

## A COMMENTARY UPON GADAMER'S INTERPRETATION OF HEGEL\*

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**ABSTRACT.** *A Commentary upon Gadamer's Interpretation of Hegel.* In light of a renewed scholarly undertaking of the Hegel–Gadamer connection, the purpose of the present paper is to carry further this much needed re-approach of the issue by stressing yet another one of its aspects. I am referring to the scholarly insights that Gadamer himself provides us with in his interpretation of Hegel. Since many of Gadamer's essays on Hegel are actually studies originally meant as contributions to major journals dealing with Hegel's work, my claim is that we can retrieve from them answers to many ongoing debates in the Hegel scholarship. I will insist on only one of these issues, namely Gadamer's account of Hegel's relation to metaphysics.

*Keywords:* Hegel, Gadamer, speculative, metaphysics, self-understanding, dialogical

### Introduction

Up until recently there was virtually no scholarly interest concerning the way in which Gadamer's critical engagement with German Idealism and especially with Hegel might actually be integral to his elaboration of a philosophical hermeneutics. When it came to the topic of the main influences on Gadamer, commentators primarily focused on Gadamer's relationship with Plato and Aristotle, his well acknowledged indebtedness to Heidegger and at best his critique of Schleiermacher and Dilthey. As far as Hegel is concerned, the widespread consensus was that Hegel constituted the paradigmatic counterexample, the way that Gadamer actively avoids. Gadamer's attitude towards Hegel was usually seen as being in line with Heidegger's up-front rejection of the author of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

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This is surprising for at least two clusters of reasons. In the first place we can undoubtedly find in Gadamer numerous explicit remarks that it was Hegel who first and foremost offered him the way out from what he perceived to be the deadlock of modern hermeneutics as it was theorized by Schleiermacher: *And so I had to decide—between the alternatives of the “psychological reconstruction of past thought” and the “integration of past thought into one’s own thought”—against Schleiermacher and in favour of Hegel.*<sup>1</sup> Secondly there is Gadamer’s sustained, almost scholarly engagement with central Hegelian texts and themes. Moreover Gadamer’s essays on Hegel were originally intended as contributions to important journals dedicated to the study of Hegel’s work, as papers to be presented in conferences regarding various topics in connection to Hegel’s philosophy, and in addition to this we have Gadamer’s rich teaching on Hegel.<sup>2</sup> However this omission could easily be explained. Gadamer does not offer any systematic account of his use of Hegel, as he proceeds with other authors, we have no Hegel chapter in *Truth and Method*, and his book-length study

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Heritage of Hegel*, in Richard E. Palmer, *The Gadamer Reader – A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 2007, p. 329 (hereafter Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Heritage of Hegel*). Gadamer acknowledges his indebtedness to Hegel in several other respects as well. For instance, Hegel is seen as a forerunner in recuperating the philosophical relevance of the ancient philosophers, a constant preoccupation for Gadamer: *Already very early, and on the same basis, I had taken an interest in Hegel, so far as I understood him, and precisely because I only understood him that far. Above all, his Logic really possessed, for me, something of Greek innocence; also his genial Lectures on the History of Philosophy (unfortunately poorly edited) provided a bridge to a non-historical but truly speculative understanding of Platonic and Aristotelian thinking.* Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Autobiographical Reflections*, Richard E. Palmer, *The Gadamer Reader – a Bouquet of the Later Writings*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 2007, p. 12 (hereafter Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Autobiographical Reflections*). Hegel is also seen as the first one to provide a way of breaking out from modern subjectivism. Gadamer identifies Hegel as the one concerned with the embedding of the human subject in time and also the first to have seen beyond the naive picture of language and concepts as merely means deployed by subjects irrespective of their having a *life* on their own. Hegel understood the necessity of all this while at the same time taking into account the danger of falling into a purely sociological frame or into historical relativism. Hegel envisaged a purely philosophical undertaking of all this. For a more detailed account see: Robert B. Pippin: *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath, part II, chapter 4 Gadamer’s Hegel: Subjectivity and Reflection*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, p. 79–97.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, *Hegel und die Antike Dialektik*, on which I will heavily draw in this paper, appeared for the first time in *Hegel-Studien*, I, Bouvier, Bonn, 1961, *Hegel – Die verkehrte Welt* appeared in *Hegel-Studien*, supplement 3, Bouvier, Bonn, 1964, *Hegels Dialektik die Selbstbewusstseins*, appeared together with a republication on the latter in Hans Friedrich Fulda, Dieter Heinrich (ed.), *Materialien zu Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1973. All of these are still acknowledged Hegel scholarly instruments. Also Gadamer’s book-length study on Hegel, *Das Erbe Hegels*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1979, was initially a paper that he presented a year before in a congress in Naples. Subsequently after being awarded the Hegel prize from the city of Stuttgart he presented it again in the same year as the publication as a book. For the purpose of being published as a book Gadamer added an introduction. As far as the teaching goes, one should only mention the 1965 lecture series entitled *From Hegel to Heidegger* that Gadamer held at the University of Heidelberg. Heidegger himself participated in the last meeting of this lecture series.

of Hegel, *Das Erbe Hegels*, is as much an account of Hegel's influence as it is a presentation and a justification of his own philosophical hermeneutics in general.

Fortunately a series of excellent and much needed recent studies<sup>3</sup> has revealed the deep affinity – as one would certainly expect without losing sight of the many and crucial differences<sup>4</sup> – between the two seemingly opposed endeavors mentioned above. Keeping in line with these refreshing re-approaches of the Hegel–Gadamer connection, I would like to bring to light another side of this matter that to my knowledge has not yet been sufficiently stressed. I am referring to the scholarly insights that Gadamer provides us with in his commentaries on Hegel.<sup>5</sup>

My straightforward claim is that we can find in Gadamer's interpretation of Hegel pertinent answers to some of the most puzzling dilemmas that Hegel scholars still struggle with. This is not to say that we can find in Gadamer definitive resolutions to our concerns but that much of what Gadamer had to say about Hegel can be read as valuable and up to date scholarly contributions. Given the confinements of the present article I will be able to attend only to one aspect of this complex issue, namely Gadamer's account of Hegel's relation to the philosophical tradition. More precisely I will argue that what Gadamer has to say about Hegel's relationship to the philosophical tradition can be read as an answer to the question regarding the status of metaphysics in Hegel's philosophy. The core of Gadamer's interpretation lies in his explanation of what, the much discussed and certainly peculiar Hegelian speculative logic entails. As it is well known the purpose of the *Science of Logic*<sup>6</sup> is to derive and clarify the basic categories of thought. But Hegel also claims to reveal the

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<sup>3</sup> I refer especially to the Kristin Gjesdal, *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009; Michael N. Forster, *Hegel and Hermeneutics*, in Beiser C. Frederick (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth Century Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, p. 174–203, Paul Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Ultimately Gadamer's attitude towards Hegel remains ambivalent. On the one hand he praises Hegel for reasons detailed above; on the other hand he dissociates himself categorically from Hegel in other respects, mainly in what concerns the Hegelian account of reflection. However this does not amount to a dismissal of the validity of the underlying claim set forward in this paper, namely that Gadamer's engagement with Hegel is integral to his hermeneutics. For a detailed discussion see: Robert B. Pippin, *Gadamer's Hegel*, in Malpas Jeff, Arnswald Ulrich, Kertscher Jens (eds.), *Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans Georg Gadamer*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2002, p. 217–238.

<sup>5</sup> The story of Gadamer's essays dedicated to Hegel is not easy to tell. All of them are articles and studies published throughout the '60 and '70 (although there are a few during the '80 and '90 as well) in different journals and volumes dedicated to the study of Hegel's philosophy. The first collected edition of these essays appeared in 1971 entitled *Hegels Dialektik: fünf hermeneutische studien*, J.C.B. Mohr, Tübingen. Another modified version appeared seven years later *Hegels Dialektik: sechs hermeneutische studien*, J.C.B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1980. For the purpose of this paper I use the English version translated by P. Cristopher Smith: *Hegel's Dialectic: five hermeneutical studies*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1976; the five essays contained in the edition translated by Smith can also be found in the German critical edition of Gadamer's work: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke, Band 3, Neuere Philosophie I Hegel – Husserl – Heidegger*, J.C.B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1987.

<sup>6</sup> Hegel's conception of logic is set forward in a greater work, see: *Hegel's Science of Logic*, Amherst, New York, 1999, as well as a shorter version the see Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic*, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1991.

basic structure of being, thus the science of logic is at once logic and ontology. What Hegel proposes is a *speculative* or dialectical logic as opposed to the logic of the Understanding. The Understanding strives to think in terms of rigid, monolithic pairs of opposites. Speculative thinking by contrast goes beyond dichotomies and tries to reconcile oppositions. Speculative thinking is not, in Gadamer's account of Hegel a dialectic of our thinking alone, nor is it a system of categories from which Hegel *subsequently constructs the system of the world as all-encompassing system of conceptual relationships*.<sup>7</sup> It is rather a dialectic of the concept that can only be realized *as the concept of the concept, the concept of spirit itself*. In pursuing such a goal, Hegel, in Gadamer's interpretation, leans on the Ancient account of dialectic. Accordingly, I will divide my paper into two argumentative steps. First, I will offer an overview of the Hegel-Gadamer relationship. In the second part, I will detail Gadamer's Hegel interpretation emphasizing the problem of metaphysics.

### 1. Reconstruction vs. Integration – An Overview of the Hegel–Gadamer Connection

As mentioned in the Introduction, Gadamer finds in Hegel the way to avoid what he considers to be the dead-end of modern hermeneutics as one can find it in Schleiermacher. Even though he praises Schleiermacher for universalizing the task of hermeneutics he none the less disapproves of the general direction that the former ascribed to it. For Schleiermacher, in Gadamer's opinion the objective reconstruction of the original meaning the works of the past<sup>8</sup> is the task of hermeneutics. Our relation with tradition is thus conceived in Schleiermacher as the restoration of the original circumstances that produced the work in question:

Hence all the various means of historical reconstruction – re-establishing the “world” to which it belongs, re-establishing the original situation which the creative artist “had in mind”, performing in the original style, and so on – can claim to reveal the true meaning of a work of art and guard against misunderstanding and anachronistic interpretation. This is, in fact, Schleiermacher's conception and the tacit premise of his entire hermeneutics.<sup>9</sup>

There are two dimensions that constitute the methodological core of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics according to Gadamer.<sup>10</sup> They concern the linguistic and cultural resources the speaker has at his or her disposal, as well as his or her individual application of these

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic Five Hermeneutical Studies*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, p. 8–9 (hereafter Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic*).

<sup>8</sup> I will resume my presentation to the issue of the relationship of the interpreter to the great works of the past.

<sup>9</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Continuum, London and New York, 2004 (hereafter Hans-Georg Gadamer *Truth and Method*).

<sup>10</sup> I take the account of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics from Kristin Gjesdal, *op.cit.*

shared resources. Schleiermacher calls the reflection on the common resources of language grammatical interpretation. Grammatical interpretation investigates the relation between the particular text and the "language area" in which it emerges. Reflection on how language forms itself in an individual expression is the task of technical or psychological interpretation. This appropriation of the inner core of a work is necessary because Schleiermacher, in Gadamer's account, sees the linguistic expression as falling back to individual, aesthetic feeling. Like artistic genius, the individual language user is able to transcend the limitations of grammatical correctness and semantic conventions. According to Gadamer, Schleiermacher's hermeneutics should be understood as being oriented towards understanding individual thought as nothing but a free construct and a free expression of an individual being. In order to grasp this free expression belonging to an individual being Schleiermacher makes use of the idea of a hermeneutic circle.

In Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, according to Gadamer, the hermeneutic circle is meant to render explicit the relation between individual language-user and original audience, and its ultimate goal is to achieve what Gadamer takes to be the conclusive unlocking of its meaning. This, in Gadamer's opinion, culminates in Schleiermacher's insistence that the aim of hermeneutics is to understand a writer better than he or she understood him or herself. Gadamer does not deny or a priori reject the importance of the reconstruction of the original conditions in which a work passed down to us as a useful tool of understanding it. What Gadamer questions is the very result of such an account of hermeneutics. Gadamer asks himself if what we truly obtain is the much desired original meaning of the respective work.<sup>11</sup> For Gadamer any act of restoration of past life remains futile given the basic historicity of our being.<sup>12</sup> Gadamer provides in this sense an illuminating example. If we take, for instance, a painting out from the museum and put it back in a church, where it used to belong, the outcome will never be that of the restoration of the original meaning of the work. What we merely obtain is yet another place of touristic enjoyment.<sup>13</sup>

Two immediate related conclusions follow from this and there are both unacceptable for Gadamer. First, the interpreter is completely detached from what he is interpreting. There is no element of self-understanding in the process of unveiling past thought. As such, no hermeneutic experience as transformative experience can occur. Second if we keep Schleiermacher's account of hermeneutics, we are condemned to an understanding of tradition as lacking any sense of continuity and as such any contemporary relevance. Instead of this Gadamer argues for an understanding of tradition as a continuing process of integration and in favour of a concept of understanding as involving a dimension of self-understanding. Hegel provides the possibility of both. The alternative for the

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 159.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 159.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 160.

objective and fruitfulness reconstruction of past meanings is the Hegelian reflective mediation of our relation to the past:

Here Hegel states a definite truth, inasmuch as the essential nature of the historical spirit consists not in the restoration of the past but in thoughtful mediation with contemporary life. Hegel is right when he does not conceive of such thoughtful mediation as an external relationship established after the fact but places it on the same level as the truth of art itself. In this way his idea of hermeneutics is fundamentally superior to Schleiermacher.<sup>14</sup>

In his appropriation as well as in his critique of Hegel, Gadamer always dwells on Hegel's relation to Ancient and especially Platonic philosophy, one that ensures the image of a dialogical Hegel.<sup>15</sup> I will, in what follows, say a few words on the subject since this is not a single occurrence in Gadamer. His account of Hegel is often intertwined with that of Greek thought. This will serve us as a good introduction for the next section, since Gadamer's interpretation of Hegel is in fact a contrasting between Hegelian and Ancient thought. The way in which Gadamer will try to go beyond Schleiermacher can be described as an attempt to carve out a notion of reason that is comprehensive enough to accept its own situatedness in history.<sup>16</sup> Gadamer understands his own hermeneutics as deeply Hegelian in spirit. The task that he ascribes to his hermeneutics is *to retrace the path of Hegel's phenomenology of mind until we discover in all that is subjective the substantiality that determines it*.<sup>17</sup> The substantive in the subjective, the historical in what appears trans-historical as well as a concept of tradition as a continuous, circular back-and-forth movement between understanding ourselves and understanding history is what philosophical hermeneutics has to learn from Hegelian phenomenology. Gadamer emphasizes the importance of dialogue in Plato's early works, especially in the *Philebus*. He praises Socrates for understanding philosophy as an ongoing inter-subjective exchange, rather than a set of rigid doctrines and elaborated arguments. Plato is "no Platonist," for that matter. The dialogical aspect of Plato's philosophy is not merely external or decorative but is essentially connected to his conception of truth, rationality, and knowledge. Philosophy is an ongoing dialogical exercise. As such, it is determined by a willingness to recognize the rationality of the other. Its internal mechanism is the *docta ignorantia*.

While focusing on the Socratic *docta ignorantia*, Gadamer emphasizes a deep affinity between Socratic dialogue and the Hegelian dialectics of history. In Socratic dialogue, the conversation is made possible by the interlocutors' capacity to gain knowledge as

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 161.

<sup>15</sup> In Gadamer's own words: *To be sure, then, what shaped my thinking in this way was a personalized and dialogical Hegel behind whom there always stood the daily, thoughtful interaction with the Platonic dialogues*. Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Heritage of Hegel*, p. 331.

<sup>16</sup> I take the account of Gadamer's appropriation of Hegel from Kristin Gjesdal, *op.cit.*

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 301.

agreement on a given problem. This agreement however most often proves to be parochial and in need of further, discursive work. At stake, as Gadamer reads it, is an ongoing progress towards increased universality, a perpetual effort to reach a dialectical sublation of two seemingly opposed positions into a more universal third. According to Gadamer, Hegel's phenomenology displays a similar dynamic. In the early Platonic dialogues, Socrates develops his position through discussion with someone else. The Hegelian shapes of consciousness develop through the self-criticism of spirit. However, in the *Phenomenology*, the spirit proceeds through gradually overcoming that which is alien. The very self that is engaged in the process matures through considering and integrating the point of view of the other. This is the central philosophical intuition of Hegelian dialectics namely that of transforming what is alien into something that is its own. In this sense, Hegel, too, is a dialogical thinker, and it is the force of his thinking to move the dialectics of dialogue from the level of interpersonal conversation to the level of history and tradition.<sup>18</sup>

## 2. Hegel and the metaphysical tradition – a Gadamerian account

One of the most challenging tasks that any serious interpreter of Hegel has to face is to give an accurate account of his relation to the philosophical tradition and most notably with Kant and the other great representatives of German Idealism. There is probably no other place where scholars are more divided than in how to render explicit Hegel's relation to metaphysics. The questions to be posed are: does Hegel return to a pre-Kantian notion of substance metaphysics<sup>19</sup> or is he to be understood as a self-conscious critical philosopher working in the wake of Kant's rigorous attempt of fleshing out the limitations of human knowledge, or is he perhaps pursuing the ideal of a renewal of metaphysics in the light of the Kantian intervention? Many of the recent Anglophone commentators<sup>20</sup> sought to envisage an entirely non-metaphysical portrait of Hegel. Largely these studies assume that Hegel as a post-Kantian thinker offers a modified version of the project of transcendental idealism. But one can find in Anglophone as well as in German scholarship interpreters who, on the contrary, dismiss such a hypothesis and argue for an affinity between Hegel and some pre-Kantian lines of thought, not to

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Kristin Gjesdal, *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism*, p. 132–135.

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed account of Hegel's relationship to pre-Kantian metaphysics, see: Brady Bowman, *Hegel and Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, especially chapter 2: *Hegel's complex relationship to pre-Kantian metaphysics*, p. 62–101.

<sup>20</sup> I refer especially to: Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism – the Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989 and Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: the Sociality of Reason*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.

mention that Kant himself, or at least the young Kant, is now being linked back to pre-critical doctrines.

Although Gadamer does not concern himself specifically with the issue whether Hegel is *per se* a metaphysician or not<sup>21</sup> his portrait of the inherently speculative nature of philosophy in Hegel's thought might shed some light on the issue. In its basic outline Gadamer's contention is that, as far as Hegel is concerned, the assumption that the form of thought by which the truth can be adequately attained should be the form of the *finite thought-determinations* or more precisely of the categories of traditional ontology is utterly untenable. Furthermore, Hegel agrees with Kant's diagnosis that these traditional categories should be the focus of critical attention. Yet in Hegel's opinion Kant is not sufficiently radical in his intention, for he confines himself to considering only the range of their validity, while restraining himself from examining what Hegel calls their internal *logical structure*. Stephen Houlgate<sup>22</sup> offers an explanation of this topic that is very close to what Gadamer had in mind. Kant, according to Hegel, assumes that all acts of understanding should be taken as acts of judgment, and as such, all concepts including our basic categories, become *predicates of possible judgments*.

Houlgate offers an illuminating example regarding the Kantian use of the concept of substance. For Kant, if one takes concept of substance, the purpose of the concept would not be that of standing independently as an object of contemplation but to be applied to something in a judgment such as the judgment "X is substance". Starting with the assumption according to which thought is mainly judgment, Kant then goes on to derive the basic categories of thought from the various forms of judgments that we are familiar with from traditional logic. The affirmative judgment, "S is P", delivers the category of "reality", the negative judgment, "S is not P", yields the category of "negation", the problematic judgment, "S might be P", emphasizes the category of possibility. As such the categories can serve as *predicates* in any other form of judgment: one can equally state that "S is possible", or "S is not possible", or that "S might be a substance". Each category, however, has its *origin* in a particular form of judgment or putting it in another way in the specific way in which the subject and predicate hold together in a particular form of judgment. Each judgment form thus gives rise to a specific category that can then serve as a predicate in several different forms of judgment. In Hegel's view, Kant's deduction is open to criticism since the categories are derived not from the very nature of thought as such but from what functions merely as a weak assumption, namely the fact that judgment is the essential activity of thought.

<sup>21</sup> Though he does mention Hegel as a forerunner in his attempt of surpassing substance metaphysics: *To defend this view, and thus to oppose the common interpretation of Aristotle's criticisms of the doctrine of ideas, and to attack also the substance metaphysics of the Western tradition, has been the goal of my writing in this area. By the way, I do not stand all alone in this; Hegel also held such a view; Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, Autobiographical Reflections, p. 31.*

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Stephen Houlgate, *Hegel's Logic* in Frederick C. Beiser (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth Century Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 111–134; see also Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic*, Purdue University Press, West Lafayette Indiana, 2006, p.10–16.



However Kant never provides a satisfactory argument as to which judgment is fundamental to thought, or as to why judgment must take certain forms. Kant takes all of this for granted uncritically, and for that matter, he cannot prove that he has discovered all the basic categories of thought or that he has conceived of them properly.<sup>23</sup>

This idea, of the critique of the assumption according to which judgment is the essential activity of thinking lies at the core of Gadamer's interpretation of Hegel. Accordingly Gadamer conceives of Hegel as providing a definition of philosophical thinking as primarily comprehensive in nature and as such as rejecting the form of the judgment as philosophies proper mode of presentation. Gadamer claims that in doing so, in distancing himself from this assumption he draws heavily on the Ancient account of dialectic. Gadamer advances the claim of a deep affinity between Greek philosophy and Hegelian dialectics. His claim is that even though Hegel did not himself explicitly consider this aspect of his philosophy and did not give any systematic account of it but only hinted to it in a rather preliminary manner, one can still convincingly argue for such a state of affairs. From the outset, however it should be emphasized that despite Gadamer's identification of many similarities between Hegelian philosophy and Ancient thought, he ultimately conceives of Hegelian philosophy as primarily resting on a modern, more precisely Cartesian ethos. The modern strand will prevail in Hegel thought. This will concern us later.

What resources of the Ancient dialectics does Hegel deploy and to what extent.<sup>24</sup> In order to properly answer this question we must remember, Gadamer advises us, Hegel's claim regarding the fundamentally speculative nature of philosophy. If philosophy is essentially speculative, it must follow that the form of the judgment or the statement is plainly inadequate as its mode of presentation: *The fact that the form of the proposition is not suitable for expressing speculative truths was something Hegel had both known and told us.*<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, Hegel's use of the Ancient dialectics stems from his claim regarding the inadequacy of the form of the statement as the proper vehicle for the expression of speculative truth. For Gadamer Hegel's philosophy is intrinsically comprehensive, and for that matter, the ordinary form of the judgment is unable to satisfy this internal demand.

I will try to sketch Hegel's argument as it is understood by Gadamer in what follows. In the judgment we always encounter an underlying subject to which the predicate is related as its accidents and where the same subject is posited as a fixed basis.

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Stephen Holgate, *Hegel's Logic*, p. 115–116.

<sup>24</sup> I do not intend to pursue here the vast and multi-faceted subject of Hegel's relation to Ancient philosophy nor the complicated and controversial issue of the accuracy of Hegel's account of classical thought. I simply intend to shed light on Gadamer's interpretation of Hegel alongside his own understanding of Hegel's relation to Ancient dialectics. For that matter I will abstain from references to the Platonic or Aristotelian texts, nor will I critically assess Hegel's interpretation of the Greek texts. For a detailed account of Hegel and Ancient philosophy see de Laurentiis Alegria, *Hegel's Interpretation of Aristotle's Psyche – A Qualified Defence* in Katerina Deligiorgi (ed.), *Hegel: New Directions*, Acumen, Chesham, 2006, p. 243–254.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Heritage of Hegel*, p. 322.

Accordingly, the activity of determination is pictured as a back and forth movement across the posited subject. The subject can therefore be determined in one or another respect, it can always be judged in yet another or another way. The respects in which a subject can be judged come out to be external to the subject itself. As a consequence determination is merely external to the matter at hand, since always new predicates can be assigned to the fixed subject, which in return will always extend beyond any particular determination. Determination's development therefore lacks necessity. All these determinations relate to each other only externally.

Contrary to this picture, in speculative thinking which by contrast behaves comprehensively, this tendency to reach beyond the subject of the sentence to other things in virtue of which the subject is then determined as such or such is removed. Speculative thinking proceeds in an opposite direction. Surely it begins with the subject but with the sole purpose of discovering that the subject has passed into the predicate, that it has been sublimated and that in fact the predicate becomes the subject. Our natural tendency when we intend to learn something new about a thing is to reach beyond the foundation of that subject to something else, which we subsequently ascribe to that subject as a new predicate. Philosophic statements are an entirely different case. In philosophical thinking, thought does not proceed by way of reaching a predicate that refers to something else but instead to come to a predicate which takes us or, in Gadamer's own words, forces us back to the subject itself. In this way we are obligated to scrutinize the subject anew:

We do not take up something new or different in the predicate, for in thinking the predicate we are actually penetrating into that which the subject is. The subjectum taken as a firm foundation is abandoned since thought does not think something else in the predicate but rather rediscovers the subject itself.<sup>26</sup>

The subject understood as a firm foundation is forsaken in speculative thinking. To clarify his claim Gadamer takes one of Hegel's well known examples, the statement *The real is the universal*. The concept of the real is the one defined in this statement and as such we cannot ascertain that thought passes beyond that concept. The real is not determined in this statement as something other than itself, rather as that which it is and that which it is proves to be the universal, hence the universal is the true subject of thought. Gadamer's point is that from the perspective of speculative thinking the essential issue that one should notice here is the consequence that thought goes back into itself. Thought for Gadamer's Hegel reflects on itself since as a matter of fact it does not reflect about something while reaching outside of its content in order to bring in other determinations of reflection. Thought understood from a speculative point of view immerses itself in its own content, *in that which the subject itself is*.<sup>27</sup> This constitutes what Gadamer understands to be the

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic*, p 19.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic*, p 19.

essence of dialectical speculation, namely the thinking of nothing else but this kind of selfhood, *thinking the being of self itself one in which the ego of self-consciousness has always already recognized itself*.<sup>28</sup> The subjectivity of self-consciousness is for Hegel as understood by Gadamer, indeed the very subject of all statements. Quoting the *Encyclopaedia*, Gadamer ensures us that according to Hegel philosophical speculation begins with the decision to try to think purely, or putting it another way to think nothing besides that which is being thought. To sum up, Gadamer offers us three elements that he perceives as fundamental for speculative thinking. The first concerns what is thinking and accordingly thinking is thinking of something in itself taken by itself.<sup>29</sup> From this it follows that thinking necessarily thinks contradictory determinations simultaneously. Finally the unity of contradictory determinations has the proper nature of the self.

According to Gadamer, Hegel finds all the three elements in the dialectics of the Ancients. The first point can, in Gadamer's opinion, easily be identified in Ancient dialectics. In Gadamer's almost empathic words *only the decision to try to think purely and to avoid imaginative notions could have led to the incredibly daring thought characteristic of Eleatic philosophy*.<sup>30</sup> Gadamer offers the example of Zeno, who employs such thought. Zeno's demonstration that if there were "a many" it would have to be infinitely small because it would consist of the smallest parts without size, and at the same time it would have to be infinitely large since it would consist of infinitely many such parts rests on the presupposition that both determinations, that of the smallness and that of the multiplicity of the parts, are thought by themselves, and in each case lead by themselves to determinations of the "many." The second element regarding simultaneous thinking of contradictory determinations, can also be traced in Zeno's argument as far as to the argument is seen as an indirect refutation of the hypothesis of the "many." But it is such a refutation only insofar as smallness and size are to be directly ascribed to the many and not in different respects. A separation of the different aspects of multiplicity and smallness would, in fact, prevent the contradiction. The form of the argument corresponds in Gadamer's opinion exactly to the one which the Ancients attributed to the Eleatic Parmenides. The contradiction of every statement must be inquired upon along with the statement itself and the consequences of both outlined. In Zeno, however, the point of thinking determinations together and by themselves is a negatively dialectical one. That which is determined by such contradiction is, as contradictory, null and void. Hence the third component of Hegelian dialectics cannot be found in Ancient dialectics. Gadamer offers a detailed account as to why this is as such. It rests primarily on a series of misinterpretations from Hegel's part of key Platonic passages that Gadamer discusses at length. I will not enter this discussion since in

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic*, p 19.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic*, p 21.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic*, p. 20.

presupposes too many philological details that cannot be properly dealt with here. It will suffice to state that even though Gadamer criticizes Hegel for misinterpreting Plato, he does not for that matter dismiss the value of his insights into the truly speculative Plato. I would like to point out another aspect namely the manner in which Gadamer contrast Hegelian and Ancient Dialectics. In detailing the relation between Hegel and Ancient philosophy, Gadamer the fact that Hegelian dialectics follows the Eleatic and Platonic model of demonstration rather than the Aristotelian.<sup>31</sup>

Gadamer's remark is not merely a pedagogical tool meant to help us better understand the Hegelian or the Ancient accounts of dialectics. Gadamer is convinced of the fact that valuable Platonic insights are appropriated as such by Hegel thus appropriated into his own thought. Moreover, Gadamer sees Hegel playing a historical role in the interpretation of Plato Hegel is seen as the first to have acknowledged Plato's philosophical depth. Hegel is the discoverer of the truly speculative dialogues namely the *Sophist*, *Parmenides* and *Philebus* virtually unknown for eighteenth century philosophy. However in pursuing a methodological ideal of dialectic Hegel heavily relies on the Socratic dialogues, on what Gadamer calls *the immanent formation and self-unfolding of thought which he extols in Socrates guidance of discussion*<sup>32</sup> rather than on the late dialogues. Gadamer disrupts the discussion of the affinity between Platonic and Hegelian dialectics in order to point out the fact despite his great achievement of rehabilitating the ancient thinkers as philosophers, Hegelian dialectics derives its methodological strength from elsewhere namely from principles of the Cartesian method, on the learning of the Catechism, and on the Bible.<sup>33</sup> Gadamer insists that for Hegel the truth of what he perceives to be the modern era<sup>34</sup> is indeed superior to the classical understanding of dialectic.

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<sup>31</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic*, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic*, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic*, p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> For a well informed account of Hegel's understanding of modernity, see Ludwig Siep, *Practical reason and spirit in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* in Dean Moyar, Michael Quante, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit – A Critical Guide*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, especially Section I *The Concept of Spirit and its Historical Origin*, p. 173–175. In Siep's opinion Hegel attributes his concept of spirit to what he understands to be *the modern age and its religion*. By the phrase *modern age* Hegel designates in both Siep's as well as Gadamer's opinion the *querelle des anciens et des modernes* as following the Greco-Roman era. The religion that Hegel has in mind is naturally Christianity and the philosophy that characterizes it is Neo-Platonism. Hegel's understanding of *nous* is it Siep's opinion rather Aristotelian as *Denken des Denkens*. Besides Christian theology and its Hellenistic heritage, Siep identifies yet another two historical sources for Hegel's concept of spirit namely, his interpretation of Greek ethical life and the Herderian concept of *Volkgeist*. Siep and Gadamer share the same opinion when claiming that for Hegel the modern strand is superior to the ancient account.

## Conclusion

In light of the recent reconsideration in Gadamer scholarship of his relation to German Idealism and especially to Hegel, I tried in this paper to further develop this much needed re-approach. Accordingly, I tried to retrieve the scholarly insights that Gadamer provides us with in his interpretation of Hegel. Starting with Gadamer's contrasting of Hegelian philosophy with Greek thought, I sought to shed some light on how Gadamer understands Hegel's relation to the philosophical tradition, more precisely what is Gadamer's take on the status of metaphysics in Hegel's thought. Even though Gadamer does not deal with these issues as such, my contention was that in his interpretation of what Hegelian *speculative logic* amounts to, one can retrace some answers to such a question.

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