

INFINITE JUDGEMENTS AND TRANSCENDENTAL LOGIC¹

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ABSTRACT: The infinite judgement has long been forgotten and yet, as I am about to demonstrate, it may be urgent to revive it for its critical and productive potential. An infinite judgement is neither analytic nor synthetic; it does not produce logical truths, nor true representations, but it establishes the genetic conditions of real objects and the concepts appropriate to them. It is through infinite judgements that we reach the principle of transcendental logic, in the depths of which all reality can emerge in its material and sensible singularity, making possible all generalization and formal abstraction.

KEYWORDS: Hegel; Kant; Deleuze; Maimon; Maimonides; Dialectics

The infinite judgement has long been forgotten and yet, as I am about to demonstrate, it may be urgent to revive it for its critical and productive potential. An infinite judgement is neither analytic nor synthetic; it does not produce logical truths, nor true representations, but it establishes the genetic conditions of real objects and the concepts appropriate to them. It is through infinite judgements that we reach the principle of transcendental logic, in the depths of which all reality can emerge in its material and sensible singularity, making possible all generalization and formal abstraction. I will begin with a short historical introduction to infinite judgement that will allow us to understand the central role of Kant and, above all, the post-Kantians Salomon Maimon and Johann G.

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Fichte. I will subsequently explain how Hegel finds himself forced to reduce this judgement to non-sense in order to render formal logic an organon and make accessing the absolute possible. To conclude, I will demonstrate how Gilles Deleuze returns to the infinite judgement and transcendental logic to refuse the Hegelian dialectic, which reveals his political position to be aligned with the necessity of thinking an alternative to the formalism that dominates the present.

One of the first accounts of the operation that would come to be called ‘infinite judgement’ can be found in *On Interpretation*,² where Aristotle catalogues the parts of speech, recognizing that expressions like ‘not-man’ or ‘not-healthy’ cannot be reduced to negations.³ In fact, a negation such as “Socrates is not a man,” signifies that the subject is deprived of the predicate, whereas if we say “Socrates is a not-man” we affirm something undefined about the subject. According to Aristotle, expressions such as not-man are indefinite names: “‘not-man’ is not a name, nor is there any correct name for it. It is neither a phrase nor a negation. Let us call it an indefinite name [*onoma aoriston*].”⁴ The expression ‘not-man’ indicates the opening of the subject to infinite predicates with the exception of those relating to man.

The medieval philosophers would make extensive use of these indefinite nouns. For a complete catalogue, we turn to the exhaustive work of Daniel Heller-Roazen.⁵ I limit myself here to signaling the use made by Moïse Maïmonide in *The Guide for the Perplexed*,⁶ which would extend a certain influence over Kant and Salomon Maïmon. A philosopher and rabbi of the eleventh century, Maïmonide used the indefinite noun to indicate divine attributes, knowing that, on the one hand, one could not suggest that God was characterized by the same qualities that defined His creatures and that, on the other hand, one could not think of Him as deficient, because a perfect being cannot lack anything. Thus, the solution

² Aristotle, “De interpretation,” trans. J.L. Ackrill in *Aristotle, The Complete Works: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984, vol. 1,

³ Translators’ note: In Longo’s original French, infinite judgements are typically expressed with the predicate ‘non-,’ e.g. ‘non-sage,’ ‘non-homme.’ Following the precedent established by Ackrill and other translators of Aristotle, we have chosen to render these compound modifiers with the predicate ‘not-.’

⁴ *Ibid.*, §2, 6a30-16a31, p. 3.

⁵ Daniel Heller-Roazen, *No One’s Ways: An Essay on Infinite Naming*, New York, Zone Books, 2017.

⁶ Maïmonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1963.

was to consider the attributes of God and the attributes of finite beings as ambiguous homonyms, which is to say that divine qualities and human qualities share the same definition but are expressed differently. It follows, for example, that a man may be wise, that a man may not be wise, but the Creator is not-wise: this signifies that a finite being can be characterized by the attribute of wisdom, he can be deficient of it, whereas the infinite being possesses wisdom in a completely different way than men. That God is not-wise means that God is wise in a way that we cannot understand. The infinite being is not-wise, not-living, not-powerful, etc., and this means that He is the origin of these qualities which we find in reality, rather than to signify that these apply to Him. Kant would remember these reflections when he discussed the idea of the *ens realissimum* as the basis of all real determination.

INFINITE JUDGEMENT AND KANT

Kant applies the concept of infinite judgement in “Transcendental Dialectics”⁷ when he considers the complete determination of any possible object. Here it is not a question of logical determination, which is to say relying on the principle of non-contradiction to establish that the negation of a predicate implies the affirmation of its opposite, but of transcendental determination, which concerns the matter or the content of the judgement. To explain it simply, when we say, “the apple is red” we affirm that the subject possesses a certain quality; when we say, “the apple is not red” we maintain that the subject is lacking that quality. There exists a certain number of possible predicates to characterize the apple—for example, “the apple is green,” “the apple is sweet,” “the apple is ripe”—that can also be negated; for example, “the apple is not green,” “the apple is not ripe,” “the apple is not sweet.” Yet the sum of all the qualities that could characterize the apple, without being present all at the same time (if the apple is currently red it is not green, but it may have been green in the past), constitute the apple’s “complete determination,” which is to say the sum of its possible determinations, of the predicates which one could ascribe to it in judgement. This implies that there are also some impossible judgements, for example, “the apple is straight,” “the apple is not straight,” “the apple is depressed,” “the apple is not depressed.”

⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allan Wood, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

To explain why only certain attributes can be applied to an object in valid syntheses, it is necessary to consider the apple from a material perspective, which is to say as the sum of its possible qualities. Yet the sum of the apple's possible determinations does not correspond to the sum of possible qualities, for example, of the table or of Socrates. In particular, the apple can in no case be straight, nor a bipedal, feathered animal: the apple is therefore not-straight, not-bipedal, and this does not mean that it is lacking the qualities that could characterize it in a different moment, but that these qualities could never apply to it. The reality of the apple, as the sum of possible determinations, is thus opposed to the reality of objects which are straight, bipedal, or feathered. The proposition "the apple is not-bipedal" makes sense in terms of transcendental logic, and this means that the predicate is not part of the complete determination of the apple. Therefore, the main objective for Kant is to find the basis that legitimizes judgements with respect to content, which is to say from the perspective of transcendental logic. This basis is the totality of reality; i.e., the sum of all possible qualities, with regards to each particular being, is a limitation: the reality of the apple is the set of determinations that we can ascribe to its particular reality as opposed to the reality of the table; the latter determinations constitute what we could, at first glance, consider another subset of total reality.

In this framework, Kant explains that "logical negation, which is indicated solely by the little word 'not,' is never properly attached to a concept, but rather to its relation to it in a judgement, and therefore it is far from sufficient to designate a concept in regard to its contents."⁸ Therefore in saying 'not-mortal,' we don't suppose to characterize any particular being but, quite simply, to indicate the sphere of beings that are not mortal. Considered from the transcendental point of view, negation does not indicate the privations of a predicate (in this case mortality), but affirms, in a positive manner, the totality of the not-mortal being:

A transcendental negation on the contrary, signifies non-being itself, and is opposed to transcendental affirmation, which is something, the concept of which in itself already expresses a being, and hence is called reality (thinghood), because through it alone, and only so far as it reaches, are objects Something (things).⁹

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 555.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 555.

Thus, in transcendental logic, the negation (not-) is an infinite judgement that, in affirming the reality of a sphere of being that does not fall within a given concept, establishes, in some way, the possibility of formal negation. In transcendental logic, the ‘not-’ affirms, in a positive manner, the reality of all that is not included within the predicate, for example, the reality of all not-mortal beings. In a certain manner, “X is not-mortal” does not indicate just that X is not mortal and that X is eternal, but it affirms the existence of a not-mortal reality to which subject X belongs. Consequently, transcendental negation indicates the infinite matter that extends beyond the limits of the matter particular to a given concept: “All true negations are then nothing but limits.”¹⁰ Finite logical determination thus finds its basis in the Idea of an infinite reality with respect to which each determination is a limitation. Likewise, we can consider each logical judgement as the basis of a disjunctive syllogism that implies the Idea of the totality of all the possible predicates against which each determined thing should be compared: the complete knowledge of an object thus returns to the conception of its own limits—that is, as cut off from the totality of reality from which it is excluded. To revisit our example, the logical judgement “X is not mortal” finds its basis in the existence of a reality consisting of mortal and not-mortal beings and affirms the membership of the object to one of the two sets. From that point on, “The thoroughgoing determination of every thing rests on the limitation of this All of reality, constituted by reality, in that some of it is ascribed to the thing and the rest excluded from it.”¹¹ Kant tells us that the Idea of this reality foundation, as the totality of possible determination, corresponds to the *ens realissimum*, God as supreme reality. It is, however, an Idea rather than something existing, “a fiction,”¹² the ideal is, in this sense, the totality from whence each thing draws its possibility. However, Kant explains that the *ens realissimum* must not be considered a set, but rather as the foundation of the determination of limited beings, thus “The derivation of all other possibility from this original being, strictly speaking, also cannot be regarded as a limitation of its highest reality and as a division, as it were, of it (...) Rather the highest reality would

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 555.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 556.

¹² *Ibidem.*

ground the possibility of all things as a ground and not a sum total; and the manifoldness of the former rests not on the limitation of the original being itself, but on its complete consequences.”¹³ From this point of view, infinite judgement does not exactly correspond to a limitation in a set made up of parts, “even though we represented it in such a way at the beginning in our first crude outline,”¹⁴ but to the seizure of this foundation which is both the limit of the real condition of all determination or knowledge of objects. Kant seems here to indicate a genetic perspective according to which the determination of real objects follows from an infinite, indeterminate being, which we could define as the not-being that is the source of the finite being of real entities. We could say that the *ens realissimum*, which, for Kant, is an Idea of reason rather than an existing God, is not-wise, not-living, not-powerful, and that, on the other hand, it is necessary to think of it as the *raison d'être* of reality which we can determine to be wise, to be living, or to be powerful. Infinite judgement is not just an indefinite noun, as it was for Aristotle, it does not refer, quite simply, to the opening of infinite predication (complete determination), but is a true judgement in the framework of transcendental logic that indicates the condition of existence of real objects, the genetic principle of all determined reality, or the infinite determinable which founds the possibility of all determined reality.

IDEAS ARE THE DIFFERENTIALS OF THOUGHT

Familiar with the philosophy of Maimonide and Kant, Salomon Maimon affirms the priority of transcendental logic by asserting that it is the true foundation of general logic. This assertion is necessary if we wish to insure critical philosophy against the attacks of skeptics like Gottlob Ernst Schulze,¹⁵ maintaining that finite

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 557.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ *Aenesidemus* is a German book published anonymously by Professor Gottlob Ernst Schulze of Helmstedt in 1792. Schulze attempted to refute the principles that Karl Leonhard Reinhold established in support of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). The title is a reference to Aenesidemus, an ancient Greek skeptic philosopher. Its complete title, in English translation, is *Aenesidemus or Concerning the Foundations of the Philosophy of the Elements Issued by Professor Reinhold in Jena Together with a Defense of Skepticism against the Pretensions of the Critique of Reason* (German: *Aenesidemus oder über die Fundamente der von dem Herrn Professor Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementar-Philosophie. Nebst einer Vertheidigung des Skepticismus gegen die Anmassungen der Vernunftkritik*).

knowledge cannot know itself without contradicting itself. In other words, for Maïmon, it is a question of explaining why certain concepts, rather than others which could produce a different representation, should be used. The fact that everyone agrees on particular formal conditions does not imply that they are necessary and that others are therefore to be excluded. Maïmon therefore attempts to respond to the question *quid juris?* [*which law?*] with respect to the usage of formal concepts and his strategy consists of showing the rules which force the imagination to determine itself in accordance with the real. In this way, we do not marvel at the fact that a given concept should be adapted to the matter which subsumes it, but it suffices merely to recognize the ideal reasons that oblige the faculties to construct objects in a certain manner. Maïmon proposes geometric examples: the knowledge that we have of a circle is perfect, since the figure is built, independently of empirical data, following an ideal rule according to which the circle is the figure produced by drawing, from a single point, infinite equal lines in all directions. Although the imagination cannot draw an infinite number of lines, it uses an efficient rule of construction; it rotates a segment around a vertex and thus obtains the image of a circle that we can perfectly understand according to its internal connections, for example the link between the diameter and the circumference. The knowledge that we have of a circle is thus justified by the rules of construction for the object given by the Idea: here, we are not applying concepts in a heterogeneous matter, but noting internal connections within an object that we construct in a manner conforming to rules of thought. Now, according to Maïmon, it should be shown that, for any perceptible object, the ideal rules of construction justify the usage of concepts, i.e., the recognition of certain internal connections within the object and between different objects. Therefore, we would explain why an apple can be red or sweet but cannot be straight (it is not-straight) by demonstrating that the qualities that one is supposed to predicate depend, in fact, on the ideal rules of construction of the object.

For Maïmon, it was thus a question of ensuring the validity of concepts *a priori* if knowledge limits itself to what is represented in these judgements. Thus, picking up the philosophy of Leibniz, he maintains that the imagination constructs its objects via an operation of integration based on an ideal differential ratio. In mathematics, differentials are tangential equations of the curve which describe the behavior of the sought function through the operation of integration. As such, a determined object in consciousness would be constructed by a similar integral operation of infinitely minute impressions, the synthesis of which is based on the

ratio dx/dy , which constitutes the rule of internal determination. Now, differentials do not solely determine the construction of objects but also the relations between objects; that is, differentials prescribe the application of categories. As Maïmon explains: “Sensibility thus provides the differentials to a determined consciousness; out of them, the imagination produces a finite (determined) object of intuition; out of the relations of these different differentials, which are its objects, the understanding produces the relation of the sensible objects arising from them.”¹⁶ Maïmon therefore takes up the Leibnizian metaphysics of calculation, adapting it to critical philosophy and considering differential ratios as Ideas; “they are mere limit concepts [*Gränzbegriffe*], which we can approach nearer and nearer to, but never reach,”¹⁷ so “these differentials of objects are the so-called noumena; but the objects themselves arising from them are the phenomena.”¹⁸ Ideas are the unknowable conditions of knowledge, in other words, the infinitesimal relations that determine the construction of phenomena in consciousness. In this way, Maïmon strives to legitimize synthetic judgements *a priori* without contradicting critical philosophy and the limits it imposes on knowledge. Considered as differential ratios, noumena are not that which lies beyond the limits of representation, they are not the dogmatic ‘cause’ of empirical data, but rather the degree zero of representation. Therefore, for Maïmon, noumena are not ‘the other’ in relation to phenomena, but are the originary limit of all phenomenal consciousness, the ratio dx/dy approaching zero. We could say that Ideas, as the genetic limit of representation, constitute the true *a priori* of knowledge, an *a priori* that is the condition of real experience, i.e., the designation of a perceptible matter containing the rules of synthesis in consciousness rather than possible experience. This produces a synthesis which operates according to standards specific to a preconstituted consciousness. According to Maïmon, “the understanding does not subject something given *a posteriori* to its *a priori* rules; rather it lets it arise in accordance with these rules”¹⁹; these rules, through which perceptible data is produced, are the ideal differential

¹⁶ Salomon Maïmon, *Essay on Transcendental Philosophy*, trans. Merten Reglitz, ed. Nick Midgley, Henry Somers-Hall, Alistair Welchman and Merten Reglitz, London, Continuum 2010, p. 21.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, footnote I, p. 21.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

ratios.

Now, we have access to some of these ideal ratios, like the principles of mathematics or geometric entities, which is obvious since we build geometric figures intuitively without needing any perceptual information to be provided: we build mathematic beings in our imagination by allowing them to form from the internal ratios of determination that we know and, for that reason, a perfect knowledge of these entities is, for us, accessible. However, since our understanding is limited, we do not have access to differentials for the production of matter corresponding to perceptible things, which are available only to an infinite understanding. Maimon thus considers himself obliged to assume the fiction of infinite intellect, for which perceptible objects are built completely *a priori* like mathematical objects, in order to justify the synthesis of given impressions operating in finite consciousness. He presumes that Ideas corresponding to perceptible objects, that is, the differential rules of their construction, are only accessible to the infinite mind, which recognizes each object as completely determined, while our finite understanding represents them through an imperfect, or incomplete, synthesis of imagination. Therefore, to legitimize this imaginary synthesis, it is imperative that:

We assume an infinite understanding (at least as an idea), for which the forms are at the same time objects of thought, I or that produces out of itself all possible kinds of connections and relations of things (the ideas). Our understanding is just the same, only in a limited way.²⁰

This implies, in part, that the finite knowledge at our disposal can only be justified by the hypothesis of an infinite knowledge, but also that infinite knowledge is not other than ours; it is a question rather of limitation, of the unconscious, of degree zero. In this sense, we could say that infinite understanding is not beyond finite understanding, but rather like a non-thought in relation to thought, which, naturally, does not signify a relation of opposition or negation. Thus, infinite understanding could be indicated by an infinite judgement like the limit, in the mathematical sense, of finite understanding. The relationship between infinite understanding and finite understanding could be exemplified by the ratio of a circle and an inscribed polygon: the latter tends

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

towards the identity of the former (as the number of sides approaches infinity). It is important to note that infinite judgement here expresses a relation of non-identity; the circle and the polygon are not identical but neither do they share a relationship of contradiction or exclusion: they are identical at infinity or they are not-identical. Here, we are not considering the logical relation between finite understanding and infinite understanding, which could be explained thus: given “finite understanding is infinite understanding,” or “finite understanding is not infinite understanding”; we are not dealing with the relationship between two concepts, but rather the relation between the determinable and the determined from the material or transcendental logical point of view. The determinable, as the condition of all determination (which for Kant was the *ens realissimum*), is not-identical to the determined. Similarly, attributes of God are not-identical to the attributes of creatures without there being a logical negation at play. Infinite judgement therefore explains the genetic relationship between the determinable and the determined, given their non-identity or their identity at infinity. We will now see how this relationship of non-identity, explained by infinite judgement, plays a fundamental role in Fichte’s philosophy.

FICHTE’S SCIENCE OF KNOWLEDGE AS TREATY OF TRANSCENDENTAL LOGIC

We know that Fichte was one of the rare contemporaries of Maïmon to have appreciated his philosophy and, we could say, to have developed it in the spirit of Kantianism to ensure that finite knowledge would rest on a solid foundation. It seems that at least two of Maïmon’s intuitions were fundamental to *The Science of Knowledge*²¹ (1794): (1) that transcendental science should constitute the basis of general logic according to a genetic perspective; (2) that the science of knowledge can justify the knowledge of a finite subject only in relation to the ideal of an absolute understanding, source, or immanent condition of all determined knowledge. In this respect, we will see that the first part of *The Science of Knowledge*²² concerns the principles of transcendental logic and that it is within this context that infinite judgement, which Fichte calls ‘thetic,’ assumes the function

²¹ J.G. Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, trans Peter Heat and John Lachs, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1982.

²² *Ibid.*

of addressing the principle capable of legitimizing our limited knowledge without allowing us to exceed the limits of our constitutive finitude. “Our task is to discover the primordial, absolutely unconditioned first principle of all human knowledge. This can be neither proved nor defined, if it is to be an absolutely primary principle.”²³ Thus begins 1794’s *The Science of Knowledge*. Now, the sought principle is not the identity principle of general logic, $A=A$, which is assured. Nonetheless, as Fichte writes, “with respect to A itself we have thereby said nothing, as yet, as to whether it exists or not,”²⁴ only that “the X that is absolutely posited can also be expressed as $I=I$; I am.”²⁵ This is the principle of transcendental logic, which has a totally different meaning than the logical identity $A=A$: the latter concerns an identity, i.e., it establishes the concept A to be equal to itself, while the principle of transcendental logic concerns the identity of the act of posing a reality and that very reality. As Fichte explains, in the formulation $I = I$:

The proposition 'I am I' has a meaning wholly different from that of 'A is A.' For the latter has content only under a certain condition. A is posited, it is naturally posited as A, as having the predicate A. But this proposition still tells us nothing as to whether it actually is posited, and hence whether it is posited with any particular predicate. Yet the proposition 'I am I' is unconditionally and absolutely valid; it is valid not merely in form but also in content. In it the I is posited, not conditionally, but absolutely, with the predicate of equivalence to itself; hence it really is posited, and the proposition can also be expressed as I am.²⁶

In this way, according to the principle of transcendental logic, “the self exists because it has posited itself”²⁷; what is affirmed is its existence, its reality, composed through the pure act of posing what makes the Self “at once the agent and the product of action; the active, and what the activity brings about; action and deed are one and the same.”²⁸ This act constitutes “the unconditional principle of human consciousness” beyond which it is impossible to venture, since it involves the material institution of all possible determination. Now, it is in

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 98.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 97.

relation to this content posed as absolutely existing (existing through itself) that it is possible to establish logical identity. Logical identity is “Demonstrated, in that A is A, because the self that has posited A is identical with that in which A has been posited; determined, in that everything that exists does so only insofar as it is posited in the self, and apart from the self there is nothing. No possible A in the above proposition (nothing) can be anything other than something posited in the self.”²⁹ The principle of transcendental logic thus institutes, through an absolute act, the totality of possible reality that constitutes the basis of determined logical judgements. With regards to Kant, then, the totality of reality is not the Idea of the *ens realissimum*, but the absolute I that limits itself in a free act by defining itself as a finite I (the knowing subject). This absolute I, as a totality, is not an infinite understanding, for which all conceptual relations are immediately real, but the I itself where we consider it as the subject of the act by which it is posited as determined, as existing, or as reality. The *Science of Knowledge* therefore begins by introducing the first principle of transcendental logic, the not-identity of absolute Self (that which posits) and of finite Self (that which is posited).

The second principle of transcendental logic is real opposition, which establishes the second principle of general logic, that is, the contradiction *A is not -A*. This second principle of transcendental logic, which should not be confused with logical negation (the concept Maimon emphasized), establishes that we cannot posit A without positing, at the same time, not-A: the opposition consists of positing a not-Self that is necessarily opposed to the Self. The not-Self therefore does not lack reality in relation to the Self; on the contrary, it is reality itself which is opposed to the reality of the Self. Here the ‘not-’ of the not-Self is an infinite judgement in the Kantian sense, because it affirms the reality of all that the Self is not. Moreover, for Kant, the principle of opposition in transcendental logic is the basis of logical negation: “By abstraction from the content of the material proposition I am, we obtained the purely formal and logical proposition 'A=A.' By a similar abstraction from the assertions set forth in the preceding paragraphs, we obtain the logical proposition -A, 'A is not equal to A,' which I should like to call the principle of opposition.”³⁰

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

The third principle of transcendental logic establishes the logical principle of exclusive tiers, relating to the principle of limitation. The latter has the function of resolving the contradiction implicit within the second principle since, in effect, the Self and the not-Self, as real opposites, do not seem to be simultaneously posited in the Ego without contradiction, in other words, “the opposed self and not-self are to be unified thereby, to be posited together, without mutual elimination.”³¹ The solution to the problem consists in thinking the Self and the not-Self as opposed via reciprocal limitation, that is to say, as sharing the reality of the absolute Self. To this end, it is necessary to consider that to limit something doesn’t mean to suppress all of its reality, but only a part. Consequently, the absolute Self should be considered as divisible: “To limit something is to abolish its reality, not wholly but in part only, by negation. Thus, apart from reality and negation, the notion of a limit also contains that of divisibility.”³² According to the third principle, the Self and the not-Self are posited as sharing the totality of reality; “only now, in virtue of the concept thus established, can it be said of both that they are something.”³³ In fact, “The absolute self of the first principle is not something (it has, and can have, no predicate); it is simply what it is, and this can be explained no further,”³⁴ and it is a limitation that confers upon it a real, determined existence. The absolute Self, divisible before any limitation, is defined by Fichte as if it were not something, as a non-being, a non-existent that constitutes the experiential condition of determined things, that is, the Self and the not-Self which, in sharing indeterminate reality (not-something), are reciprocally determined. In short:

The self is to be equated with, and yet opposed to, itself. But in regard to consciousness it is equal to itself, for consciousness is one: but in this consciousness the absolute self is posited as indivisible; whereas these self to which the not-self is opposed is posited as divisible. Hence, insofar as there is a not-self opposed to it, the self is itself in opposition to the absolute self.³⁵

It follows, and this is of the utmost importance, that the opposition of the Self

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 108.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 109.

and the not-Self implies the difference or the not-identity of the *finite* Self and the *infinite* Self. Furthermore, one must understand the absolute Self as if it were a no-something or a non-being in relation to the finite Self. It is thus the limit of the absolute and ideal reality of the Self (i.e. the originary act) that not only constitutes the bounds of the knowable, but also provides the determined matter which makes all knowledge possible. The originary act, as a principle of transcendental knowledge, can be understood as an autolimitation that permits the reciprocal determination of the Self and its opposite, that is, their passage to a determined existence.

Now, it should be noted that in the theoretical section of *The Science of Knowledge*, where it is a question of explaining the genesis of representation, the Self is conceived as determined by the causality of the not-Self, while in the practical section the Self is conceived of as capable of self-determination (and it determines the not-Self in return). The problem to resolve is the contradiction between the absolute Self and the finite Self, i.e., the subject of knowledge: the finite Self is indeed supposed to be capable of self-determination (freedom), however its activity depends on the reality of the not-Self, which is to say, of the material given to perception. The finite Self is thus supposed to be free (capable of self-determination) and therefore to be identical to the absolute Self (which depends on nothing, which posits itself absolutely) but, indeed, its activity of synthesis is determined by the not-Self, which implies that it is not identical to the absolute Self (the totality of reality): the finite Self is the not-Self in relation to the absolute Self. It is then through an infinite judgement that this contradiction can be resolved in demonstrating that the absolute Self (infinite) and the intelligent Self (finite) “must be united, so long as opposition remains, until absolute unity is effected; a thing, indeed which could be brought about only by a completed approximation to infinity, which in itself is impossible.”³⁶ Therefore, between the absolute Self and the finite Self there is an infinite identity at the limit, in the sense that for example, by increasing the sides of a polygon, we approach, little by little, a circle, without ever being able to obtain a perfect identity. Now, Fichte explains that the absolute Self, as perfect autonomy, constitutes the highest thesis, that which should be considered as the originary act of the institution of existence:

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 113-114.

the necessity of opposing and uniting in the manner prescribed rests directly on the third principle; the necessity of combination in general, on the first, highest, absolutely unconditioned principle. The form of the system is based on the highest synthesis; that there should be a system at all, on the absolute thesis.³⁷

This thesis, which concerns the not-identity of the finite Self and of the absolute Self, that is, their identity at infinity, is thus the basis that legitimizes the possibility of synthesizing opposites. This infinite, or *thetic*, judgement can be explained as such: the finite Self is not-free or not-absolute since the condition of its determined reality rests on its difference, at the limit or at infinity, in relation to the unknowable, indeterminate reality of the absolute Self. That 'the Self is free' is therefore a *thetic judgement*: "a thetic judgment, however, would be one in which something is asserted, not to be like anything else or opposed to anything else, but simply to be identical with itself: thus it could presuppose no ground of conjunction or distinction at all: the third thing, rather, which as a matter of logical form, it must still presuppose, would be simply the requirement for a ground,"³⁸ yet, "[t]he first and foremost judgment of this type is 'I am,' in which nothing whatever is affirmed of the self, the place of the predicate being left indefinitely empty for its possible characterization."³⁹ By this, it is clear that a thetic judgement is an infinite judgement concerning the real basis of all possible determination, an unreachable limit to which one can only approach endlessly. In this way, the Self must become more and more like the absolute Self as its source or being-in-itself: the Self must make an infinite effort to become identical to the establishing act, or the limit, that determines the interior. We therefore understand Fichte's famous phrase about judgement, "man is free": "Man must approximate, ad infinitum, to a freedom he can never, in principle, attain."⁴⁰ "Man is free" is thus not a synthetic judgement *a priori*, nor an analytic judgement, but a *thetic* judgement through which we aim at the highest thesis; it is that which one must strive to attain with infinite effort. Indeed, "man is free," as a *thetic* or infinite judgement, signifies "man is not-free" given that liberty is the unattainable origin of all determined or finite beings. In this regard, it will be remembered that

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

the absolute self had been defined as a not-something, as a not-existing: man attaining absolute liberty would no longer be a thing or a determined being. Once more, then, infinite judgement, here as a *thetic* judgement, expresses an unattainable limit of knowledge that constitutes the basis of knowledge from the material position: it is through the free originary act that the Self and the establishing matter are brought into being. Thus, infinite judgement is, in part, the principle of transcendental logic—as that which addresses the absolute condition of all possible existence—but it is also that which addresses the condition of all possible determination as unknowable. The absolute Self is thus the pure indeterminable, the obscure and inaccessible source of all finite knowledge: human knowledge, then, is condemned to remain a non-knowledge, that is, finite rather than absolute knowledge. In refusing to accept that absolute knowledge will remain inaccessible to us, Hegel will be forced to refuse the validity of transcendental logic and infinite judgement.

HEGEL AND INFINITE JUDGEMENT AS NON-SENSE

Hegel's ambitious project is to demonstrate the possibility of absolute knowledge as produced by a philosophical history in which the systems of Kant and the post-Kantians were no more than steps. According to Hegel, his predecessors understood something fundamental—they understood the role of the subject in the construction of the object—but they remained unable to surpass the opposition between subject and object. Thus, knowledge remained limited to the domain of phenomena without being able to access things in themselves, which constituted both the limit and the condition of all knowledge. The issue, therefore, is to denounce the error implied by this perspective, which resides in the separation between transcendental and formal logic, or in the presupposition that a judgement consists of a conceptual *a priori* synthesis that can only be legitimized *a posteriori* by corresponding with its given material. Now, by designating form and matter to be two heterogeneous components, Kant and the post-Kantians had been incapable of legitimizing differentiable representation because that depended, ultimately, on an interminable, even indeterminate, absolute (the famous 'night in which all cows are black'). Thus, matter remained in an unsurpassable state of alterity in relation to understanding, and it could only be indicated in an infinite judgement indicating the non-identity of the subject and object, given, in Hegel's view, their irresolvable contradiction. To resolve this

contradiction implies, on the one hand, reaching the identity of the subject and object and, on the other, disqualifying infinite judgement by showing that it depends on a poor conception of the infinite as that which extends beyond the bounds of the determinate. Hegel thus engages in a profound transformation of logic and aims, against his predecessors, to show that formal synthesis does not need to rely on the transcendental logic that supplied, in a mysterious way, differentiated matter, i.e., for sensible intuitions to be subsumed under the concept. His point of departure consists of noting that to think does not mean, as the Kantians had believed, joining diverse elements under a given concept, but rather dividing the original unity of the concept in order to reach the consciousness of the identity of the Idea and of whoever thinks it; in other words, of infinite understanding and of finite understanding, the absolute Self and the transcendental self. Thus, synthesis would be based on unity of concept and knowledge would be the historical process through which original unity is reconstituted in a reconciliation of the opposites which derive from the activity of reflection. Following this perspective, which is evident in *The Science of Logic*,⁴¹ to think does not consist of representing something that would be other than thought, but of understanding the rules through which thought is realized as knowledge or as a rational construction of the real. As a consequence, that which we believed about an object, as opposed to the subject, only relies on the concept: the object in judgement is the singular realization of the universal. In adopting this perspective, there is no need to postulate an unknown source of the matter of representation (thing in itself) over which the conceptual ritual would be applied to produce phenomena, but it suffices to understand the matter of judgement as that which is posed by a concept in a concept, even the singularization of the universal. The thing in itself is then only the concept in its universality, while what we thought were subjective representations were only determinations of the universal in judgement. To understand how Hegel gets rid of transcendental logic and infinite judgement in order to establish access to the idea as an intelligible source of all reality, we will now explore the given examples in the section on *judgement of conceptual logic*.⁴²

In the positive judgement “the rose is red,” we usually think of a connection

⁴¹ Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. and ed. George Di Giovanni, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

⁴² *Ibid.*

between the subject (the rose) and the predicate (the color red). It is a question of showing the necessity of this judgement without, however, making the attribute into one possible determination of the thing in itself which is the rose; in other words, one must avoid the insufficient solution posed by Kant which consisted of making the rose's reality a sum of its qualities. From this perspective, which considers matter, the rose would be the universal determined by the attribute, which can be expressed in this way: *the universal is singular*. However, Hegel notes that in reality, in this judgement, we subsume the rose, as a singular noun, under the universal concept expressed by the attribute 'red,' as a singular name; this means that the *singular is universal*. Thus, "the rose is red" means that the universal (red) is here determined as the red of the rose (rather than the red of an apple, for example), and is thus *singular*. Nevertheless, to have a judgement, it is necessary that a singular should be linked to a universal; it follows that "the singular is singular" does not make sense, is not a judgement. Until this point, then, we remain in a separation between the perspective of content, *the universal is singular*, and that of form, *the singular is universal*, which leads us to apply a not-identity of the subject and the predicate. Positive judgement thus becomes a negative judgement, "the rose is not red" or "the rose is not-red," meaning that there is no identity between the subject and the predicate. Consequently, positive judgement finds its truth expressed not only in opposition, but also in relation to contradiction between the subject and the predicate: the universal is not singular, the singular is not universal. Hegel emphasizes that one must not consider negative judgement, which is expressed as both "the rose is not red" and "the rose is not-red," as an infinite judgement in the Kantian sense. In negative judgement, in fact, we express a connection between the subject and the predicate and an effective determination. "The rose is not red" or "the rose is not-red" means that the rose has a color, although this color is not red; the negative judgement affirms the connection between the singular noun and the universal sphere of color. Not-red, then, does not mean that we are in a state of complete indetermination according to which the rose would be open to all possible determination with the exception of the determination of being red, as Kant would have it, but that the rose could be white or yellow, for example. The next step is to consider the truth of the negative, which expresses the opposition between subject and predicate in order to overcome this opposition in a unity

that justifies the validity of the judgement. This allows us to avoid verifying our consideration as based merely on the idea of the rose's being as equal to the sum of its possible determinations. To do this, Hegel demonstrates that, in judgement, the concept of the rose is specified as potentially having different determinations, as potentially becoming or passing through a plurality of determinations rather than as a non-being of the determinable (the not-determined). The unity of concept, which justifies the relation of terms in the judgement, is thus reinstated: that the rose is red means that there is an identity of red and of the rose in the existence or particular realization of the concept. The universal concept, rose, is realized in its particular determinations as judgement, or in a series of necessary judgements (the rose is red, white, or yellow since it 'becomes,' that is, it is realized in different ways). The rose is identified as red, the redness of the rose, and thus there is an identity between subject and predicate in the unity of concept. The resulting concept is the 'good infinity,' the determined unity of opposites, and this justifies the connection of the subject 'rose' and predicates like 'red,' 'white,' or 'fragrant,' which are true judgements, or singularizations/realizations of the universal.

However, Hegel says that a judgement of the type "the rose is an elephant" is an infinite judgement that addresses the 'bad infinity,' that is, the indeterminate as unlimited sum of all possible reality. In this judgement, which must be considered as lacking sense, we express the incommensurability of the sphere of the being of one thing with the sphere of being of the other, rather than the unity of opposites in the concept. A significant example of infinite judgement is a crime that is situated outside the sphere of the good infinity of the law. In a dispute, for example, the ownership of an object is contested and re-established by the law within the legal sphere; by contrast, theft, as a crime, consists of acting outside the legal sphere, it consists of positing an exterior sphere irreducible to law, the not-law as negation of the law. Hegel insists on the non-sense of infinite judgement and on its poor characterization as the negation of reason; that is, as a negation of the absolute identity of the Idea. Infinite judgement addresses an irreducible exteriority which claims to deny the positive absolute of the mind by opposing it to non-being or to the negative being in absolute sense (not dialectic-able). Another example of infinite judgement offered by Hegel is "+1-1=0," for which we address the indeterminable non-being as a sum of opposites; which is to say,

the bad infinity that constitutes the basis of transcendental logic (according to Fichte, for example, the reality of the self (+1) and the reality of the not-self (-1) share the total reality of the absolute Self (0) as their grounds of pure determination; the indeterminate non-being serves as a condition of existence of each determined or reciprocally determined being). With infinite judgment, Hegel thus refuses transcendental logic, a logic of bad infinity expressing false judgements. Good logic is, by contrast, formal: it understands opposites as the possible realizations of the concept. To return to the last example, one should understand +1 and -1 as two singularizations of the concept 1, that is, as differences within the concept of 1, rather than as two opposites canceling each other out in an irreducible exteriority to the unity of concept, zero rendered empty. In making infinite judgement into a non-sense, Hegel thus excludes the possibility of referring to unknowable things in themselves: the reality situated outside the good infinity of the absolute mind, a determined infinity identical to the self-awareness of the mind that knows itself as Idea realizing itself in all reality. Indicating more the negative being than the dialectic-able contradiction of differences within the concept, infinite judgement is a concept Hegel incessantly ridicules in order to hide its destructive potential. It is therefore not surprising that Gilles Deleuze's anti-Hegelian strategy consists of reprising infinite judgement and its ability to indicate difference in itself against the law of identity.

DELEUZE AND THE NOT-BEING OF THE PROBLEMATIC

In *Difference and Repetition*,⁴³ Deleuze proposes an anti-Hegelian dialectic based on the idea of difference, a project which he continues in *The Logic of Sense*.⁴⁴ It should be remembered, in this regard, that his interpretation of *The Science of Logic* was influenced by the commentary of Jean Hyppolite.⁴⁵ Deleuze wrote:

In the wake of this fruitful book by Jean Hyppolite, one might ask whether an ontology of difference couldn't be created that would not go all the way to contradiction, since contradiction would be less and not more than difference. Hyppolite says that an ontology of pure difference would restore us to a purely

⁴³ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, London, The Athlone Press 1994.

⁴⁴ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester, London, The Athlone Press, 1990.

⁴⁵ Deleuze, "Jean Hyppolite's *Logic and Existence*" (1953), in *Desert Islands and other Texts*, Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2004.

formal and exterior reflection, and would in the end reveal itself to be an ontology of essence. However, the same question could be asked in another way: is it the same thing to say that Being expresses itself and that Being contradicts itself?⁴⁶

Deleuze's philosophical project thus begins as an attempt to think of difference as the real source of what exists and the concepts of formal logic as those things which depend on it. By refusing the universalism and uniqueness of the Hegelian Idea, which resolves each contradiction in the identity of a process in which there is only becoming the same, Deleuze aims to establish the possibility of a repetition of difference. This facilitates a becoming which concerns the actualization of heterogeneous realities, which cannot be reduced to the unity of concept and which, consequently, are not found in a relationship of contradiction. In considering difference as a simple opposition to push to the point of contradiction—which opens up the possibility of surpassing identity—Hegel's philosophy reduces any alternative deployment of identity to non-sense, preventing any other philosophical possibility of articulating the real.⁴⁷ Hegel reduces difference to a difference in concept rather than that which falls outside of the concept. As we noted, it is in this sense that difference is addressed by Kantian and post-Kantian infinite judgement, which points towards the unknowable and the undetermined outside of the power of the concept and, at the same time, which alone can justify the use of concepts in formal logic. The question posed in *Difference and Repetition* is therefore the following: "what is the concept of difference - one which is not reducible to simple conceptual difference but demands its own Idea, its own singularity at the level of Ideas?"⁴⁸ The sought difference is not that which concerns the various entities which we subsume under the same concept, e.g., the variation in possible reds of the rose. On the contrary, difference should be understood as the condition of actualization of the rose's being-colored as a singular event which generates its own concept. Here,

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴⁷ Contra the universal history of philosophy proposed by Hegel, which reduces all philosophy to a stage in the development of the same speculative system, we refer to the *Dianoematics* of Martial Gueroult, whose interpretation of Descartes, Maimon and Spinoza was fundamental for Deleuze. It is a question of showing the genetic conditions of each philosophical system in its autonomy and singularity, avoiding conceiving it as contradictory truths that need to be overcome in the achievement of an absolute philosophy.

⁴⁸ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 27.

difference is the appearance of what we do not yet have a concept for, that which has not already been understood in the space of possible determined experience by a given concept.

For Deleuze, the question is one of reprising the transcendental logic of the post-Kantians, which concerns real objects' conditions for existing as they are determined in consciousness. However, rather than conceive of difference as an undetermined non-identity, for example the not-identity of the determinable (infinite) and the determinate (finite) or as the not-identity of the absolute subject and of the knowing subject, Deleuze aims to render difference in itself as a singular and determined difference, the condition of beings. Indeed, Hegel reproached his predecessors for making the differentiated reality of the phenomenal world depend on the unknowable thing in itself, deprived of all determination—the 'dark night' of the undifferentiated. It is the undifferentiated non-being of the thing in itself (the sum equal to zero or the negative being) which, according to Hegel, is a consequence of the erroneous perspective of the 'bad infinity.' Hegel opposes this to the 'good infinity' of the Idea, the originary unity of possible realizations as specifications already contained within the concept as differences. For Deleuze, the challenge is thus to indicate the ideal condition of the genesis of the real while avoiding rendering it as the difference of determinable undifferentiation in relation to determined beings. For Deleuze, this also means considering the ideal genetic condition as the identity of the Idea, which unfolds according to a necessary dialectic. It is a matter of affirming difference in a positive manner rather than as the difference between things and making the ideal genetic condition the object of infinite judgement rather than undifferentiated being. By acknowledging that the "'non' in the expression 'non-being' expresses something other than the negative,"⁴⁹ Deleuze considers that the Idea is the problem, in the mathematical sense, where the solutions come from. In this way the non-being is not the undifferentiated, but the problematic being as differentiated and yet non-identical to the solutions that it renders possible. As we can read in *Difference and Repetition*:

Being is also non-being, but non-being is not the being of the negative; rather, it is the being of the problematic, the being of problem and question. Difference is not

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

the negative; on the contrary, non-being is Difference: heteron, not enantion. For this reason non-being should rather be written (non)-being or, better still, ?-being.⁵⁰

The genetic condition of determined beings in consciousness is thus the not-being of the problem which is not pure nothingness, or indeterminate, but which, while being determined, makes possible the realization of its solutions in their singular determination (differentiation). The solutions differ from the problem, which cannot be reduced to the sum of its solutions. Following the mathematical philosophy of Albert Lautman, Deleuze remarks:

A problem does not exist, apart from its solutions. Far from disappearing in this overlay, however, it insists and persists in these solutions. A problem is determined at the same time as it is solved, but its determination is not the same as its solution: the two elements differ in kind, the determination amounting to the genesis of the concomitant solution.⁵¹

In sum, the Idea is the problematic being, the not-being as the actualizing condition of solutions. However, thus conceived, the Idea is always already determined since the problem has determined conditions. As Deleuze describes it, Hegel's dialectic is only a distortion of the true dialectic, which progresses from the conditions of the problem to the generated solutions.

Problems are always dialectical. This is why, whenever the dialectic 'forgets' its intimate relation with Ideas in the form of problems, whenever it is content to trace problems from propositions, it loses its true power and falls under the sway of the power of the negative, necessarily substituting for the ideal objectivity of the problematic a simple confrontation between opposing, contrary or contradictory, propositions. This long perversion begins with the dialectic itself, and attains its extreme form in Hegelianism.⁵²

By disqualifying transcendental logic in favor of formal logic, Hegel's dialectic elides the true genetic conditions (Ideas as problems) of real beings to concern itself only with the proposals expressing these solutions. In other words, Hegel's dialectic engenders beings as not determined in existence but only through language, as the realizations of the concept. The Hegelian spirit says what it is and is what it says. Now, for Deleuze, the dialectic is a matter of substituting a

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 164.

pre-subjective problem, in which any particular subjectivity is only a matter of solution, for the question by which the Hegelian subject interrogates herself. The problem is not the question posed by someone (a universal or individual subject), but the conduit through which an individual subject may emerge in its difference compared to the other types of solution and, thus, as a thing which is singularly faced with universal being. Differential calculus offers a Deleuzian problematic: “Just as we oppose difference in itself to negativity, so we oppose dx to not-A, the symbol of difference [*Differenzphilosophie*] to that of contradiction.”⁵³ The problem would thus consist in the distribution of differential relations (singularities) dx/dy , relations that indicate the limit of o/o , and in which solutions would be obtained through integration. All real existence is thus a solution to the differential problem.

Thus the ideal connections constitutive of the problematic (dialectical) Idea are incarnated in the real relations which are constituted by mathematical theories and carried over into problems in the form of solutions. We have seen how all three of these aspects were present in the differential calculus: the solutions are like the discontinuities compatible with differential equations, engendered on the basis of an ideal continuity in accordance with the conditions of the problem.⁵⁴

As it was for Maïmon, existence is a question of making the determination of objects depend on the consciousness of the integration operation of ideal differentials. However, the thing which, for the post-Kantians, remained the object of an infinite understanding, here becomes rationally accessible as the problem. It is no longer a matter of addressing, through infinite judgement, the not-identity of the ideal determinable (the thing in itself, absolute subject) and of the real determined (the phenomenon, finite subject), but of the difference in itself as a problem which does not resemble its solutions. Consequently, the subject emerges not as a determined being which differs from the non-being of the absolute subject, but as a series of intensive differences that depend on the relation dx/dy , of the determined Idea, or the specific condition of the problem, which differs through the nature of its solutions. For Deleuze, the problem is neither the Idea of the totality of the possible in divine, infinite understanding, nor the Idea of the totality of possible and contradictory determinations through which the

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

absolute subject passes. Rather, it is through variation that the problem permits the actualization of heterogeneous and non-contradictory possibilities, of singular subjectivities that we cannot subsume under a universal identity.

Infinite judgement, which Hegel reduced to non-sense, is transformed and employed by Deleuze to indicate difference in itself, the ideal (virtual) problem that alone guarantees the right to existence of the singularity that resists the universal. This difference in itself contests the unitary sphere of the good infinity of the Idea in the absolute subject. We thus understand the political scope of the Deleuzian position:

It is in terms of this image that everybody knows and is presumed to know what it means to think. Thereafter it matters little whether philosophy begins with the object or the subject, with Being or with beings, as long as thought remains subject to this Image which already prejudges everything: the distribution of the object and the subject as well as that of Being and beings. We may call this image of thought a dogmatic, orthodox or moral image.⁵⁵

Thus, it seems urgent to me today, faced with the universalist vocation of logic, to bring out the power (*pouvoir*) of infinite judgment and transcendental logic in order to address a different problem, which is capable of allowing the heterogeneous to emerge. As Deleuze said, “Contradiction is not the weapon of the proletariat but, rather, the manner in which the bourgeoisie defends and preserves itself, the shadow behind which it maintains its claim to decide what the problems are. Contradictions are not 'resolved,' they are dissipated by capturing the problem of which they reflect only the shadow.”⁵⁶

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⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 268.