Tales of the Mighty Dead:
Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality

Chapter Six: Holism and Idealism in Hegel's *Phenomenology*

I. Introduction

The opening *Consciousness* section of Hegel's *Phenomenology* addresses our understanding of the physical world around us. The next section, *Self-Consciousness*, begins to consider our understanding of ourselves and each other. This order of discussion is neither arbitrary, nor merely convenient. Rather, one of the principal lessons we are to have learned by the end of the development of *Consciousness* is that our best conception of the world that is the *object* of our cognitive activities is intelligible only as part of a story that also considers the nature of the *subject* engaging in those activities. The rationale for this expository transition is an important strand in Hegel's *idealism*. In this essay I'll offer a rational reconstruction of an argument that I see as supporting this transition and the kind of idealism it embodies.[1]

II. The problem: understanding the *determinateness* of the objective world.

Hegel starts the line of thought I'll be rehearsing with the everyday idea of how things are—the idea that there is some way the world is. Understanding how things are or might be is grasping a certain sort of *content*. And his first observation is that that content—the

way things are or could be taken to be—must be *determinate*. That is to say at a

minimum that there must be a distinction between things being that way and them being

some other way.

1) The way things objectively are must be *definite* or *determinate*.

Determinateness is a matter of identity and individuation. It concerns how one thing is

distinguished from others.

In thinking about the sort of difference implicit in the notion of determinateness, it is

important to distinguish between two different kinds of difference. Properties (for

instance) can be *different*, but compatible, as **square** and **red** are. We might call this

"mere" difference. But properties can also be different in the stronger sense of material

incompatibility—of the impossibility of one and the same thing simultaneously

exhibiting both—as **square** and **triangular** are. We might call this "exclusive"

difference. Although I cannot discuss here how the point is made, in *Sense Certainty*

Hegel argues that the idea of a world exhibiting definiteness or determinateness as *mere*

[gleichgültige, translated by Miller as "indifferent"] difference, without *exclusive*

[auschliessende] difference, is incoherent. This is why compatibly different properties

always come as members of families of exclusively different ones.[2]

Hegel embraces the medieval (and Spinozist) principle *omnis determinatio est negatio*.

But mere difference is not yet the *negation* that determinateness requires according to this

principle. For an essential, defining property of negation is the exclusiveness codified in

the principle of noncontradiction: *p* rules out *not-p*, they are *incompatible*. For Hegel, it

is this exclusiveness that is the essence of negation. He abstracts this feature from the case of formal negation, and generalizes it to include the sort of material incompatibility that obtains between the properties **square** and **triangular**. (Formal negation can then reappear as the shadow of material incompatibility: *not-p* is the *minimal* incompatible of *p*. It is what is entailed by everything materially incompatible with *p*.) In a conceptually deep sense, far from rejecting the law of noncontradiction, I want to claim that Hegel radicalizes it, and places it at the very center of his thought.[3]

So his idea is that

2) The essence of determinateness is modally robust *exclusion*.

One understands items (for instance propositions or properties) as determinate just insofar as one understands them as standing to each other in relations of material incompatibility.

> The many determinate properties...are only determinate in so far as they *differentiate* themselves from one another, and *relate* themselves *to others* as to their opposites.[4]
> It is through its *determinateness* that the thing excludes others. Things are therefore in and for themselves determinate; they have properties by which they distinguish themselves from others...They are determinate properties in it only because they are a plurality of reciprocally self-differentiating elements.[5]

The idea Hegel is working with here is a common feature of both contemporary information theoretic and possible worlds approaches to semantics. The concept of the information conveyed by a signal is defined in terms of the way its reception serves to restrict, for the receiver, some antecedent set of possibilities. Before receiving the

message I only knew the number lay between 0 and 100. Afterwards I know that it is an *even* number in that range. (This fundamental idea must not be confused with the much more specific strategy for working it out that assigns numbers as *measures* of information in that sense.) The defining function of information is to rule out possibilities. Again, possible worlds semantics sees a proposition as significant just insofar as it effects a *partition* of the space of possible worlds. Its correctness *excludes* the actual world from one element of the partition (although rhetorically the focus is usually put on its being *included* in the other).

The concept of <u>material incompatibility</u>, or as Hegel calls it "determinate negation", is his most fundamental conceptual tool. Here are two uses of it that are particularly important for articulating the sort of idealism that is my topic.

- First, relations of determinate negation allow the definition of *consequence relations* that are modally robust in the sense of supporting counterfactual inferences—what show up at the end of *Consciousness* in the form of *laws*. The proposition or property *p* entails *q* just in case everything incompatible with (ruled out or excluded by) *q* is incompatible with (ruled our or excluded by) *p*. For instance having the property **square** entails having the property **polygonal**, because and in the sense that everything materially incompatible with **square** (for instance **circular**) is incompatible with **polygonal**. In this sense, it is *impossible* for something to be square without its also being polygonal. So we can see (though Hegel never makes the point explicitly) that:

3) Material *incompatibility* relations induce modally robust material

    ***consequence* relations.**

Taking his cue from the role played by the middle term in a classical syllogism,

Hegel uses the term "mediation" [Vermittlung] in discussing the *inferential*

articulation of contents induced by relations of determinate negation. Thus

mediation can be understood in terms of determinate negation.[6] This is to say that for

Hegel <u>schließen</u> is rooted in <u>ausschließen</u> (conclusion in exclusion). Together, these

two sorts of relation define what Hegel means by "conceptual" [begrifflich]:

4) To be *conceptually* articulated is just to stand in material relations of

    incompatibility and (so) consequence (inference).

In this sense, conceptual articulation is a perfectly objective affair. It has nothing

obviously or explicitly to do with any *subjective* or *psychological process*. Showing

that it nonetheless does have an *implicit* connection to such processes, and what that

connection is, is the task of motivating objective idealism (that is, idealism about the

objective conceptual structure of the world).

Given this definition, Hegel's *conceptual* realism can be seen as just the form taken

by a *modal* realism. There really are modally qualified states of affairs: possibilities

and necessities (necessitations being the inferential version of this categorical notion,

and conditional possibility being the corresponding weaker conditional modality).

Further, without acknowledging them, we cannot make intelligible ordinary

descriptive predicates and properties. Again, Hegel will claim that modal realism

requires objective idealism.

- Second, I started this story with the idea of how things are—the idea that there is some way the world is. Understanding how things are is grasping a certain sort of *content*. In talking about objectivity and subjectivity in terms of 'truth' and 'certainty', Hegel wants us to start by focusing on this notion of *content* rather than on the *objects* of (claims to) knowledge. One reason to do this, of which Hegel's *Introduction* reminds us, is so our philosophical idiom will not rule out from the beginning as incoherent the possibility that how things are in themselves might also be how they are for some consciousness—that there is a sense of 'content' in which, at least in some cases, truth and certainty may be two different forms taken by the same content. If we start by terminologically committing ourselves to a picture of consciousness as a *relation* between two sorts of *thing*, subjects and objects, we cut ourselves off from the shift in theoretical perspective that Hegel wants to recommend under the heading of 'idealism', which is my topic here. Talk of subjects and objects comes late in the story, not at the beginning. And when they do officially become a topic, in *Perception*,

> 5) **The concepts <u>subject</u> and <u>object</u> can be defined in terms of determinate negation or material incompatibility.**

Both are to be understood as loci or units of account that in a generic sense "repel" or "exclude" incompatibilities. Objects repel objectively incompatible properties (such as **square** and **triangular**), in that one and the same object *can*not at the same time exhibit both—though they can be exhibited by different objects. And subjects repel subjectively incompatible commitments (for instance, commitment to something being square and commitment to it being circular) in that one and the same subject

ought not at the same time endorse both (though the same prohibition does not apply to the commitments of different subjects). The different ways in which objects and subjects "repel" or "exclude" them make it clear that incompatibility$_{obj}$ and incompatibility$_{subj}$ are *different* concepts. (Since while one object *can*not simultaneously exhibit objectively incompatible properties, one subject merely *ought* not simultaneously undertake subjectively incompatible commitments.) The intimate relation between these concepts—the way in which incompatibility$_{obj}$ and incompatibility$_{subj}$ turn out to be two sides of one coin, each intelligible in principle only in relation to the other—is the essence of Hegel's *objective idealism* concerning the relation between the subjective and the objective poles of consciousness.[7]

III.   Holism

The notion of immediacy presupposes determinateness of content, but cannot by itself underwrite it. Determinate content must be articulated by relations of material incompatibility. That realization entails rejecting the semantic atomism that lies at the core of what Wilfrid Sellars would later call the "Myth of the Given," in a work that opens by invoking "Hegel, that great foe of immediacy." The concept of immediacy can itself be made intelligible only against a background of mediating relations of exclusion. This is the conclusion of Hegel's discussion of *Sense Certainty*.[8]

Understanding determinate conceptual content in terms of relations of exclusion among such contents commits one, then, to some kind of *semantic holism*. Although earlier thinkers outside the empiricist tradition (especially Kant) had dipped their toes in the water, Hegel is the first thinker explicitly to take the plunge and try to think through

rigorously the consequences of semantic holism. But what exactly is he committed to? To begin with,

6) We can distinguish two grades of holistic commitment:

- *Weak* individuational holism: Articulation by relations of material incompatibility is *necessary* for determinate contentfulness (for instance, of states of affairs and properties, on the objective side, and propositions and predicates on the subjective side).

- *Strong* individuational holism: Articulation by relations of material incompatibility is *sufficient*—all there is available to define it—for determinate contentfulness (for instance, of states of affairs and properties, on the objective side, and propositions and predicates on the subjective side).

Hegel is clearly committed to the weaker claim. So, for instance, in a characteristic expression introducing it in the discussion of *Perception*, Hegel says of "differentiated, determinate properties" that "*many* such properties are established [gesetzt] simultaneously, one being the negative of another."[9] *One* property can be understood as determinate only by understanding *many other* properties—those incompatible with it— as similarly determinate. But is he also committed to the stronger form?

There are reasons to think that he is. Standard contemporary ways of thinking of conceptual content in terms of the exclusion of possibilities—paradigmatically information theoretic and possible worlds accounts—treat the space of possibilities partitioned by such a content as fixed and given in advance of any such partition. By contrast to both, the line of thought Hegel develops here does *not* take it that the

possibilities are available conceptually antecedently to the possible (indeed, actual[10])

contents of messages or claims, or that the properties are already sitting there intelligibly

determinate *before* the relations of exclusion among them have been considered. For

what would that determinateness consist in? If immediacy *as* immediacy is

*in*determinate, it seems that the relations of exclusion must be what their determinateness

consists in. What might be called "asymmetric relative individuation" of one sort of item

with respect to another is a relatively straightforward matter. Thus if I understand the

property **red** as selecting out of the set of objects a privileged subset, namely those that

exhibit that property, I can identify and individuate another property, **not-red**, entirely in

terms of its contrast with the original property. I understand it also as selecting out of the

set of objects a privileged subset, defined in terms of the other, namely, the complement

of the first. But this is not what Hegel offers us. He is committed to *symmetric* relative

individuation, in which a whole *set* or *system* of determinate contents—comprising **red**,

blue, **yellow**, and so on—is 'posited' at once, each individuated by its relations to (its

strong differences from) the others.[11] If such a view does not entail strong

individuational holism, a story will have to be told about why not.

The second reason to attribute to Hegel commitment to strong individuational semantic

holism is the nature of the transition from *Perception* to *Force and Understanding* that is

driven by making explicit the holism that turns out to be implicit in understanding

properties as identified and individuated by the relations of determinate negation and

mediation in which they stand to one another (and, at a higher level, to the objects

ultimately defined as centers of exclusion of them). Thus even in its first appearance,

where the concept of <u>force</u> is understood as dividing into forces playing the roles of soliciting and solicited, we are told:

> [T]hese moments are not divided into two independent extremes offering each other only an opposite extreme: their essence rather consists simply and solely in this, that each *is* solely through the other, and what each thus is it immediately no longer is, since it *is* the other. They have thus, in fact, no substance of their own, which might support and maintain them.[12]

At this point, relations to other items of the same category are not merely *one* necessary element in the individuation of the items being considered. It seems that they are all there is. The whole discussion of *Consciousness* leads up to putting on the table the final holistic conception of the conceptual that Hegel calls "infinity". At the very end of that part of the *Phenomenology* Hegel says:

> Infinity... in which whatever is determined in one way or another...is rather the opposite of this determinateness, this no doubt has been from the start the soul of all that has gone before.[13]

The conception of the conceptual as "infinite" is the axis around which Hegel's systematic thought revolves. Grasping it is the primary goal towards which the exposition of the whole *Logic* is directed. In the discussion at the end of *Force and Understanding*, the "Notion of inner difference,"[14] contrasting with the inadequate atomistic conception of "absolute" difference, is repeatedly equated with <u>infinity</u>. In fact, the term is introduced for the first time as characterizing what

> is itself and its opposite in one unity. Only thus is it difference as *inner* difference, or difference as *its own self*, or difference as an *infinity*.[15]

Inner difference is material incompatibility among items understood to be the items they are solely in virtue of standing in those relations of necessary mutual exclusion. Inner difference is

> a *difference* which is no *difference*, or only a difference of what is *self-
> same*, and its essence is unity. The two distinguished moments both
> subsist [bestehen]; they are *implicit* and are *opposites in themselves*, i.e.
> each is the opposite of itself; each has its 'other' within it and they are only
> one unity.[16]

Understanding such a holistic unity requires "the distinguishing of what is *not* to
be distinguished, or the *unity* of what is distinguished."[17]

The holistic successor conception to a world of *facts*—namely, the world as having the
structure of *infinity*—emerges as the lesson of the discussion of the constitutive holistic
interrelations of laws.

> That the simple character of law is infinity means, according to what we have
> found, a) that it is self-*identical*, but is also in itself *different*; or it is the selfsame
> which repels itself from itself or sunders itself into two...b) What is thus
> dirempted [Entzweite], which constitutes the parts...exhibits itself as a stable
> existence...but c) through the Notion of inner difference, these unlike and
> indifferent moments...are a *difference* which is no *difference* or only a difference
> of what is *self-same*, and its essence is unity...The two distinguished moments
> both subsist; they are *implicit* and are *opposites in themselves*, i.e. each is the
> opposite of itself; each has its 'other' within it and they are only one unity.[18]

We are now to think of the whole as having its differences within it, as an articulating
structure essential both to the constitution of the whole and to the constitution of its "self-
differentiating" components.

Those components can be thought of as particular facts, particular laws, and general laws,
provided we do not forget that these cannot be understood as atomistic elements
intelligible independently of and antecedently to consideration of the modal relations of

exclusion and inclusion in which they stand to one another. If we keep firmly in mind that the topic is a holistically understood system of determinately contentful elements that are determinately contentful, *conceptually* contentful, just because and insofar as they are articulated by relations of material incompatibility, and hence material inferential relations, we can at least begin to see what Hegel is trying to get across in passages such as this one:

> This simple infinity, or the absolute Notion…whose omnipresence is neither disturbed nor interrupted by any difference, but rather is itself every difference, as also their supersession; it pulsates within itself but does not move, inwardly vibrates, yet is at rest. It is self-*identical*, for its differences are tautological; they are differences that are none...that very self-identicalness is an inner difference. These *sundered moments* are thus *in and for themselves* each an opposite—*of an other*; thus in each moment the 'other' is at the same time expressed; or each is not the opposite of an 'other' but only a *pure opposite*; and so each is therefore in its own self the opposite of itself. In other words, it is not an opposite at all, but is purely for itself, a pure, self-identical essence that has no difference in it....But in saying that the unity is an abstraction, that is, is only one of the opposed moments it is already implied that it is the dividing of itself; for if the unity is a *negative*, is *opposed* to something, then it is *eo ipso* posited as that which has an antithesis within it. The different moments of *self-sundering* and of *becoming self-identical* are therefore likewise only this movement of *self-supersession;* for since the self-identical, which is supposed first to sunder itself or become its opposite, is an abstraction, or is *already itself* a sundered moment, its self-sundering is therefore a supersession of what it is, and therefore the supersession of its dividedness. Its *becoming self-identical* is equally a self-sundering; what becomes identical with itself thereby opposes itself to its self-sundering; i.e.. it thereby puts itself on one side, or rather *becomes* a *sundered moment.*[19]

The concept of <u>infinity</u> in play here is clearly a holistic one. But should we understand it as holist in the *strong* sense?   It turns out that there is a real question as to whether we even *can* so understand it.

IV. Conceptual Difficulties of Strong Holism

For Hegel also realizes, what the difficulty of his language perhaps makes manifest: it remains far from evident just how to understand such holistic claims in detail. We will see that one of the primary tasks driving Hegel's exposition—in particular, the crucial transition from *Consciousness* to *Self-Consciousness*—is unpacking the commitments implicit in holist conceptions of content, and assembling the conceptual raw materials needed to explain them.

Strong individuational semantic holism asks us to think of conceptual contents—that is, for Hegel, whatever is in any coherent sense *determinate*—as forming a *holistic relational structure*. Such a structure would consist of a domain and set of relations of material exclusion defined on that domain. But, further, it asks us to understand the domain elements themselves as constituted by the relations of material exclusion it stands in to other domain elements. The relata are in a sense dissolved into the relations between them. And at this point we have a chicken-and-egg problem: the relations are individuated by their relata, and the relata by the relations they stand in. But relations between *what*, exactly? The intelligibility of the relations themselves is threatened. Can

we really understand relations of incompatibility without any prior grip on what is incompatible? How does the whole thing get off the ground? Once we have eschewed *a*symmetric relative individuation in favor of the symmetric variety, the strong version of holism threatens to dissolve into unintelligibility. What is supposed to be the very structure of determinateness itself seems wholly *in*determinate and unconstrained. The strongly distinguished items are defined in terms of their strong differences. There is an evident danger of circularity involved in trying to individuate some items in terms of others when the situation is symmetric. For in that case those others to which one appeals are themselves only individuated in terms of their relations to the so-far-unindividuated items with which one began. The sort of structure being described threatens to be "unendlich" in the sense that we chase our tails endlessly in search of some firm distinctions and distinguished items to appeal to in getting the process of identification and individuation started.

I think there is not just a *prima facie* problem in making strong individuational semantic holism intelligible, but one that is unsolvable in principle.

7) Strong individuational semantic holism is not a coherent position.

If we are to make good sense of Hegel, we must come to see that, in spite of the ways in which his language repeatedly invites us to attribute this view to him, he is in fact *not* committed to this sort of strong holism. But we must also, then, see what it is about the view he *does* endorse that makes these forms of expression tempting. Hegel's understanding of *determinateness*—whether thought of objectively, as a matter of how things really are, or subjectively, in terms of our grasp of how things might really be—in terms of modally robust *exclusion* entails a certain kind of *holism*. And I have indicated

that I think Hegel's *idealism* should be understood as motivated in the *Phenomenology* by

being revealed as an implicit presupposition of the intelligibility of that holism. In

evaluating the philosophical credentials and significance of Hegel's idealism, the

argument for this claim is of the utmost importance. So it is worth some care to get it

right.

V. A Bad Argument

Unfortunately, the texts that discuss this move—basically, those that describe the

rationale for the transition from the consideration of the objects of consciousness, in

Consciousness, to the subjects of consciousness, in *Self-Consciousness*—invite a reading

in which only a very weak argument is visible. For Hegel emphasizes from the beginning

that consciousness itself must be thought of as having a certain kind of holistic structure:

it is a unity that essentially consists in the relation between its distinct subjective and

objective poles (what appear for instance as "the immediately self-differentiating

moments within perception"[20] [M111]). And it can *look* as though what he is saying is

that once we discover the holistic character of the *objects* of consciousness, we see that

they resemble consciousness itself in this respect, so that consciousness of everything

should be understood on the model of consciousness of objects that themselves have the

holistic structure characteristic of consciousness—that is, that we should understand

consciousness generally on the model of *self*-consciousness. I'll call this the "analogical

argument from holism" for the sort of idealism that models consciousness on self-

consciousness, thereby underwriting the expository transition from *Consciousness* to *Self-*

Consciousness. Thus in the penultimate paragraph of *Consciousness*, after the discussion of "infinity" we find this summary of what appears to be the rationale for moving at this point to concern with *self*-consciousness:

> Since this Notion of infinity is an object for consciousness, the latter is consciousness of a difference that is no less *immediately* canceled; consciousness is for its own self, it is a distinguishing of that which contains no difference [Unterscheiden des Ununterschiedenen], or *self-consciousness*. I distinguish myself from myself, and in doing so I am directly aware that what is distinguished from myself is not different. I, the selfsame being, repel [abstoßen] myself from myself; but what is posited as distinct from me, or as unlike me, is immediately in being so distinguished not a distinction for me. It is true that consciousness of an 'other', of an object in general, is itself necessarily *self-consciousness*… consciousness of itself in its otherness…[N]ot only is consciousness of a thing possible only for a self-consciousness, but that self-consciousness alone is the truth of those shapes.[21]

The object of consciousness has the holistic relational structure Hegel calls "infinity".

This is a structure of differences (exclusions) that are canceled or superseded ("aufgehoben") in that the identity or unity of the differentiated items is understood as consisting in those relations of reciprocal exclusion. But consciousness itself is such a structure. So consciousness of objects is consciousness of something that has the same structure as consciousness. It is therefore structurally like consciousness of *selves* rather than objects. Generically, then, it is to be understood as self-consciousness.

This is a dreadful argument. If it were intended to show the *identity* of consciousness and self-consciousness (if that were the intent of the 'is' in the claim "consciousness of an

'other', of an object in general, is itself necessarily *self-consciousness*"), it would have the same form as what has been called the "schizophrenic syllogism":

Men die.
Grass dies.

———————

∴ Men are grass.

That is, it would illegitimately infer identity from mere similarity. On the other hand, if it is intended merely to show a structural analogy, the situation seems entirely symmetrical. Why should self-consciousness be privileged because of its holistic character as the fixed end of analogy on the basis of which to understand the holistic character of the objects of ordinary consciousness, rather than the other way around? In any case, the analogy does not seem very strong. On the face of it, the relation between subjects and objects in consciousness is asymmetric: there cannot be subjects of consciousness without objects, but the very same things that can be the objects of consciousness (e.g. the physical forces theoretically postulated by natural science) can be there without subjects to be conscious of them. Of course they are not there *qua* objects of consciousness, but so what? The asymmetry would still seem to be real. Hegel *might* mean to deny that there is any asymmetry of this sort between the status of subjects and objects of consciousness, but if so he would hardly be entitled to *assume* such a view in arguing for an idealist conclusion. And there does not seem to be any corresponding asymmetry in the holistic relational structure he has discerned as implicit in the determinateness of the objective world. (One could try to work one up from the asymmetry underlined by the discussion of the inverted world—the asymmetry, namely, between the actual facts about what objects have what properties, on the one hand, and the merely possible instantiations of

properties by those same objects that they, as determinate, exclude. But this seems

importantly different from the subject-object asymmetry.) If this is right, then the

analogy between the underlying holistic structure of the objective world arrived at by the

end of *Consciousness* and the holistic structure consciousness is supposed to have would

depend on a very thin and abstract respect of similarity—a slender reed on which to build

an idealist edifice.

Things would look, if anything, worse if Hegel is relying on his terminology to shore up

the comparison. Thus one might seek to appeal to the formula that determinate objective

content (say, of a property) is a kind of "identity in difference", and then use the same

words to describe consciousness. But the mere fact that the same phrase could be used

about both surely counts for very little here, especially given the differences just pointed

to. Again, the fact that Hegel can say that "in general, to be for itself and to be in relation

to an other constitutes the essence of the content,"[22] and that one could also say that

consciousness was both "for itself and in relation to an other" (i.e. essentially involved

consciousness of itself and of its object) may just show the flexibility of this somewhat

figurative way of speaking, rather than evidencing any very illuminating similarity.

Calling the relations something stands in its "being for others" would be a pretty cheap

way to buy the right to model the objects of consciousness on the subjects of

consciousness, especially in the context of a social theory of self-consciousness, which

explains being-for-self in terms of being-for-others. The point is not that using the same

terminology for both cases cannot be earned, or that it cannot be illuminating. The point

is that it must be earned in order to be illuminating. At the *end* of the story, we may see

why it is useful to talk this way. But it is hard to see how these tropes by themselves can move that story along. The mere fact that it is possible to talk about the objects of consciousness and consciousness itself in terms that are so generic that we say some of the same things about both is a very weak rationale for the expository transition to *Self-Consciousness*. The most it would provide is an excuse for a shift of topic, along the lines of saying "Now, let's look at <u>self-consciousness,</u> since it has come up in the story...". But it would provide no argument at all for any sort of interesting or controversial idealism, and no clarification of such a thesis. If this sort of argument—really a verbal slide that conflates two quite different points, one wholly on the side of objective content (facts, objects, properties), the other about the relation between such contents and knowers—were the best we could find Hegel presenting at this crucial juncture in his account, there would be no reason to take his idealism seriously.

VI. Objective Relations and Subjective Processes

A good place to start is with a distinction between inferential *processes* and inferential *relations* that emerges first in thinking about logic. Gilbert Harman has argued provocatively that there are no such thing as rules of deductive inference.[23] For if there were, they would presumably say things like "From *p* and *if p then q*, infer *q*." But that would be a bad rule. One might already have much better evidence against *q* than one had for either *p* or the conditional. In that case, one should give one of them up. What deductive logic really tells us is not to believe all of *p, if p then q,* and *~q*. But it does not tell us what to *do* inferentially. It merely specifies some deductive *relations* of

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entailment and incompatibility, which *constrain* what we should do without *determining* it. Inference is a *process*; implication is a *relation*. Nothing but confusion can result from running together the quite different concepts of inferential processes and inferential relations. What I will call "the Harman point" is

> **8) One must distinguish, and consider the relations between, inferential *relations* (and hence relational structures[24]) and inferential *processes*.**

He makes the point in connection with formal deductive logic, but it has broader applicability.

In particular, Hegel's term "Schluß" exhibits just this relation/process ambiguity. It is usually translated "syllogism", on the perfectly reasonable grounds that "Schluß" is the term historically used in Germany to discuss Aristotelean syllogistic inferences. And there are places, particularly in the *Science of Logic* discussion of the forms of syllogism, where this is the only proper translation. But the term means *inference* more generally. And while it is clear that sometimes he is talking about the relations between the different elements of a classical syllogism—for instance, about having the status or playing the role of a middle term—as we shall see, it is also clear that sometimes he is talking about the *movement* from the premises to the conclusion.[25] (Related terms, such as "mediation" [Vermittlung] take similar double senses.) Indeed, one of his major concerns, I shall argue, is with the *relation* between inferential relations and inferential practices or processes.

As we have seen, Hegel has a deeper notion than that of material inference, namely

material *incompatibility*. The only sorts of inference Hegel considers as contributing to

determinate conceptual content are the modally robust ones that derive from relations of

exclusion. Taking material *inferential* relations (mediation, schließen) to be grounded in

material *incompatibility* relations (determinate negation, ausschließen) suggests a

generalization of the Harman point, to relational structures defined by *exclusion*, and (so)

by *necessitation*. Hegel's version of the Harman point accordingly is something like

> **9) In thinking about determinateness in terms of material incompatibility,**
>
> **and so in terms of inference, we should also distinguish between *relations* and**
>
> ***processes*.**

I think it is helpful to construe the distinction between the *objective* incompatibility of

situations, properties, states of affairs, or the determinate elements of an "infinite" holistic

conceptual relational structure, on the one hand, and the *subjective* incompatibility of

commitments, on the other hand, on the Harmanian model of *relations* and *processes* (or

practices). The *process* on the *subjective* side of *certainty* that corresponds to the *relation*

of incompatibility of facts or properties on the *objective* side of *truth* is *resolving*

incompatible *commitments*, by revising or relinquishing one of them. As a version of the

point was put above, *objectively* incompatible properties *cannot* characterize the same

object (objectively incompatible facts cannot characterize the same world), while

subjectively incompatible commitments merely *ought not* to characterize the same

subject. Any case where they do is a case of *error*, the acknowledgment of which (as

Hegel has argued in the *Introduction*) *is* what taking one's commitments to be answerable

to an objective world (in the sense constitutive of treating them *as* representations *of* such a world) consists in. But to acknowledge an error, that is, to acknowledge the incompatibility of two of one's commitments, is to acknowledge an obligation to *do* something, to *alter* one's commitments so as to remove or repair the incompatibility.

I think that the idealism that emerges from the expository transition from *Consciousness* to *Self-Consciousness* claims, broadly, that one cannot understand the relations of *objective* incompatibility that articulate the conceptual relational structure in virtue of which the objective world is *determinate*, unless one understands the *processes* and *practices* constituting the acknowledgment of the *subjective* incompatibility of *commitments* that are thereby treated as representations *of* such a world—in the sense of being answerable to it for their correctness. Such a view about the relation between subjective cognitive *processes* and the *relations* that articulate potential objects of knowledge involves extending the Harman point along another dimension. It requires not just that there be a *distinction* between conceptual relations (paradigmatically, material inferential and incompatibility relations) and conceptual processes (of belief and concept revision), but further, that grasp of the relations *consists* in engaging in the corresponding processes. This view is a more specific version of

> **10) Conceptual pragmatism: grasp of a concept (conceptual content) is a *practical* capacity, mastery of a practice, or the capacity to undergo or engage in a process; it is the capacity to *do* something.**

(Sellars propounds a linguistic version of conceptual pragmatism, in claiming that grasp of a concept is always mastery of the use of a word.) Applied to the case in hand,

understanding the objective relation of determinate negation or material incompatibility, which provides the most basic structure of the conceptual, is acknowledging in practice a subjective obligation to engage in the process of resolving incompatible commitments.[26] Read back into the very simple Harman case with which we began, endorsement of conceptual pragmatism supports a stronger claim than Harman makes: the claim that one does not understand the concept of deductive implication *relations* unless one understands them *as* constraints on inferential *processes* of rationally altering one's beliefs. This the idea that what it is for the relations in question to be *implication* relations just is for them to play a certain role in constraining rational belief change. Endorsing this thought is moving beyond the original point. For Harman does not say that what it *is* for one proposition to stand in a relation of implying or entailing another just *is* for certain inferential moves and not others to be correct or appropriate (and vice versa). He does not take the process of grasping inferential relations to be an essential defining element of what those relations are.[27]

VII. Sense Dependence, Reference Dependence, and Objective Idealism

It will be helpful here to introduce some definitions.

> **11) Concept P is *sense dependent* on concept Q just in case one cannot count as having grasped P unless one counts as grasping Q.**

> **12) Concept P is *reference dependent* on concept Q just in case P cannot apply to something unless Q applies to something.[28]**

A paradigmatic sense dependence claim is Sellars' classic argument in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" that one cannot master the use of 'looks' talk without having mastered the use of 'is' talk. The concepts <u>nail</u> and <u>hammer</u> may be related like this: one cannot understand what a nail is—something meant to be driven by a hammer—without understanding what a hammer is.[29]

One important point to keep in mind is

13) Sense dependence does not entail reference dependence.

That is, even if the concept <u>nail</u> is sense dependent on the concept <u>hammer</u>, it would not follow that it was impossible for there to *be* nails without there being hammers to drive them. (Maybe the nails were invented first, or all the hammers were destroyed.[30]) The point is clearest if we look at *intensions* and *extensions* in a possible worlds framework. Consider a property or intension defined by a *de re* comparison: <u>being more massive than the Earth's sun (in fact) is</u>. (Calling it a "*de re*" comparison just marks the familiar distinction of scope: in evaluating its application, one *first* determines the mass of the Earth's sun in *this* world, and *then* compares it to the mass of bodies in other possible worlds.) Now I take it that this intension is intelligible only in the context of another: <u>the mass of the Earth's sun</u>. No-one who did not understand the latter could count as understanding the former. (Of course, understanding the concept does not require knowing what the mass of the Earth's sun is in the sense of being able to specify a number of kilograms or pounds.) And this is not just a point about understanding. It is a point about the intensions themselves: one is defined in terms of (as a function of) the other. But it is clear that there could be stars that have the property **being more massive**

than the Earth's sun even though they are in possible worlds in which the Earth and its sun never formed. That is, the dependent intension can be instantiated even though the intension it depends upon is not.

Another example: the property **being produced by a reliable belief-forming mechanism** is conceptually dependent on that of **being a true belief**, because to be a reliable belief-forming mechanism is to produce beliefs that are likely to be true. But a belief can exhibit the dependent property without exhibiting the property it is conceptually dependent on—it can be produced by a reliable mechanism without being true.

From the fact that P_2 is defined as an intension that is a function of the intension of P_1, it simply does not follow that wherever P_2 is instantiated, so is P_1. Definitional dependence of *in*tensions does not entail *de facto* dependence of *ex*tensions.

If one first extends the Harman point from formal logic, and applies it also to material inferential and incompatibility relations, and then strengthens it into commitment to a kind of conceptual pragmatism, what one gets is a characteristic kind of *reciprocal sense dependence claim*:

> **14) One can only understand the concept of a determinate *objective* world to the extent to which one understands *subjective* process of acknowledging error—what Hegel calls 'experience'--which is treating two commitments one finds oneself with as *incompatible*.**

I think one should understand the strand in Hegel's idealism we might call *objective idealism* as codifying this genus of reciprocal sense dependence between the realm of truth and that of certainty. Given Hegel's most basic concept, a slightly more articulated version is:

> **15) Objective Idealism: The concepts of <u>incompatibility_{obj}</u> and <u>incompatibility_{subj}</u>, and *therefore* the concepts of an <u>objectively determinate world</u>, on the one hand, and of <u>error</u>, and <u>experience</u>—which characterize the process of resolving incompatible commitments—on the other, are reciprocally sense dependent.**

For Hegel, the conceptually fundamental reciprocal sense dependence is that between <u>incompatibility_{obj}</u> and <u>incompatibility_{subj}</u>, epitomized in the different senses in which objects and subjects "repel" incompatibilities, respectively of properties and of commitments.[31] But the force of the claim is probably clearer for us if we consider its applicability to what Hegel takes pains in *Consciousness* to show are phenomena definable in terms of those incompatibilities: <u>object</u> and <u>property,</u> <u>fact</u>, and <u>law</u> (or <u>necessity)</u>.

In fact, these are three examples of objective idealist theses that I think can and should be defended on their own merits by contemporary conceptual pragmatists.[32]

- First, the concepts <u>singular term</u> and <u>object</u> are reciprocally sense dependent. One cannot understand either without at least implicitly understanding the other, and the basic relations between them. Only people who know how to use singular terms can pick out objects and distinguish them from properties, situations, or states of affairs.

And one cannot master the use of singular terms without understanding that they stand for objects. Kant's version of idealism depends in part on his understanding of the relation between our judgments being about objects and their containing (directly or indirectly) singular representations. Frege (who would be no less horrified by the appellation "idealist" than any of our contemporaries—but who also had perhaps no less flat-footed an understanding of what the German idealists were after) argues vigorously and cogently for at least one direction of sense dependence, of <u>object</u> on <u>singular term</u> (that is, the direction that is most important for idealists), in the *Grundlagen*.

- Second, the concepts <u>asserting</u> and <u>fact</u> are reciprocally sense dependent. That facts can be the contents of assertions, judgments, beliefs—that they are claimable, thinkable, believable—is an essential feature of them. One does not know what a fact is unless one understands that they can be stated. This line of thought is opposed to an explanatory strategy that would start with objects, and try to construe facts as arrangements of objects—what might be called the "tinkertoy" picture of facts. One would then go on to understand sentences as a special kind of complex representation, one that represented not objects, but objects as characterized by properties and standing in relations. (The *Tractatus* is often misread as promulgating a view of this sort.) I think such an approach is doomed to failure at making propositional contents as such intelligible. The evident difficulties this strategy has with modal facts, probabilistic facts, and normative facts, for instance, are merely the surface manifestations of the deeper difficulties in making the notion of <u>proposition</u> or <u>fact</u> intelligible in a context in which one is not also taking into account what it is to use

an expression as a declarative sentence. My aim here, however, is not to argue for this sense dependence claim, but merely to place it relative to a contrary approach to things, and to suggest that it is not a view that ought to be dismissed out of hand.

- Third, the concepts <u>necessity</u> and <u>law</u>, on the one hand, and <u>counterfactually robust inference</u> on the other, are reciprocally sense dependent. Sellars has argued for the more controversial direction of sense dependence, on the basis of his conceptual pragmatism: one has not grasped the difference between lawlike regularities and mere regularities unless one understands that the former, but not the latter, support counterfactual reasoning. (Hegel's version is the connection between <u>law</u> and <u>explanation</u>, which stand to each other roughly as do the concepts <u>perceptible property</u> and <u>acknowledging error</u>.)

In assessing these claims about the sense dependence of concepts that articulate our understanding of the structure of the objective world on concepts pertaining to our cognitive and practical activities, it is important to keep firmly in mind that sense dependence does not entail reference dependence (claim (13) above). The claim is *not* that if there were no cognitive activity—no resolving of subjectively incompatible commitments, no use of singular terms, no asserting, no counterfactual reasoning—then there would be no determinate way the world is, no objects, facts, or laws. There is not the slightest reason to believe that Hegel thought any such thing. Certainly making the sense dependence claims that I take to constitute objective idealism does not commit him to such an idea.

It may be helpful in clarifying this crucial feature of idealism to focus on a less controversial case that is somewhat analogous to objective idealism, in that it involves the sense dependence of properties of objective things on subjective activities. Consider *response dependent* properties. By this I mean properties defined by their relation to the responses of something else. The general form of such a definition might be this:

> An object has property *P* just in case a creature of kind *K would* (in circumstances of kind *C*) respond to it with a response of kind *R*.

To say that *P* is a response dependent property in this sense entails that it is sense dependent (by definition) on other concepts, notably *R,* the response, (as well as *K* and *C*). One could not understand what property *P* is unless one also understands what the response *R* is. It doesn't matter for our purposes here just what properties are properly thought of as being response dependent in this sense. It is plausible that the property **humorous** or **funny** is a property of this sort; a remark or event is humorous or funny just in case the right people (those with a sense of humor) are disposed in appropriate circumstances to *take* it to be funny, that is, to laugh at it. Some have thought that **beautiful** is a response dependent property. The notion of response dependence has also been forwarded as an analysis of secondary quality concepts picking out properties such as **red**: to be red just is to be such that properly sighted creatures respond to it in a certain way, by having a certain kind of experience, by its *looking* red to them.[33] Regardless of whether any of these particular potentially philosophically puzzling sorts of properties are best thought of as response dependent, the concept of response dependent properties is clearly a coherent one. And it should be equally clear that it does *not* follow from a response dependent definition of the form above that in a world that lacks creatures of

kind *K*, responses of kind *R*, or circumstances of kind *C*, nothing has the property *P*. For things might still have the dispositional property (counterfactually, in the cases imagined), that if they *were* placed in circumstances *C*, and there *were* creatures of kind *K*, those creatures *would* produce responses of kind *R*. Even if response-dependent analyses of the sort gestured at above were correct for concepts such as beautiful and red, it would not follow that there were no beautiful sunsets or red things before there were creatures to respond to them as such, or that there are not such things in worlds that are never shared with such creatures. In the same way, and for the same reason, the objective idealist subjective-objective sense dependence claim does *not* entail that there would be no objects, facts, laws, or (to sum these all up in Hegel's master concept) objective incompatibilities (and hence a determinate objective world) unless and until there were singular term uses, assertions, practices of drawing conclusions from counterfactual situations, or activities of attempting to resolve incompatible commitments. Such a claim *would* be crazy (or at least, both obviously and demonstrably false). But no claim of that sort is a consequence of objective idealism as here adumbrated.

VIII.   Beyond Strong Holism: a Model

With these conceptual raw material in hand, we are in a position to be somewhat clearer about individuational holism. Earlier I distinguished two grades of holistic commitment: according to the weaker one, relations among holistically individuated items are *necessary* for them to be determinate, and according to the stronger one, they are *sufficient*. But now we can ask: should Hegel's holism—whether understood as strong or

as weak—be understood as a *sense* dependence claim, or a *reference* dependence claim?
Hegel's answer is clear:

16)) Individuational holism is a reciprocal sense dependence claim.

Understanding it as a reciprocal *reference* dependence claim would be making the
mistake of the First Inverted World[34]: thinking that because an object's being determinate
is intelligible only in terms of its exhibiting properties that are each themselves
determinate in virtue of their modally robust exclusion of other, strongly contrasting
properties, that therefore where one property is possessed by an object, the contrasting
ones must also be possessed by that or other objects.

The conception of the Inverted World is what results if one mistakenly thinks that
because the exclusive contrast between being positively charged and being negatively
charged is essential to each being the determinate electrical property that it is, that
therefore in saying that one thing is actually positively charged one must implicitly be
claiming that some other, corresponding thing is actually negatively charged. Hegel
invokes this flat-footed way of misconstruing the significance of the holism that follows
from his understanding of what determinateness consists in—in a portion of his text that
many have found puzzling—in order to mark the necessity for a more nuanced construal
of just what that holism does involve.

Notice that on this account,

**17) Objective idealism is itself the assertion of a reciprocal sense dependence
relation, and hence a kind of *holism*.**

The looming problem we have identified concerns *strong* individuational holism: the case where *all* there is to appeal to in individuating elements of a holistic relational system are the relations they stand in to each other. The examples I offered of clearly intelligible sense dependence without reference dependence, where one intension is a function of another (paradigmatically as in response dependent properties) did not involve *reciprocal*, but only *asymmetric* sense dependence. One intension is taken as already specified, apart from its relations to others. Strong holism asks us to do without such antecedent, independent individuation of the items that stand in sense dependent relations of modally robust exclusion. And my claim was: without antecedent relata, we cannot really understand the relations (and so the relata). As we will see, immediacy plays a crucial role in Hegel's distinctive kind of holism.   So in the end, it is a distinctive kind of *weak*, not *strong* holism, that characterizes the "infinite" relational structures within which alone anything can be understood as having determinate conceptual content. which is accordingly a version of the weak, not strong sort. The passages that seem to commit him to strong holism should be understood rather as corresponding to one (ultimately inadequate) phase in the process of grasping or understanding a holistic relational structure.

For, as conceptual pragmatism would lead us to expect, making holistic relational structures intelligible requires engaging in a fairly specific sort of *process*. The relations between the holistic relational structure and that process can then be seen both to instantiate and to support the objective idealism that results from extending and supplementing the Harman point. This, I think, is the ultimate shape of Hegel's argument

for objective idealism in the first part of the *Phenomenology*: *determinateness* requires a kind of *holism*, and that holism is intelligible only on the hypothesis of objective *idealism.*

Here is one way to think systematically about holistically individuated *roles* that items play with respect to a set of relations: Start with some already identified and individuated *signs*, say proposition letters. These are things we can immediately *distinguish*, that is, noninferentially discriminate or tell apart. But initially, we assume nothing about their content. That they are discriminably different is enough.[35] Next, we look at relations among them. As an example, consider the relation two sign kinds *p* and *q* stand in if in some community, tokening both of them is subjected to a distinctive sanction.[36]

One can then define the *roles* played by signs with respect to that relation—for instance, by associating with each sentence letter the set of sentence letters that stand in the first, practical-incompatibility, relation to it. We can think of such a set of incompatible sentence letters as a kind of incompatibility *content* that is *expressed by* the sentence letter it is associated with. And then we can define *new* relations on these roles or contents that are induced naturally by the relations on the signs they comprise. For instance, content-incompatibility relations among the roles will shadow practical incompatibility among the underlying signs. But we can also define *entailment* relations among the contents, by $\underline{p}$ (the content expressed by '*p'*) entails $\underline{q}$ just in case $\underline{q}$ is a subset of $\underline{p}$.

Roles defined this way are *abstracted* from the underlying signs in a way somewhat

analogous to orthodox mathematical abstraction by the formation of equivalence classes.[37] Such abstract roles are identified and individuated entirely by relations. If we squint just enough not to distinguish the two levels of relations (the latter definable entirely in terms of the former), then the roles would appear to be identified and individuated wholly by the relations *they themselves* stand in to *each other*. That is the paradoxical formulation of strong holism. But if we do keep track of the (somewhat subtle) distinction of levels, we see that there need be nothing paradoxical about defining an abstract relational structure of roles by such a three phase process. However, the *only* way to pick out the roles and their relations is by engaging in the process that proceeds through the recognition of the signs and their relations at the lower level. This is a sense dependence relation: what it is to be an incompatibility role (at the second level) is defined in terms of relations on signs (at the first level). The symmetric sense dependence at the second level depends on the asymmetric sense dependence of the second level on the first.

IX. Traversing the Moments: Dialectical Understanding

Here is where I think the two-level model of holistic role formation can help in understanding Hegel:

> 18) **The process of grasping or understanding holistically identified and individuated items is what Hegel calls "*traversing the moments*."** [38]

Because of the holistic character of the conceptually articulated objective determinate contents it must grasp in order to know the world as it is, consciousness must be

posited in a two-fold manner: once as the restless movement [Bewegung] to and
fro through all its moments [welches alle seine Momente durchläuft], aware in
them of an otherness which is superseded in its own act of grasping it; and again,
rather as the *tranquil unity* certain of its truth.[39]

Understanding objective idealism requires understanding the relation between the

"restless *movement* to and fro through all the moments" on the subjective side, and the

content on the objective side that is grasped thereby.

In essence, the object is the same as the movement: the movement is the
unfolding and differentiation of the two moments, and the object is the
apprehended togetherness of the moments.[40]

What, then, are the "moments" of the holistic structure, articulated by objective, modally

robust relations of exclusion and (so) inclusion, which Hegel thinks we must "traverse" in

order to grasp the world as determinate? And what sort of "movement" is it that we are

to perform? What do we need to *do* in order to count as "traversing the moments"?

Almost everything Hegel wrote is structured by some version of this conceptual

progression. In his hands, the basic thought is a flexible one, which he adapts to many

disparate topics and circumstances. So it is not easy to come up with a formula that will

do justice to them all. But the basic outlines of the thought are not hard to discern. We

start with two "moments" or aspects that can be abstracted from a determinately

contentful thought or way the world could be. These are variously characterized: identity

and difference, immediacy and mediation, being-for-self and being-for-others.[41]

Traversing the moments is how one understands the relations between these concepts and

that of determinateness according to the metaconcept of <u>*Vernunft*</u>. Thinking that one can

first understand the logical notions of, say, <u>identity</u> and <u>difference</u>, and *then* somehow put

them together to get an adequate conception of <u>determinateness</u> is how one understands

the relations between these concepts and that of determinateness according to the

ultimately unsatisfactory and unworkable metaconcept of *Verstand*. "Running through"

the two moments yields three stages, one corresponding to each moment, and the third to

the distinctive way of understanding their combination and relation that is the goal and

result of the process. What one does at each of those stages is, in Hegel's terminology, to

"posit" [setzen] something determinate *as*, for instance, simply immediate being. Doing

that is understanding it according to the conception of simple identity or being-for-self.

"Positing X as Y" means taking or treating X as Y, understanding or representing X as Y,

applying the concept Y to X, characterizing a referent X as picked out by a sense Y,

specifying an extension X by means of an intension Y.[42]

Hegel envisages an expressively progressive transition from one construal to another of

the objects of knowledge, each of which presupposes those that come before it. It can be

illustrated to begin with by the course of thought we go through in understanding

properties as holistically identified and individuated—the first category in which this

point comes up. We can see our understanding of properties as comprising three stages:

A) First, one grasps the property as *immediately contentful*. It is just the thing it is,

brutely there. To say that one initially understands it as objectively *immediate* is to say

on the objective side that one has an *atomistic* conception of it. One takes it to be

possible for that property to be what it is apart from its relations to other properties.

Thus, on the subjective side, one need not *consider* those relations or those other

properties in order to *judge* that something has the property. The properties in play are

restricted to *sense* universals, that is, to observable properties—those about which one can make judgments that are subjectively *immediate* in the sense of being *noninferentially* elicited in observation. These play the role of the primitively individuated *signs* at the first stage of holistic role abstraction. Thinking about these apart from the subjective incompatibility relations among those commitments is thinking about the objective world they present as itself consisting in observable states of affairs that are objectively immediate in the sense that the things presented in sensation are taken as being what they are apart from any relations among them.

This is a position that is unstable, however. For it does not include a coherent conception of what one grasps as *determinately contentful*. Beginning to make explicit what is implicit in such a conception requires moving to the next stage, by considering the next "moment". That is

B) Next, one sees that the property is determinate only insofar as it *strongly differs* from other properties, excluding them in the sense that it is impossible for one object (at one time) to have two properties that are incompatible in this sense. At this point, one has moved away from considering the property in terms of its *immediate identity* or *unity*, to considering its *relations to, mediation by*, *difference* or *disparity from* other properties. At this stage, relations of subjective incompatibility among the commitments are considered. They present relations of objective incompatibility among the states of affairs represented by the original commitments. Doing this, Hegel says, is moving out (in thought) from the thing (here, property) into its other. Being-for-self has dissolved into being-for-others. The property is now understood exclusively in terms of its relations to, in particular

(given the relations of material incompatibility Hegel has argued articulate

determinateness) its determinate strong *differences from* other properties.

This is the dissolution of the original conception of the identity of properties as

immediate, without yet putting in place any stable successor conception of identity. It,

too, is unstable, because positing the property as—understanding it just in terms of—

mediation, exclusion, relation to others puts the relations in place without yet providing

the conceptual resources to make sense of the relata. This is essentially the position I

gestured at above, as threatening to leave us with no ultimately intelligible conception of

properties (facts, "forces", etc.) as elements in a holistic relational structure articulated by

relations of determinate exclusion. Put slightly differently, the first stage asks us to

understand properties as contentful independently of the relations among them: as each

picked out by senses *in*dependent of one another. The second stage is then a strong

construal of them as *reciprocally sense dependent*. But how are we to make sense of

this? If none of the senses, as it were, start off as determinate, how can distinctions

among them (among what?) make them determinate? The conception of reciprocal sense

dependence threatens to send us around in (infinite!) circles, without making progress on

determining the content of any of the senses we run through. How are we to understand

the whole thing as getting off the ground? The model of holistic role abstraction tells us

exactly how we must combine the first two conceptions (content as immediate and

content as strongly holistic) to yield a third. We must reconceive the things we are

talking about—here properties—in such a way that the immediacies that became first

available are construed as *signs*, expressing a reality articulated by the relations that we

first understood at the second stage. It is relations among these *roles* that can be played

by what is immediate that should ultimately be understood as standing in holistic relations one to another.

C) In the final stage, then, one returns to the determinate content of the property, but now understands its *identity* as essentially *consisting* in its relations of exclusion of or difference from those it contrasts with (as well as its relations of inclusion to those it entails or that entail it). Where before one treated the determinate content as something merely *immediate*, and then as something merely *mediated*, one now grasps it as fully *mediated immediacy*.[43] One sees its being-for-self as consisting in its being-for-others. Thus at this stage we construct the roles and the new relations among them, which are taken to be *expressed by* the immediacies considered in the first stage. The underlying only *theoretically* (that is *inferentially*, i.e. by mediation) accessible *reality* is *expressed by* the observationally (noninferentially, i.e. immediately) accessible *appearance*, which serves as a *sign* of it. These determinately contentful roles are constituted entirely by their relations to one another—but these are the higher-order relations induced by the lower-level relations on the signs (immediacies).

The final stage is a conception of the property as "infinite", as a holistic role with respect to relations of material incompatibility or exclusion, but one to which the immediacy of the sense universals makes an essential contribution. The subjectively immediate commitments acquired noninferentially through sense perception are now understood as presenting an objective world whose immediacy (brute thereness) is merely a *sign*, an appearance *expressing* a richly mediated determinate, and therefore holistic structure.

This is not a picture which has the immediacy as a mere sign for something *else*, a content. That would be a representational, not an expressive model. An immediacy-as-sign is imbued with the content it expresses; it shows up as itself, an immediacy *as* mediated—as it must be to be determinately contentful. The inferential and incompatibility relations that make such immediacies revelatory of *only* inferentially accessible, theoretical features of reality is not a passage *beyond* itself to something else, but only to something *implicit* (in a straightforward inferential sense) in it, in the content it has. This third stage, the holistic "infinite" conception we are ultimately aiming at, is *made* intelligible *only* by the process of arriving at it. For one must *build* the holistic roles in stages, starting with something construed as immediate, and then investigating the mediation implicit in taking it to be determinate.

Here is another of the many passages in which Hegel describes this fundamental process (and I hope by this point in our story he can be heard struggling here to say something that we can now put in somewhat clearer terms):

> The movement of a being that immediately is, consists partly in becoming an other than itself, and thus becoming its own immanent content; partly in taking back into itself this unfolding [of its content] or this existence of it, i.e. in making *itself* into a moment, and simplifying itself into something determinate. In the former movement, *negativity* is the differentiating and positing of *existence*; in this return into self, it is the becoming of the *determinate simplicity*.[44]

This "movement" is what we must rehearse in order to trace the relations that articulate the sort of determinate content Hegel calls "individuality". "Negativity" appears here in its characteristic double guise: on the *objective* side, in the form of *relations* of modally robust material exclusion, and on the *subjective* side as

movement, as the *doing* of something, the *alteration* of commitments that is the grasping and acknowledging of the significance of those relations.[45]

Looking back from the perspective achieved in *Absolute Knowledge*, Hegel sums up in this way the conception we are supposed to have:

> Thus the object is in part *immediate* being, or, in general, a Thing-corresponding [entspricht] to immediate consciousness; in part, an othering of itself, its relationship or *being-for-another*, and *being-for-itself*, i.e. determinateness—corresponding to perception; and in part *essence*, or in the form of a universal—corresponding to the Understanding. It is, as a totality, a syllogism [Schluß] or the movement [Bewegung] of the universal through determination to individuality, as also the reverse movement from individuality through superseded individuality, or through determination, to the universal**. It is, therefore, in accordance with these three determinations that consciousness must know the object as itself** [emphasis added].[46]

This, then, is the framework of Hegel's idealism, providing the context in which are situated both more specific idealist claims I have suggested (concerning the relations between the concepts of <u>singular term</u> and <u>object</u>, of <u>assertion</u> and <u>fact</u>, and <u>counterfactual reasoning</u> and <u>law</u>) and the generic Hegelian reading of objective incompatibility in terms of *experience*: the process of resolving incompatible commitments. The objective world is a holistic relational structure, determinate just insofar as it is articulated by modally robust relations of material incompatibility. Such a conceptual structure is in principle intelligible only by means of a process of traversing the moments: holistic role abstraction ascending from immediacy through mediation to immediacy as expressive of purely mediated contents. The determinateness of the

objective world and the structured process of grasping it are reciprocally sense dependent concepts, each intelligible only in terms of the other. So understood, objective idealism does *not* entail or involve any claims of *reference* dependence—as though our concept using activity were required to *produce*, as opposed to being required to *make intelligible*, the conceptually structured world. The thought that that world is always already there anyway, regardless of the activities, if any, of knowing and acting subjects, has always stood as the most fundamental objection to any sort of idealism. It is a true and important thought; but it is not an objection to Hegel's objective idealism, as here construed.

X.   Conclusion

I have argued:

- that understanding the *objective* world as *determinate* for Hegel entails that it must be understood as a *holistic relational structure*;

- that there is a prima facie problem with the intelligibility of strongly holistic relational structures;

- for the strengthened Harman point, a specific kind of conceptual pragmatism, about construing the relation between objective *relations* and subjective *processes*;

- for an understanding of *idealism* as a *sense* dependence relation of <u>objective determinateness</u> on <u>subjective processes of resolving incompatible commitments</u>; and

- for an understanding of holism also as a *sense* dependence relation.

Hegel's claim is then that **the _only_ way to make <u>holism</u>, and so <u>determinateness,</u> intelligible is objective <u>idealism</u>.**

It then remained only to say what _subjective process_ can make intelligible _objective weakly holistic semantic relational structures_. For that I offer a model: _holistic role abstraction_, beginning with _signs_, and ending with _roles_ played by those signs, or _contents expressed_ by them, thought of in terms of higher order relations among _sets_ of those signs.

So objective idealism—a sense dependence thesis relating the concept of objective holistic relational structures to the concept of a certain kind of subjective process— emerges as a response to conceptual difficulties attendant on the conception of strongly holistic relational structures. Disentangling issues of _sense_ dependence from those of _reference_ dependence shows idealism as a respectable and potentially defensible response to genuine conceptual problems. An unforeseen bonus of this way of approaching things is the provision of a novel (though admittedly telegraphic[47]) account of the _dialectical method_ that structures all Hegel's philosophical accounts. That method responds to the need to understand holistic structures by traversing the moments, by starting with conceptions of what things are immediately or in themselves, then moving to grasp them as what they are mediately or for others, and then to understand what they are _in themselves_ as constituted by what they are _for others_, as _mediated immediacy_. Not only _objective idealism_, but Hegel's distinctively structured dialectical _process of understanding_ emerge as required to understand the (weakly) _holistic_ relational structures that Hegel takes to be implicit in the notion of a world that is _determinately_ one way

rather than another. Situating a central strand of Hegel's idealism[48] in this structure, it

seems to me, sheds light both on his thought and on the issues he thought about.[49]

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[1] By way of warning, if not preparation, for those who may not have read the fuller

discussion of this issue in Chapter Three, I should say that it is a *de re* reading of the

relevant portions of the text, not a *de dicto* one. As I use and develop these notions in

Making It Explicit, these are two styles in which one can specify the contents of the very

same claims. By "content" I understand broadly inferential role. Grasping a content is,

to a first approximation, knowing what follows from it, what is incompatible with it, and

what would be evidence for it. But now an issue arises concerning the source of the

auxiliary hypotheses one conjoins with it in order to extract those inferential

consequences. Presenting the content in the *de dicto* way requires restricting oneself to

appeal only to other collateral commitments specified in terms that one takes it the one to

whom one attributes the claim in question would also acknowledge commitment.

Presenting the content in the *de re* way relaxes this restriction, and permits the

employment of auxiliary hypotheses the interpreter takes to be *true*, whether or not the

target of the ascription knows or believes them. At several crucial junctures in my story,

I will help myself to moves that Hegel does *not* explicitly make, but which *I* endorse as

correct and important insights, in characterizing the thought that Hegel is expressing. (As

an alternative model of this procedure, one might think of domain extension in

mathematics. Often an important pattern involving one domain of objects-say, the

distribution of roots of polynomial equations with coefficients in the real numbers-only

becomes apparent when one considers them as a subset of a wider domain, for instance,

the complex numbers. Only the perspective of the extended structure lets us see what is

already true of the more restricted one.) In the present case, I will signal explicitly when I am importing something into the Hegelian story to make the underlying rationale I discern more visible.

[2]   All citations from the *Phenomenology* are paragraph numbers from A.V. Miller's Oxford University Press translation, hereafter cited as *M*. Cf. [M114], quoted below (note 4).

[3]   He can then reject the merely formal principle in the sense that he does not take it to be an adequate expression of the crucial relation of *determinate* negation.

[4] [M114].

[5] [M120].

[6] As can universality, though that is another story. Cf. *Science of Logic* [A.V. Miller, trans. Humanities Press International, 1990, hereafter, *SL*] "…universality is a *form* assumed by the difference, and the determinateness is the *content*. [SL608]

[7]   Note that I will only try to sketch one part of this story. An account of how representational relations can be understood in terms of relations among graspable senses, of how the concept of <u>noumena</u> arises out of relations among *phenomena*, is a story for another occasion.

[8]   But the thought is, of course, pervasive in Hegel's writings. Thus for instance "Immediacy in general proceeds only from mediation, and must therefore pass over into mediation. Or, in other words, the determinateness of the content contained in the definition, because it is determinateness, is not merely an immediate, but is mediated by its opposite; consequently definition can apprehend its subject matter only through the opposite determination and must therefore pass into *division*." [SL800]

[9] [M113].

[10] See the discussion of this point in "Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel's Idealism" [*European Journal of Philosophy*, August 1999].

[11] (Cf. §42Z of the Encyclopedia.) Worse, Hegel insists that we cannot help ourselves to the category <u>object</u> in defining properties, since the categories <u>object</u> and <u>property</u> themselves stand in a symmetric holistic relation, each in principle intelligible only in terms of the other.

[12] [M141].

[13] [M 163].

[14] [M161].

[15] [M161].

[16] [M161].

[17] [M168].

[18] [M161].

[19] [M162].

[20] [M111].

[21] [M164].

[22] [M 134].

[23] "Logic and Reasoning," *Synthese*. 1984; **60**, pp. 107-128.

[24] To begin with, grounded ones.

[25] This fact is sometimes obscured for those reading the *Phenomenology* in English translation, since "syllogism", unlike "Schluß", doesn't have a naturally associated verb

form. In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel often explicitly uses the phrase "Verlauf der

Schlüsse" [e.g. at WL II 597].

[26]   As Hegel says at. Encyclopedia § 555: "The subjective consciousness of the absolute

spirit is essentially and intrinsically a process…"

[27] This relation should be understood as symmetrical and reciprocal: one also does not

understand the idea of purportedly representational commitments, and so

incompatibility$_{subj}$, unless one also understands the idea of a determinate world whose

determinateness means that it can be other than as it is represented. This is an idea

articulated by relations of incompatibility$_{obj}$.

[28]   This might be called 'coarse' reference dependence, which claims only that if one

property is instantiated somewhere in a world, the other is instantiated in that same world.

'Fine' reference dependence would then claim that if some object instantiates the one

property, *that same object* instantiates the other. teacher and student are (given some

straightforward stipulations) related in the first way, while square and rectangle are

related in the second.

[29] Since hammers are meant to be used to do many things besides driving nails, the

relationship would not be reciprocal in this case.

[30]   I'm not sure whether Heidegger was confused on this point in Division One of *Being*

and Time, but certainly some of the commentators on the "equipmental involvements"

that structure Zuhandensein have failed clearly to distinguish the two claims I am calling

"sense dependence" and "reference dependence".

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[31]   Though both of these structures are eventually aufgehoben in favor of something even more holistic, the 'infinite' holistic incompatibility relational structure of the end of *Consciousness*, and situated, embodied communities, by the end of *Reason*.

[32] I have defended the first two explicitly in *Making It Explicit*, and also there set out some of the raw materials that would need to be assembled to back up the third, Sellarsian claim.

[33]   Of course, those who are sufficiently impressed by Sellars' analysis of the relation between **looks-red** and **is-red**, in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," will not be much tempted by such an account. But a more sophisticated analysis of secondary quality concepts is available to them. I discuss one in "Non-inferential Knowledge, Perceptual Experience, and Secondary Qualities: Placing McDowell's Empiricism," forthcoming.

[34]   [M157-160].

[35]   Doing this need not be assuming that the notion of immediate difference is autonomously intelligible. There will always be some actual content to the difference: the sign designs exhibit incompatible shapes, for instance. But we can abstract from that content and employ in our reasoning only some of its consequences: the mere difference of the signs. As Hegel says in the Encyclopedia Logic [§ 115]: "Abstraction is…the transformation of something inherently concrete into this form of elementary simplicity. And this may be done in two ways. Either we may neglect a part of the multiple features which are found in the concrete thing (by what is called analysis) and select only one of them; or, neglecting their variety, we may concentrate the multiple character into one."

[36] The sanction might be being (counted as being) *obliged* to *do* something that one would not otherwise be obliged to do--for instance, to alter the conditions under which one is disposed to produce tokenings of other signs in the domain in systematically (systematizably) constrained ways. In this example, the relations are generically socially instituted normative relations of relative practical incompatibility of act kinds. But this is *just* an example (though not chosen at random).

[37] Abstraction in the usual sense requires an equivalence relation on the underlying domain, while the variety considered here relies on an *non*reflexive, *non*transitive relation. (Indeed, it need not even be considered as symmetric, though Hegel seems to treat determinate negation as symmetric.)

[38] "Traversing" is Miller's translation of "durchlaufen"—literally, running or walking through. See for instance [M47], where Hegel says that the topic of philosophy is "existence within its own Notion. It is, and this whole movement constitutes what is positive *the process which begets and traverses its own moments* [in it] and its truth." (Emphasis added.)

[39] [M237].

[40] [M111].

[41] "Force is the unconditioned universal which is equally in its own self what it is *for another*; or which contains the difference in its own self—for difference is nothing else than being-*for-another*." [M136] "Being for another" is Hegel's way of talking about *relations*—in the case that matters, relations of strong exclusion.

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[42] Hegel sometimes—I think, less happily—talks about the situation in which one posits, say, properties now as immediate and again as mediated, as one in which the same *content* (a determinate property) shows up in two different *forms*.

[43] "In the consummation of the syllogism…where objective universality is no less posited as totality of the form determinations, the distinction of mediating and mediated has disappeared. That which is mediated is itself an essential moment of what mediates it, and each moment appears as the totality of what is mediated." [*Science of Logic* 703]

[44] [M53].

[45] Here, as often, he talks about this movement as something that *happens*, rather than something we *do*. But that is just a way of emphasizing that all we are doing in moving this way is bringing out into the explicit light of day what is implicit in each conception we entertain. The path of the movement required to understand them is accordingly determined by the holistic, relational nature of the conceptual contents we are grasping.

[46] [M789].

[47] Particularly noticeably by its absence in this sketch is an account of how the subject's engaging in the process of revising the commitments it finds itself with in response to their material incompatibilities underwrites understanding them as presenting (representing, being about, answering for their correctness to) a world articulated by objective relations of material incompatibility. Hegel begins to tell such a story in the *Introduction* to the *Phenomenology*. It is an account of how the representational dimension of concept use emerges from the process of rectifying one's commitments, about how concern with *reference* emerges from concern with *sense* and the sorts of sense dependence considered here. I tell that story elsewhere.

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[48] Another strand is what I call "conceptual" idealism. I understand *absolute* idealism as roughly the product of objective and conceptual idealism. Conceptual idealism is the sort discussed in my essay "Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel's Idealism", under the slogan "The structure and unity of the concept is the same as the structure and unity of the self-conscious self." From the point of view of the current essay, it is what one gets by applying the strengthened Harman point one more time, and construing subjective processes and objective relations, not as standing to each other as elements in a relational structure, but as aspects of a process. This is construing how things stand between objective relations and subjective processes, as modeled on the processes of subjects, rather than the relations of objects. It is within *this* process that the "for others" of the second stage comes to encompass relations between the objective and the subjective. But that is another story.

[49] I am grateful to John McDowell for helping me to separate out distinct threads in this argument and to see just how to characterize the view I am attempting to reconstruct and attribute to Hegel.