas, the very distinctness and objectivity of which are *given independently* of reflection. In contrast, the peculiar mode of self-consciousness characteristics of Kant's *Ich denke* is *self-determining* activity which *synthetically constitutes* its object.

Kant, Hegel avers, did not fully succeed in extricating the *Ich denke* from external reflection, as is evidenced by his ontological distinction between sensibility and understanding. However, he notes that prior to his rehabilitation of teleology in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Kant saw the need to bridge the hiatus separating understanding and sensibility by recurring to the concepts of reflection.³² The concepts of reflection are intermediary between immediate being (forms of intuition) and real phenomenal existence (categorical schemata). From an empirical perspective, before representations are related to one another under causal relations they must be compared to one another in order to determine, e. g., whether they are part of the same identical thing or not. A transcendental philosophy, therefore, must establish the *a priori* grounds of such identity. In other words, a logic of reflection, of identity and difference, matter and form, inner and outer, agreement and opposition, etc. must precede a logic of objective existence. Hegel retains this order in Book II of the *Logik*. But there is a fundamental difference between Hegel's and Kant's respective treatments of the concepts of reflection. Whereas Kant regards the role of transcendental reflection to be that of assigning the concepts of reflection to heterogeneous transcendental domains, so that, e. g., identity (*Einerlei*), is properly understood to be a function of the understanding while difference (*Verschiedenheit*) is seen as given in sensibility, Hegel construes reflection *ontologically*, as the dialectical movement of thought and reality in which the understanding/intuition, identity/difference, form/matter distinctions are *aufgehoben*. Again, in Hegel's opinion, Kant's treatment of reflection is reminiscent of the Enlightenment's preoccupation with faculty psychology. The *terminus a quo* of Hegel's enterprise, on the contrary, is the metaphysical problem of being.

³¹ Yvon Belaval, *La doctrine de l'essence chez Hegel et chez Leibniz*, in: *Archives de Philosophie*, 33, 1970, pp. 579–604, *Kant-Studien*, 63, 1972, pp. 436–462, and in *Studi Internazionali di Filosofia*, 108, 1974, pp. 115–138.

³² *Logik* II, p. 15; *Logic*, p. 586.

Let us now turn to Kant's critique of Leibniz. In the section of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* entitled "Von der Amphibolie der Reflexionsbegriffe," Kant is concerned with exposing a confusion to which dogmatic rationalism is prone, namely, the assumption that pure *analysis* of what is thought in the *concept* of an object yields informative, i. e., *synthetic*, knowledge of the object *itself*. Uncritical rationalism seeks to extend its knowledge of the *real ground* of phenomena by comparing them in accordance with the concepts of reflection as the pure understanding conceives them. Transcendental reflection, in contrast, distinguishes pure thought objects (*noumena*) from sensible intuitions. Subsequently, it restricts the objective employment of such concepts to the formal conditions of space and time.³³

By collapsing pure understanding and sensible intuition, Leibniz, Kant maintains, blurs the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgements. This confusion leads him to disregard the importance of space and time as the *a priori* sensible ground of synthetic knowledge in general – an error, Kant believes, which is profoundly evident in Leibniz's amphibolic treatment of individuation.³⁴ Leibniz states that the *ideality* of spatio-temporal relations derives from the fact that they are but confused, sensible representations of rationally ordered states of substances, so that strictly speaking, the identities of such substances are internally contained within their complete notions.³⁵ But in that case, the manner in which spatio-temporal phenomena are well-founded remains enigmatic. There is no sufficient reason which explains how we get from immutable, internally consistent essences to variable, conflict-ridden phenomena, from conceptual unity to existential multiplicity, or from abstract logical identity to the identity-in-difference of dynamic substances.³⁶ By wedding the idea of internal relations to the law of contradiction, Leibniz eliminates the category of interrelation altogether; either a concept analytically contains another concept, in which case they are unrelated, or it does not, in which case they are again unrelated. This reinforces the suspicion that, for Leibniz, absolutely simple (partless), self-contained substances exist prior to relations, or what is the same thing, that *matter* is prior to *form*, if what we

³³ For a concise discussion of Kant's critique of the amphiboly of reflection see H. J. Paton, *Kant on the Errors of Leibniz*, in: *Kant Studies Today*, ed. L. W. Beck, La Salle, 1970, pp. 72–87.

³⁴ *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Reclam, Stuttgart, 1966, A 270/B 331.

³⁵ L. Couturat, ed., *G. W. Leibniz: Opusculum et fragments inédits*, Paris, 1903, p. 8. Leibniz did not deny that spatio-temporal differences are sufficient for distinguishing things, but he maintained that such phenomenal differences have their ground in internal essences. (See *Letters to Samuel Clarke*, in: *Leibniz Selections*, ed. P. Wiener, New York, 1951, p. 245). This is basically Hegel's position as well. Moreover, Hidé Ishiguro has shown (*Leibniz's Theory of the Ideality of Relations*, in: *Leibniz: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. H. G. Frankfurt, Garden City, N. Y., 1972) that for Leibniz the ideality of such relations did not entail their eliminative reducibility to one-place predicates. On the contrary, he, like Hegel, affirmed just the opposite, namely, that all predicates are ultimately relational in nature – a fact which generates a contradiction between the monad's self-subsistence and its dependence upon external conditions.

³⁶ *Kr. d. r. V.* A 273/B 329–A 275/B 331.

mean by *matter* and *form* respectively are substrate of potentiality and actual limitation and negation.³⁷

To conclude, Leibniz's system of monads harbours a deep-seated contradiction which is not satisfactorily mitigated by his appeal to divinely pre-established harmony. The monad's identity is supposed to be internally related to the aggregate of monads, but the conceptual reduction implicit in such an analytic relation would seem to entail an invidious monism. If, however, grasping the other horn of the dilemma, we affirm the absolute disjunction of an infinite plurality of monads, then we are left with relationless, undifferentiated atoms.

Hegel concurs with Kant's assessment of the problem encountered by Leibniz's reduction of real identity to abstract logical identity, and he too locates the source of the difficulty in Leibniz's failure to appreciate the *synthetic a priori* ground of reality. However, unlike Kant, who is inclined to bifurcate the ground into two separate sources of *knowledge*, sensibility and understanding, Hegel elevates transcendental apperception (metaphysically conceived as *Geist*) to the supreme, all-encompassing ground of synthesis *tout court*. But if Hegel returns to Leibniz in abolishing the distinction between sensibility and understanding and, in effect, reproaches Kant for grounding real identity in spatio-temporal location, how does he circumvent the Leibnizian *aporia*? He does so by conceiving reason dialectically. Stated differently, he retrieves those concepts of reflection which Kant transfers from pure understanding to the *jenseits* of sensibility, namely, difference, opposition, matter, etc., and extends their range of application to include the very reason which grounds reality as such. Hegel can afford to hold the doctrine of indiscernibles because in Book II of the *Logik* he liberates the internal conceptual relations which rationally ground identity from the logical constraints (P. 3) imposed upon them by Leibniz.

III

The metaphysical problems associated with essence, ground, and sufficient reason are rendered otiose within the Kantian system. The section on the amphibolies declares that questions concerning the ultimate foundations of existence are meaningless.³⁸ The principle of sufficient reason likewise loses its ontological import. Existence is *given* in sensation and knowledge is limited to the discovery of causal regularities within its purview. The ontological argument is accordingly denigrated – one cannot argue from essence to existence.

It is otherwise with Hegel, who is not content with juxtaposing empirical categories. His point of departure in the *Logik* is qualitative being, not sensible existence, and therefore, he like Leibniz must demonstrate the logical necessity of existence from

³⁷ *Kr. d. r. V.* A 283/B 339–A 286/B 342.

³⁸ *Kr. d. r. V.* A 278/B 334.

being and essence – a metaphysical *tour de force* which culminates in the grand apotheosis of absolute idealism.³⁹

In Leibniz, the transition from essence to phenomenal existence proceeds by a way of a *deus ex machina*. God externally reflects upon an ensemble of essences denoting *prima possibilia*, the combinations of which are subordinated to the laws of formal logic. At this stage, individuation ostensibly manifests itself in the complete notion as absolute *positive* limitation, which nonetheless subsists prior to reflection and negation. Phenomenal existence, which is burdened with conflict and negation, ineffably supervenes in the complete notion as absolute *positive* limitation during the act of creation. At this point Platonic *eidōs* gives way to Aristotelian *telos*; the monadic entelechy individuates itself to the degree that it realizes its essence and becomes self-determining, and it becomes so the more it reflects, or concentrates, the concrete totality within itself.⁴⁰

The transition from transcendence to immanence is presented by Leibniz as if it were an inexplicable *fait accompli*. (Leibniz cannot rationally demonstrate the well-foundedness of phenomena because he conceives of essence as if it were a lifeless, geometrical chain of possible deductions.) Later in the creation process, when the monad is supposed to be self-determining, it is still a receptacle which passively reflects relations that have been predetermined by God. These relations are integral to its identity in the same way that reflections are integral to the differentiation of a mirror's surface, but the mirror and the source of illumination, Hegel observes, condition one another *externally*, or mechanically. *In itself*, the monad, like the mirror, is an undifferentiated thing, or bare particular, which remains *indifferent* to its properties.⁴¹ Thus, Leibniz's metaphysics unintentionally succumbs to the objections which he levels against Newtonian mechanics. On the one hand, the only kind of *sufficient* explanation Leibniz can countenance as legitimate are those that accord with his peculiar reading of identity, which assimilates all phenomenal changes to essential ones. These explanations, which are of the form 'Y happens to X (X is P) because it is of the nature of X for Y to happen to it (P is the essence of X)' are empty tautologies. On the other hand, because the monad's successive dynamic states are not, in fact, determined by it all, but only reflect an external order, its identity is dissolved into a congeries of unrelated appearances, or "bubbles." Such appearances have no unity other than those mechanical regularities which the understanding adventitiously finds in them and these empirical generaliz-

³⁹ Belavel notes (*La doctrine de l'essence* Archives de Philosophie, p. 558) that the difference between Leibniz and Hegel on this score is that «... le monisme hégélien généralise à toute existence l'argument ontologique ... tandis que, chez Leibniz, le existence d'un être fini ne se développe pas d'elle-même à partir de l'essence: Dieu l'y surajoute par un acte de création. (Cout. Op. 376)».

⁴⁰ See G. W. Leibniz, *On the Ultimate Origin of Things*, in: Wiener, pp. 346–55, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, esp. VIII, XIII, and XIV (loc. cit.), *On Necessity and Contingency* (loc. cit., pp. 480–85), and *The Monadology*, Nos. 43–60 (loc. cit.).

⁴¹ *Logik* II, pp. 181–82; *Logic*, p. 712.

ations do not so much explain phenomena as tautologically record their persistence.⁴²

For Hegel, the key to overcoming the Leibnizian dilemma resides in showing that essence is immanent in appearance. The defense of this assertion rests upon a demonstration that essence both *is* and *is not* its appearances – a contradiction which admittedly is not readily accessible to analytic thought. Nonetheless, if we bear in mind what Hegel is trying to avoid, then the contradiction loses some of its mystery. Simply put, Hegel is trying to steer a middle course between the Scylla of skepticism and the Charybdis of what Kant calls dogmatism – the affirmation of a transcendent ground of identity existing apart from the way things appear. Skepticism maintains that appearances, or empirical descriptions of identity, are only subjective and stand in no relation to the substratum to which they refer. A corollary to this kind of nominalism is the idea that substances are "bare particulars" (Locke's *je ne sais quoi*) – a notion which runs counter to our ordinary Aristotelian proclivities to regard individuation as a function of internal qualification. Dogmatism no better succeeds in uniting *ordo cognoscendi* and *ordo essendi* than does skepticism, but it reverses epistemological priorities by securing the principle of individuation in rationally knowable essences; the epistemological problem of ascending from appearances to essences is the reverse side of the ontological problem of making sense of the notion of "bare particulars." The upshot of the preceding analysis is that essence and appearance must be irreducible, yet somehow internally related. In effect, Hegel, like Kant before him, will argue that identity, no less than objectivity, must be grounded in the immanent relations of phenomena rather than in transcendent essences.⁴³

The central arguments in Book II of the *Logik* which presently concern us are contained in Chapters Two and Three of Section One. Hegel's initial contention is that essential identity entails contradiction. In contrast to the abstract identity of formal logic ($A = A$, 'A tree is a tree'), the actual identification of phenomena is a synthetic activity which unites a manifold of diverse appearances under a distinct identity (this tree as a unique growth process).⁴⁴ A tree is *not* any one of its developmental stages

⁴² Contra empiricism, Hegel agrees with Leibniz that phenomena cannot be sufficiently explained without appealing to some doctrine of essence. See D. Henrich, *Hegels Logik der Reflexion*, in: *Hegel im Kontext*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1971, pp. 95–156, for a detailed discussion of the transition from Book I to Book II of the *Logik* concerning this issue. Also, see R. Pippin (n. 43 below) to whom I am indebted for much of the preceding and following formulation of the problem.

⁴³ *Logik* I, pp. 486–504; *Logic*, pp. 394–408. For a further elaboration of some of the aspects of the identity problem treated here, see R. Pippin, *Hegel on Contradiction*, in: *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. XVI, 3, 1978, pp. 301–312.

⁴⁴ *Logik* I, pp. 508–515; *Logic*, pp. 411–418. Taken from the past participle *gewesen*, *Wesen*, Hegel reminds us, literally means the abiding that has been. Note: A Fregean sense/reference distinction could provide an optional analysis of identity at this point and Fulda (*Unzulängliche Bemerkungen zur Dialektik*) suggests that the distinction is helpful in trying to understand some of the early transitions in the *Logik*. Nevertheless, the distinction cannot be vigorously applied to the dialectic of Book II without reintroducing some version of the doctrine of bare particulars which Hegel is trying to avoid.

taken singly, but neither is it something other than the *becoming* of these “moments.” Understood from the standpoint of subject-predicate logic, the synthetic nature of individuation forces us to concede that the subject and predicate of essential descriptions are related to one another under the opposed rubrics of difference (*Unterschied*) and identity (*Identität*).⁴⁵ A predicate *essentially* individuates a particular only by making use of determinations that are *not* what that particular is, precisely in order to say something informative about it in the first place. Thus, Socrates, for example, both *is* and *is not* a man.

Is Hegel here guilty of conflating the ‘is’ of *predication* with the ‘is’ of *identity* as Russell accuses him of doing, viz., is Hegel only making the trivial claim that a *particular* (Socrates) is not identical to some *universal* (man), which is nevertheless truly predicated of it?⁴⁶ The answer to this question depends on whether Socrates is a man only in the Russellian sense that a particular denoted by the name ‘Socrates’ just happens to be the existential placeholder of the predicate “snubnosed.” If Socrates is a man only in this attenuated, *accidental* sense, then we are again committed to some version of the doctrine of bare particulars. The only alternative to this metaphysical posture is a theory of essential definition in which the predicate is joined to the subject by way of identity and difference, thereby generating a contradiction.⁴⁷

Anticipating his later discussion of contingency (*Zufälligkeit*), Hegel notes at the conclusion of this chapter that finite things must recede into, or *fall* to, the ground (*zugrunde gehen*), precisely because they consist of a multiplicity of contradictory determinations.⁴⁸ Hegel’s pun is not gratuitous, for he, like Leibniz, must provide a sufficient reason (*Grund*) for essential differentiation in general which will also explain the world of phenomena (*Wirklichkeit*). The classical form/matter distinction figures predominantly in Hegel’s treatment of ground, which he characterizes (again, drawing from the speculative ambiguity of the term) as an “absolute recoil (*Gegenstoß*) of essence upon itself.” Ground reflects upon itself as the dual subject/object of individuation. *Qua* identical substrate of change, ground is the passive matter of potentiality. *Qua* rational movement wherein actual identity is determined, grounding is negative activity (*Tätigkeit*, analogous to Aristotle’s *energeia*) which internally *informs* immediate being and endows it with real existence. This Kantian conception of form as synthetic activity presages the subjective logic, where pure apperception assumes the metaphysical role of absolute ground. Within the context of the objective logic, Hegel is primarily interested in reversing the Leibnizian primacy of matter over form. By refuting the myth of the given, he demonstrates the untenability of the matter/form dualism.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ *Logik* I, pp. 515–517 & 535; *Logic*, pp. 417–418 & 431.

⁴⁶ B. Russell, *Logic as the Essence of Philosophy*, in: *Our Knowledge of the External World* (London, 1914).

⁴⁷ See R. Aquila, *Predication and Hegel’s Metaphysics*, in: *Kant-Studien*, 64, 1973, pp. 231–245 for a more thorough examination of these issues.

⁴⁸ *Logik* I, p. 541; *Logic*, p. 435.

⁴⁹ *Logik* I, pp. 551–574; *Logic*, pp. 444–461. See Belaval (*La doctrine de l’essence*, *Kant-Studien*) for further commentary on this chapter as it bears upon the Leibniz/Hegel connection.

The full implication of Hegel’s discussion of the matter/form distinction appears in the final section of Book II entitled “*Wirklichkeit*.” The previous examination of ground, conceived dialectically as matter (potency) and form (actuality), suggests that a thing’s identity is a function of modality (the possible formal mutation it can endure without becoming other than it is). At this juncture of the argument Hegel endeavors to show that the contradiction which is endemic to essential identity must be elaborated as a contradiction between contingency and rationally grounded *Selbständigkeit*. Now the gravamen of Hegel’s repudiation of Leibnizian metaphysics is directed against the principle that essence, understood as the matter of possibility, precedes actuality. *Logical* possibility, which is sufficiently established by the absence of contradiction, can be formulated as a disjunctive relationship of exclusive terms, A or not-A, each of which is internally consistent. In Hegel’s judgement, such a notion of possibility is incoherent. Until the possibility of one of the exclusive disjuncts is denied, the other disjunct must remain non-actual and *a fortiori*, impossible. But since mere logical possibility favors the actuality of neither the one nor the other, both are necessarily impossible. A more coherent notion of possibility, Hegel argues, is one which incorporates the actual.⁵⁰

Contingency is the category that articulates the idea of an existent whose being is merely possible. Possibility and actuality are complementary notions; the actual is fully existent (self-subsistent and self-identical) only after its possibility has been deduced, or grounded, and the possible (the essential ground) achieves greater potentiality in direct proportion to its degree of actualization.

Now contingent being is burdened with the contradiction that, being merely possible, the conditions of its existence are yet *distinct* from it. Once again, we encounter the dialectic of infinity in which the price of finitude is endless dispersion. Thus, Hegel’s assertion that possible being is the *verhältnislose unbestimmte Behälter für alles überhaupt* applies to contingent actuality as well insofar as the latter is attributed a ground (the condition of its possibility) which is itself comprised of an indeterminate multiplicity of self-subsistent beings – a groundless ground.⁵¹

The formal moments of contingency are developed more concretely in the categories of *real* possibility, actuality and necessity. The real possibility of some thing or event is the existing multiplicity of circumstances sufficient to bring it about. So construed, real possibility contains within itself an *indefinite* aggregate of conditions which effects a completion, or *definite* result. Once something has become really possible, it necessarily happens. The interface adjoining possibility, necessity, and actuality, therefore, is the ephemeral moment linking an antecedent causal nexus to a unitary constellation of effects.⁵²

⁵⁰ *Logik* I, 680–685; *Logic*, 542–546. Again I refer the reader to Belaval (*La doctrine de l’essence*, *Studi Internazionali di Filosofia*) for a fuller treatment of Hegel and Leibniz on modality.

⁵¹ *Logik* I, pp. 681–683; *Logic*, pp. 543–546.

⁵² *Logik* I, p. 685; *Logic*, p. 547. The groundlessness of contingency as Hegel understands it is well clarified by George D. Giovanni, *The Category of Contingency in the Hegelian Logic*, in: *Art and Logic in Hegel’s Philosophy*, Humanities Press, 1980.

Hegel concludes his examination of modality by emphasizing that contingent being is both its own *raison d'être* – it is internally constitutive of the totality of conditions which determine it and, as such, is self-determining – and yet groundless, because its content absorbs an infinitely indeterminate impact.

Hegel's analysis of contingency is relevant to the question of individuation because the content which constitutes a thing's identity only unfolds in the course of its interaction with an environment, a process which Leibniz's system of monads cannot comprehend. Insofar as they are truly self-related, finite things display their *Selbständigkeit* and rational groundedness in the form of a well-defined identity. The richness of variable content which accompanies their individuation is simply the intense concreteness of the totality concentrated in an Archimedean point. Conversely, insofar as finite things are dependent upon conditions which remain bound to an indefinite horizon of possible interaction, individuation is contingent, or permanently ambiguous and indeterminate. The scope of possible change is groundless because each successive event actuates a further alteration in the contextual *mise-en-scène*, thereby generating new possibilities of identity which continually frustrate any determinate closure. To be is to possess an identity that is at once perduring and evanescent. Or, in the words of Hegel, "... *das Seyn der endlichen Dinge als solche ist, den Keim des Vergehens als ihr Insichseyn zu haben, die Stunde ihrer Geburt ist die Stunde ihres Todes.*"⁵³

To conclude, Hegel's treatment of identity in Book II of the *Logik* does not provide any practical solution to problems concerning the actual identification of things. If anything, it represents a significant contribution to current discussions concerning the viability of essentialism and it may well represent a compromise between Scholastic and Wittgensteinian approaches to this issue (Wittgenstein's theory of family resemblances captures the indeterminacy of "essential" classification, but it altogether elides the fundamental problem of Hegel's *Logik* concerning the *Grundlage* of determination). Moreover, it is the first major attempt to explain identity in a way which accords with our actual experience while yet satisfying the demands of reason for justification. On the one hand, it shows that our commonsense intuitions about relations between objects and their properties are probably inconsistent – we find the idea of "bare particulars" unpalatable, if not incoherent, yet we persist in making an absolute distinction between essential and accidental properties which is surely no less defensible. Rationalism, to be sure, avoids this inconsistency by reducing accidents (appearances) to essences, but this gesture invariably proves futile, for the *questio iuris* concerning the possibility of *real* identity is left hanging in the air – unless, of course, we follow Hegel in abandoning the law of contradiction.

In retrospect, Leibniz was not fully cognizant of the contradictions implicit in his notion of the monad and generally tried to suppress them by sundering being into two disparate regions, a world of immutable essences and a world of appearances. Hegel, who follows his predecessor in affirming the primacy of reason, embraces the contra-

diction as the most genuine expression of reality. Thus, it is not without irony that what is reputed to be the *ne plus ultra* of all rationalist theodicies can only prove itself worthy of the title by demonstrating the necessity of contingency. As a principal beneficiary of the Hegelian legacy, existentialism, more than any other contemporary philosophical movement, has seized upon this trenchant paradox as proof of the absurdity of all rationalism. Ruminating over a bout of nausea endured while perceiving the *de trop* root of a chestnut tree, Sartre's fictional hero Roquentin is inspired to sum up the fragility of identity accordingly: "... *la racine, les grilles du jardin, le banc, le gazon rare de la pelouse, tout ça s'était évanoui; la diversité des choses, leur individualité n'était qu'une apparence, un vernis.*"⁵⁴

⁵³ *Logik* I, p. 178; *Logic*, p. 129.

⁵⁴ J.-P. Sartre, *La Nausée*, Gallimard, Paris, 1938, pp. 179–80.