Dialectic: The Logic of Absence  
— Arguments, Themes, Perspectives, Configurations

§ 1 Absence

In C1.3 I argued that real negation > transformative negation > radical negation of a determinate, indeterminate, fuzzy, duplicitous and a mélange of other genres. In C1.6 I claimed that it is real negation or the absent, whether in the guise of the inexplicit (as in the case of teleonomic push) or the merely incomplete (teleological pull), that drives the Hegelian dialectic on, and that will drive the dialectic past him. Incidentally the epistemological dialectic sketched in C1.9 can function as the Hegelian dialectic normally operates, by simply overcoming incompleteness — e.g. by augmenting generality or depth without prior anomaly. However, the more typical case here will be that where an inconsistency, caused by a relevant conceptual or empirical lacuna, generates the move to further completeness — in a Gödelian dialectic of:

absence — inconsistency — greater completeness

in principle without end.

Real negation is most simply first considered as the presence in some more or less determinate region of space-time (comprising, as a relational property of the system of material things, an objective referential grid) of an absence at some specific level or context of being of some more or less determinate entity, thing, power, event, aspect or relation, etc. Consider as a paradigm a stapler missing from a desk drawer, or a tool from a workbench. I want to focus here for ease of exposition on simple determinate non-being within a determinate locale, which, relative to any possible indexicalized observer on any possible world-line, is existentially intransitive, whether or not the absence is positively identified, or even identifiable. But the argument may be easily extended to deal with less determinate kinds. Thus the region may be not only as large or small as is naturally possible but indefinite and/or open. And the entity may be, if it is present, hidden and perhaps necessarily unobservable to creatures like us, whether prothetically aided or not. The absence may be deep or superficial, real but not actual. The region may be totally empty, constitute a level-specific void or just not contain x. x may be never anywhere (as in simple non-existence), sometimes somewhere else (as in finite or limited existence) or just spatio-temporally distant (as in the ‘duality of absence’ and, we can add, ‘presence’, mentioned in C1.3). The absent thus includes, but is not exhausted by, the past and outside. And it may be more or less systematically (e.g. causally) connected to the presence or absence of other determinate beings. At the boundary of the space-time region it may be difficult to say whether x is present or absent or neither or both (or both neither and/or both); and, if ‘present’ and ‘absent’ are treated as contraries, we are once more confronted with the spectre of rejecting the principle of non-contradiction or excluded middle or both. Note that the possibility of action/passion at-a-distance and/or across (possibly level-specific) voids — in effect, non-substantial process — provides another ground for regarding real negation (absence) as the more basic category than transformative negation (change). I will postpone treating complications that derive from the fourfold polysemy of real negation, noted in C1.3, viz. (a) as simple absence (our focus here), including nothing; (b) as simple absenting, e.g. through divergent distanciation or substantial or non-substantial process (with or without transformation), (c) as process-in-product, e.g. as in the existential constitution of the nature of an absence by its geo-history; and (d) as product-in-process, e.g. in the iterable or non-iterable exercise of its causal powers. Similarly for those that derive from the phenomena of emergent and/or divergent (or possibly convergent) spatio-temporalities of causally efficacious absent things.

Someone may ask ‘what is being negated in real negation?’ In the case where x has been absented from a domain of being, whether by transformation and/or by distanciation, the propriety of this way of speaking may perhaps be granted. But where x is altogether absent from being, as in never anywhere existence, if the reader wishes to substitute ‘non-being’ for ‘real negation’ I have no objection. For it is my intention to maintain in this section (1) that we can refer to non-being, (2) that non-being exists, and that (3) not only must it be conceded that non-being has ontological priority over being within zero-level being, (4) but, further, non-being has ontological priority over being. In short, negativity wins. My aim in vindicating negativity...
in what may seem a prima facie paradoxical way is to foreground the contingency — both epistemological and ontological — of existential, not least human existential, questions which the tradition of ontological monovalence screens. I shall contend that this exercise is necessary for that emancipation of dialectic for (the dialectic of) emancipation that is the aim of this work.

My first objective is to argue, against Plato and Frege, that reference does not presuppose existence; more specifically, that it does not presuppose either factual existence or positive factual existence. I want to differentiate within the class of antics — understood as the intransitive objects of specific epistemic inquiries — positive existences or presences, which I shall dub 'onts', from negative existences or absences, which I shall nominate ‘de-onts’. Next I am going to identify the ontic content, i.e., if you like, the referential force, weight or charge of a proposition with what Hare has called its ‘phrastics’, and to make modified use of his further terminology of ‘neustics’ and ‘tropics’. As I shall employ his triptych, tropics — initially introduced to register mood — demarcate domains of discourse, e.g. to distinguish the fictional, I, and the factual, F; neustics convey attitudes such as acceptance, rejection or indecision, written as √, x and / respectively; while phrastics express the ontic content of a proposition, the state of affairs it describes or is about, which may be positive or negative, represented as (e) and (-e). A (positive or negative) affirmative factual claim typically occurs at the moment at which (in what I will characterize in C3.2 as the dialectic of truth) 'referential detachment' — informally the ontological detachment of the referent from the (inter-subjective/social) referential act (reference), initially justified by the axiological need to refer to something other than ourselves — becomes legitimate and necessary. The argument for referential detachment is the argument for existential intransitivity and, in science, is the ground for the argument for the stratified, differentiated and changing ontology which critical realism has hitherto deployed. And to speak of the 'ontic content' of a proposition is merely to indicate the ontic or referential aspect of the 'referential—expressive' duality of function which is a necessary component, or so I shall argue, of an adequate theory of truth. But I should also hereby give notice that I will be working with a much more general notion of 'referent' and 'reference' than the ontologically extensionalist mainstream countenances. On my position, one can refer not only to existent (or non-existent) things, but also to such things characterized in particular ways. Thus we can refer to laws, powers and tendencies to totalities, relations and aspects; to intensions, intentions and actions (or inactions); and to our discourse about all of them. To refer is just to pick something out for discussion and/or other action, and thus there are no more a priori limits on what we can designate than there are on what we can discuss. This does not abolish the distinction between the activities of reference and predication, but merely enables us to say (predicate) things about everything we normally do and necessarily must.

I have argued elsewhere that we can refer within, as well as (of course) to, fictional discourse. Typically this will presuppose an operation on a tropic. Thus the staging of Macbeth will convey the 'conversationally candid' implication, to invoke Grice's convenient expression, that Macbeth did not exist, and in referential and other acts in Macbeth we characteristically suspend our belief in that implication. Within the realm of factual discourse, the rejection of a proposition, say to the effect that caloric exists, depends upon an operation on a neustic, denying, in the transitive dimension, the existence, in the intransitive dimension, of caloric or whatever. Let us pass now to real negation. To assert that Pierre is not in the café or that the Titanic sank or that Fred's golf balls were lost or that Sara couldn't keep her date with Jemma or that Sophie missed her cue in the matinée presupposes a factual neustic in the transitive dimension, but the ontic content of the proposition — that which we reject or accept and what it is that, in (groundedly) accepting, we referentially detach from our speech acts — is now, unlike the case of caloric, negative. Real negation involves an operation on the phrastic (-e), and the negativity is now explicitly ontological. But patently I can refer to, as I can perceive (or be in a position to infer), Pierre's absence, just as readily as I can refer to the denial of caloric's existence or to Macbeth's fictionality. All three convey negative existential import. But, as I have set up the sequence, they do so in three different ways. The tropic fictional operator 'I' implies, but is not the same as, the neustic rejection of an existential proposition, which in turn implies, but is not the same as, phrastic de-ontification. There are at least three different modes in which things may be said not to be (and I want to assert the logical propriety of fictional and factual, I and F, acceptance and rejection, √ and x, and being and non-being () and (-) operators) — although, of course, there is only one sense in which things are not. F√ (-e) gives the fine structure of the simple factual positive affirmation of Pierre's death.

Real negativity, understood most simply as absence, or, qua process, absencing, and a fortiori the critique of ontological monovalence, is vital to dialectic. Absenting processes are crucial to dialectic conceived as the logic of change — which is absenting.
Absentings, which act as constraints on wants, needs or (more generally) well-being, is essential to dialectics interpreted as the logic of freedom. And the whole point of argument, on which dialectic has been most traditionally modelled, is to absent mistakes. The absence concerned may be transfactual or actual, in process or static, internally related in a totality or isolated, an inaction or not (cf. 1M–4D).* The dialectical comment (dc') typically isolates an absence (which the resolution repairs), indicating a theory/practice inconsistency or irrelevance, and advising against its dialectical (critical realist) universalizability.** In dialectical critical realism the category of absence is pivotal to 1M–4D links. Thus a 1M non-identity or alterity may generate a 2E absence causing a 3L alienating detotalization or split-off resulting in a fragmented impotent self — or, let us suppose, a reconstituted unity-in-diversity, diagrammatized in Figure 2.1. This is just one example of malign/benign 1M–4D links, in which 2E absence/absenting is the key mediation between 1M non-identity, 3L totality and 4D agency, which has as its prototype the

* Statements about transfactualities should not be confused with statements about negativities, although the classes intersect. The d/d' distinction gets its force from the fact that a tendency (which may be positive or negative) may be exercised without being actualized in a (positive or negative) outcome. The d/d' distinction stems from the consideration that things, their causal powers, their processual and possibly mediated exercise and their results may be absent (negative) as well as present (positive). That said, it should be clear that the concept of a tendency absent from actuality presupposes the critique of ontological monovalue; and that absenting processes are, in open systems, all tendencies, so that the distinctions are interdependent. Indeed the elision of natural necessity, the epistemic fallacy and ontological monovalue I shall declaim as the unholy trinity of idealism. (The pun is intentional: holes — voids — constitutive absences.)

** For the moment this may be regarded as transfactual, processual-directional-developmentmental, concrete, agentic (agent-specific or actionable) and transformative — a formula I will later both explain and qualify.

absenting of absence manifest in the satisfaction of desire. More generally, dialectics depends upon the positive identification and transformative elimination of absences. Indeed, it just is, in its essence, the process of absenting absence. Moreover, I shall show in C4.2 how the key to the critical diagnosis and rational resolution of the problems of philosophy, generated by 1M destratification or homology, 3L detotalization, 4D de-agentification and 2E positzivation, lies in the repair of the absence of the concepts of structure and heterology, concretion, relationality and totality, agentive agency and, above all, absence itself. Reference to absence is quintessential to non-idealistic dialectic. Hence my polemical reference in C1.3 to ‘subject’, as distinct from traditional predicative and propositional, negation. Later I will connect the concept of, if you like, referential negativity to developmental negation, the critique of the presupposition — which I shall call ‘fixism’ — of fixed subjects in the traditional subject-predicate propositional form (which presupposes the rigidity, and hence arbitrariness, of definitions). Fischer’s notion of necessary as distinct from impossible contradiction (contradictio in subjecto rather than in adjecto), expressing the idea of a subject in process of formation and the possible uses of the Hegel-derivative ‘speculative proposition’ in social science.

An extreme case of absence is never anywhere existence. This can be expressed in the form of a non-existential proposition, e.g. in science. Popper holds such propositions to be unfalsifiable, and so ‘unscientific’. Despite the fact that counter-examples abound in science (phlogiston, the aether, Vulcan), this is normally taken as gospel. However, in real science, individuals, particulars and universals are always already known under some more or less precise description, tied, when existential questions become pertinent within the specific context of inquiry, to definite demonstrative and recognitive criteria of existence — which they may simply fail to satisfy. Moreover, fallibilism itself depends upon the idea of identifying and remedying mistakes. This entails at the very least (leaving aside the not necessarily trivial sense in which error may be said to consist in the lack of truth) registering the recognition of error in the speech act of denial, which is absentive, and upon comprehending error as paradigmatically dependent upon absence; and its correction the repair, that is, the absenting, of the absence. Dialectic is at the heart of every learning process. Furthermore, it is easy to see that in any world in which human agency is to be possible, the human agent must be able to bring about a state of affairs which would not otherwise have prevailed (unless it was over-determined). Sophia acts, and so absents. That is, to put the matter in
acting and so absenting,

form of theory/practice and reflexive inconsistency, and self-
cannot consistently account. Not to admit absence to our ontology (in
interconnectedness, in a Marxian-Bakhtinian fashion, alike (and their
texture', in the manner of Waismann, and structural fluidity and
envisage dialectic as the great 'loosener', permitting empirical ' open-
change about beliefs) and conceptual change (to enable change in
distinction to boot). Again, unless Sophia sees herself necessarily
and hence

a state of existential doubt. This may be taken as a transcendental
detotalizes) herself. That is to say, she in practice alienates and reifies,
and hence absents herself and/or her agency, in a way for which she
cannot consistently account. Not to admit absence to our ontology (in
that very admission) is to commit performative contradiction, the basic
form of theory/practice and reflexive inconsistence, and self-
referential paradox.

To this it might be argued that there cannot be a complete parity at
the transcendental level between the positive and the negative.
Fictional disclosure is dependent upon a matrix of factual discourse,
in which neustic crosses are cradled by axiologically necessary ticks,
in which in turn absences are only identifiable via the network of
positive material things. To this objection there are a number of
ripostes. First, the identification of a positive existent is a human act.
Second, the material world operates as a referential grid for the identification of
positive and negative existents, onts and de-onts, only in virtue of
their mutual exclusion relations, that is to say, in virtue of their
differences in space and changes in time. Only in a state of eternal all-
point that causality must be grasped as intrinsically tensed spatio-
temporalizing process. For the moment we need only record that
there is no substance without causality, no material system without
its changes. This can also be regarded as a transcendental refutation of
monovalence and token monism (which must detotalize the
monist). The identification of positive existents depends upon a
changing (and therefore at least ontologically bivalent)

At this point, having registered the connections between space and
difference and time and change, I want to digress slightly to comment
upon the difference between change and difference. Both categories
are essential (and presuppose absence). But (a) change cannot be
analysed in terms of difference, as the analytic tradition from the late
Plato has been wont to do, any more than (b) difference can be
analysed in terms of change, the converse fallacy of the dialectical
tradition from at least Plotinus.

(a) Change cannot be analysed in terms of difference because it
presupposes the idea of a continuing thing in a tensed process. If the
ontologically monovalent tradition dates from the Parmenidean
'one', mediated by the Platonic exegesis of negation as difference, it is
completed by the Kantian error of supposing that one can always
replace statements about negativities or their derivatives by ones
employing purely positive predicates. But Pierre's absence from the
cafe does not mean the same as Genet sitting in his place or Pierre's
playing football instead of meeting Sartre. (b) Difference cannot be
analysed in terms of change because it includes the idea of two or
more non-identical tokens, which cannot be necessarily reduced to a
unitary origin (which would have to be the single unique origin of
everything to yield the required result). More to the immediate point,
to allow at least two (and by an extension of this argument, an
indefinite number of) non-identicals is transcendentally necessary for
our discourse to achieve referential detachment, that is, to be able to
talk about something other than itself or even to talk about itself at all.
Intransitivity is as transcendentally irreducible as I will later argue
tense to be. Of course none of this is to deny that differentiating
changes and changing differences occur. (In the meantime the reader
should be forewarned that in this chapter [and indeed throughout
this book], I will be conducting a side polemic against monism,
reductionism and fundamentalism, including the ideas of unique
beginnings, rock bottoms and fixed foundations, all of which smack
of anthropic cognitive triumphalism, which I will connect to centrism
and endism as endemic to irrealist dialectics as well as the bulk of
analytics.)

My third response to the objection claiming ontological priority for
the positive is to argue that a world without voids (absences), that is,
a 'non-clumpy' material object world, in which, as on the classical Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm, action is by continuous contiguous impact — in its canonical atomistic form, of condensely compacting particles (a conception which Newton never eschewed*) would be a world in which nothing could move or occur, as it presupposes an impossible conjunction of atomicity, rigidity and immediacy. That is to say, in effect, non-atomicity (and hence constitutive absence) and/or action-at-a-distance (and hence across voids) are transcendentally necessary features of an intelligible material object world.**3 Transmission of energy, like information in inter-personal communication, is possible only by (substantial or non-substantial) travel across, at the very least, level-specific gaps. This being granted takes me to my fourth argument against the ontological dominance of the positive. If a totally positive material object world — a packed world without absences — is impossible, there is no a priori reason to exclude the opposite — namely a total void, literally nothing. Negativity is constitutively essential to positivity, but the converse does not follow. Leave aside the Heideggerian question of why there is something rather than nothing. There could have been nothing rather than something. Of course this is a counterfactual. Beings exist. But by transcendentental argument, non-being is constitutively essential to being. Non-being is a condition of possibility of being. No non-being is a sufficient condition of impossibility of being. But there is no logical incoherence in totally no being. Dialectical arguments establish the conditions of possibility (dr') of the conditions of impossibility (dc') of some initially established result or posist. Now, employing a strategy of 'dialectical detachment' from our initial premiss — positive existence — in the metacritical end-game, we can argue that not only is a total void possible, but if there was a unique beginning to everything it could only be from nothing by an act of radical autogenesis. So that if there was an originating Absolute, nothing would be its schema or form, constituted at the moment of initiation by the spontaneous disposition to become something other than itself. Similarly, if there was a unique ending to everything it would involve a collapse to actualized nothingness, absolutely nothing. In sum, complete positivity is impossible, but sheer indeterminate negativity is not.*

Within the world as we know it, non-being is at least on a par with being. Outwith it the negative has ontological primacy. Let us linger within the everyday world. Let me also concede the force of the point that, while the converse is equally the case, without positive being we could not know negative being; and even, recognizing the counter-factual nature of the hypothesis explored in the previous paragraph, conceive of non-being as contained within a base or zero-level being. Why, it might be enquired, do I want to talk of non-being in referring to such prosaic facts as Jemma not keeping her date with Jacques? To say that Jemma or Pierre or the rain or food or self-esteem or the aether is not (is lacking) in some determinate context of discourse is to designate a real absence at some level, perspective, aspect, context and/or region of space-time. 'Is' and 'real' discharge the burden of negativity; 'not' and 'absent' denote negativity. To admit that real absence exists and real absentions occur is tantamount to conceding that non-beings, i.e. de-onts, are, happen, etc. We thus have the theorem: ontology > ontics > de-onts. In §6 I shall argue that it is inconceivable that 'ontology' does not refer and in C4 I shall examine the origins of the dogma of ontological monovalence and its generative role in the aporia of irrealist philosophy in its analytical, hitherto dialectical and post-Nietzschean forms. Its effects include, as I have already suggested, the deproblematization of existential questions (as the 1M denial of natural necessity deproblematises essential ones), securing the transmission of a pre-posted positivity from knowledge to being, dogmatically reinforcing the former as hypostatized ideas or reified facts, disguising the human agency

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* The Michelson–Morley experiment was designed to determine the velocity of the aether relative to the earth.
** This has a philosophical social analogue in what Lovejoy, thinking especially of Leibniz but equally applicable to Hegel, has called 'the principle of plenitude', but which could perhaps be more aptly labelled 'the principle of repletion'. Its inappplicability to a world dominated by scarcity (more precisely the combination of scarcity and waste), characterized by enormous inequities and subject to absolute ecological constraints should not need remarking.

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* It is customarily presupposed in cosmological discussion (a) that our cosmos is unique (so to speak, synchronically, diachronically, laterally and transcategorically); therefore (b) that its beginning was the unique beginning of everything — and in particular of matter, energy, space and time, the concepts of which therefore cannot be employed for or outside it; (c) that the cause of its beginning cannot be considered without antimony or vicious regress; or (d) insofar as it can be it must be of a monadic-fissuring type, rather than as is characteristically the case in known intra-cosmic geneses, viz. beginnings of a dyadic/polyadic-fusing kind? (e.g. as involving an asymmetric compression of pre-existent forces); and finally (e), worst of all, that if there was a unified theory capable of explaining the physical development of the cosmos, perhaps after the earliest moments of time, this would ipso facto yield a 'GTOE' — Grand Theory of Everything. These assumptions bear the heavy imprint of philosophical anthropocentrism, monism, veridifictionism, actualism, reductionism and cognitive triumphalism. (b) goes against the Lucretian dictum 'nil . . . fieri de nihilio' and the Hobbesian maxim that 'nothing taketh a beginning from itself'. Particular or absolutist monistic ontification is illicit. In respect of (c), note a polyadic-fissuring genesis of a stubbornly dialectic would give it a minimum five-term structure, without allowing for indeterminate or subsequent multiple negation.
involved and absenting (and alienating) scientists and laypersons alike from their products. The transmission of positivity from knowledge to being, covered by the epistemic fallacy and then reflected back in its ontic dual, takes place at a posited or hypothesized point of subject-object identity, abolishing intransitivity in what is in effect a point of categorial duplicity, which is actualistically generalized into eidetic eternity. Eliminating absence, most sharply experienced in contradiction and remedied by greater completeness or totality, eliminates change and error alike. Monovalence is the ideology of categorial (including epistemological) stasis. Once more, precisely the same result is achieved by the absenting of alterity, and thus the difference between change and error too. The epistemic fallacy, ontological monovalence and the actualist collapse of natural necessity (and possibility) are of a piece: the unholy trinity of irrealism.

Conversely, welcoming negativity and later totality and agency alongside 1M non-identity, depth and transfactuality to our ontology situates some very interesting possibilities. What is present from one perspective, at one level, in some region may be absent from, at or in another. Presences and absences may be recursively embedded and systematically intermingled in all sorts of fascinating ways. They may stretch forward temporally, spread outwards spatially, spiral inwards conceptually, mediate, switch or transfigure each other relationally, perspectively or configurationally, structurally sediment, abstract, concretize, contradict and coalesce themselves. Once we specifically thematize causal efficacy, emergence, tensed spatializing process, totality and sui generis social forms, all sorts of topologies become possible: hidden depths, tangled loops, inverted hierarchies, mediatized, virtual and hyperrealities; holes-within-wholes (and vice versa), binds and blocks, intra- as well as inter-action; juxtaposed, elongated, congealed, overlapping, intersecting, condensed spatio-temporalities; intertwined, dislocated and punctured processes. We shall explore some of these in due course. As it is, consider the crucial impact that the symptomatic silence, the telling pause, the vacuum, the hiatus or the generative separation possess. Or remember the effects of the non-occurrences, the undone or left alone — the letter that didn't arrive, the failed exam, the missed plane, the monsoon that didn't occur, the deforestation of the Amazonian jungle, the holes in the ozone layer, the collapse of 'actually existing socialism', the spaces in the text, the absent authors and readers it presupposes, both the too empty and the too full. Absences, immediately or on

reflection, all.* There are intervals, voids and pauses, desire, lack and need within being; and such absences and their tendential and actual absenting are, or so I am arguing, transcendentally and dialectically necessary for any intelligible being at all.

§ 2 Emergence

The official motive force of the Hegelian dialectic is, as we have seen, the contradiction that leads to the expansion of the universe of discourse or conceptual field by the positive identification and elimination of absences, including its former incompleteness in some relevant respect. But before I come to contradiction, I want briefly to broach the topic of emergence. This is a 1M category of non-identity but is (a) specifically ontological while (b) falling within the generic Hegelian class of stratificational dialectics. In emergence, generally, new beings (entities, structures, totalities, concepts) are generated out of pre-existing material from which they could have been neither induced nor deduced. There is a quantum leap, or nodal line, of (one feels like saying) the materialized imagination — or even, with Hegel, reason — akin to that occurring in the $\sigma$ or $\tau$ transforms of the rudimentary epistemological dialectic of C1.9. This is matter as creative, as autopoietic. It seems, if it can be vindicated, to yield a genuine ontological analogue of Hegelian preservative determinate negation. It consists in the formation of one or other of two types of superstructure (only the first of which has generally been noted in the Marxist canon), namely, by the superimposition (Model A) or intra-position (Model B) of the emergent level on or within the pre-existing one — superstructuration or intrastructuration respectively. There is no reason why the two models should not be used in complementary fashion, say in the concept of the intrinsic superstructure. These do not exhaust the formal possibilities, especially once one allows extraneous, contra-punctual and transvoid action, emergent and divergent (and generally detached) spatio-temporalities and disembedding mechanisms, including the disembedding of time from space (as in an aeroplane flight) and the disembedding of space from time (as in telephone reception). But they are the most obvious ones. Emergence presupposes the rejection of the ancient antagonism of (normally physicalistic) reductionism and (typically spiritualistic)

* The 'too full' reveals, in the human world, an absence of continence, balance or justice: the jewel of wisdom in the Aristotelian doctrine of the 'mean'.
dualism alike, neither of which can sustain a concept of agentive agency, presupposing intentional materially embodied and efficacious causality; and both of which posit the non-phenomenality of intentionality. It acknowledges irreducible real novelty, while rejecting a transcendent cause for it — what Hegel, with medieval Christendom and Kant (especially) in mind, will pejoratively refer to as a ‘beyond’ or **Jenseits**.

However, before I praise emergence, I must bury Hegelian versions of it. In the real world, whether we are dealing with conceptual, social (concept-dependent, but not -exhaustive) or entirely natural (extra-conceptual) terrain, ontological dialectical processes are not generally the product of radical negation alone, let alone that of the linear kind to which Hegel leans. For our world is an open-systemic entropic totality, in which results (dr in the symbolism of C1.7) are neither autogenetically produced nor even constellation ally closed, but the provisional outcome of a heterogeneous multiplicity of changing mechanisms, agencies and circumstances. Moreover, in real emergence the processes are generally non-teleologically causal, only socio-spherically conceptual; and the higher level (ultimately, in Hegel, absolute spirit or, to borrow Charles Taylor’s felicitous expression, ‘cosmic Geist’7) does not posit, but is rather formed from, the lower level. Furthermore, whether the outcome is, macroscopically, a new type of structure, or, microscopically, merely a token, or a structuratum, to employ Andrew Collier’s useful distinction, it normally remains heteronomously conditioned and controlled by the lower-order one — onto or into which it has been super- or intrapos ed. Again, real emergence has an inverse that does not figure in the entelechy of the Hegelian scheme, viz. disemergence, the decay, demise or disjoint detachment of the higher-order level. Further, emergence may involve a substantial degree of non-preservative, rather than simply additive, superstructuration. And the result may be internally complex and differentiated, consisting in a ‘laminated’ system, whose internal elements are necessarily ‘bonded’ in a multiplicity of structures (perhaps composed of their own structural hierarchies and sub-totalities). Such systems may be decentred,

* The concept of a structuratum, is, however, homonymous, between an ontological instance of a structure or a concrete individual or singular, which will normally be the condensate of, or of the effects of, a multiplicity of disjoint, and even contradictory, structures or of their ways of acting (generative mechanisms or causal powers). It will characteristically remain heteronomously conditioned, dependent upon and influenced by the levels out of which it has emerged, even where it is causally efficacious on them, as clearly society is on nature and agency on inanimate and animate matter alike.

asymmetrically weighted, and contextually variable, as in the case of the Dennettian-Joycean self, composing an internal pluriverse (to purloin Della Volpe’s redolent term11), populated by a plurality of narratives, in internal discordance and even palpable contradiction.12

Indeed emergence, which I treat in C3 as an example of the dialectic of the real and the actual, establishes distinct domains of difference qua alterity — real determine other-being. Such domains have to be understood in their own terms before (α) any scientific synchronic or (β) historician diachronic explanatory reduction can be contemplated. Thus (α) chemical phenomena had first to be classified, described and explained in a dialectic of sui generis chemical principles before any explanatory reduction to physics became feasible,13 while (β) the tradition of neo-Platonic-eschatological-Hegelian-vulgar Marxist thought has been plagued by assumptions of originarity, uni-linear directionality and teleological necessity of an empirically and conceptually untenable kind. It is best to take specific cases in this neck of the philosophical woods. To comprehend human agency as a causally and taxonomically irreducible mode of matter is not to posit a distinct substance ‘mind’ endowed with reasons for acting apart from the causal network, but to credit intentional embodied agency with distinct (emergent) causal powers from the biological matter out of which agents were formed, on which they are capable of reacting back (and must, precisely as materially embodied causally efficacious agents, do so, if they are to act at all), but from which, in an open-systemic totality in which events are not determined before they are caused,14 neither such beings nor the transformations and havoc they would wreak on the rest of nature could have been predicted ex ante. On such a synchronic emergent causal powers materialism, reasons (that are acted on) just are causes. Against dualism, we can say that it is in virtue of our complex biological constitution that human agents have the powers we do; while denying, against reductionism, that a power can be reduced to its material basis or condition of possibility any more than the acceleration of a car is the same as its engine. Contemporary reductionist materialisms both face insoluble aporiai and sneak dualism (of a disembodied linguistified neo-Kantian kind) in by the back door. For instance, the very statement of eliminative materialism appears inconsistent with its project — a self-eliminating act. At the time of its utterance such a statement transforms the material world, yielding a performative contradiction or theory/practice inconsistency again. And in a non-solipsistic (or non-token-ist) world, central state materialism cannot account for the understanding of meaning which mediates two or more neuro-physiologically distinct states in inter-subjective transactions,
whether they consist in buying a bunch of bananas or enunciating utilitarian materialism itself.

This is just as well. For accepting the causal efficacy of reasons enables us to make sense of the programme of experimental science. For in an experiment scientists co-determine an empirical result which, but for their intentional causal agency, would not have occurred; yet which at the same time potentially affords us epistemic access to the real, transfactually efficacious, but normally empirically counterfactual causal structures of the world. (Transfactual thus underpins counterfactual truth.) This furnishes us with a transcendental deduction of emergence, at least for the human realm, which at the same time functions as an immanent critique of scientistic reductionist materialism. But it is furthermore of philosophical significance in two respects. First, insofar as it is inconsistent with the ontological actualism, regularity determinism and spatio-temporal block universalism (which I shall henceforth shorten to blockism) with which reductionism has normally been associated. Thus, for instance, determinism, as it is normally understood, viz. in the Humean-Laplacean manner, such that knowledge is possible so that 'the future is present to our eyes', can be seen to rest on a naive actualist ontology of laws (the antinomies of which will in due course be fully exposed), and is posited on supposing that because an event at time \( t \), was causal (say, at \( t + t \)) to happen, it was bound (e.g. at \( t - t \)) to happen before it is caused — a confusion of ontological determination with epistemological predetermination, unwarranted in an open system constituted by irreducible alterities — other-beings, as important to the critique of irrealist dialectics as non-beings are to irrealism generally.* Second, it is significant in that it links 1M causally efficacious determination to 2E transformative negation (and the critique of actualism to that of monovalence). In a moment I am going to connect causal efficacy with what I am going to call a 'rhythmic' defined as a tensed process in space-time. And just as causal powers are processes-entitied-in-products, we could say causality is transformative negation in processual (rhythmic) determination. It could be asked why are the pivotal concepts of change and agency being neglected? They are not. For agency is intentional causality and consists in efficacious absenting. Nor is 3L being left out of the picture. For an absenting alienation, absented alienation, splitting
detotalization or split-off can exercise a causal effect, and in §7 I shall systematically discuss the intra-active and mediating holistic causality typical of a totality.

In a multi-determined, multi-levelled, multi-linear, multi-relational, multi-angular, multi-perspectival, multiply determined and open pluriverse, emergence situates the widespread phenomena of dual, multiple, complex and open control. Thus typically, in our zone of being, higher-order agencies set the boundary conditions for the operation of lower-order laws. Thus in contemporary capitalist society it is economic considerations which explain when, where and how the physical principles engaged in engineering are put to use (or held in abeyance). This principle also offers keys to the unravelling of the old Marxian conundrum of the 'superstructures'. On Model A we can readily say that it is the relations of production which determine the boundary conditions for the operation and development of the forces of production, and similarly for the relationship between polity and economy. On Model B, in which we envisage the superstructure as infrastructure, that is, formed within the base level, we can argue that it is the latter which provides the framework principles for, or conditions of possibility of, the 'higher' level which may complexify, be supervenient on or relatively autonomous from the base level or, one could say, the totality or whole in which it is interiorized. Thus, deploying Model B, the politics of the new world disorder or the spread of postmodernist culture can be seen as occurring within the context of global capitalist commodification, both figuratively and literally — and, as already remarked, there is no reason why these models should not be deployed concurrently.

Emergence entails both stratification and change. So far I have concentrated on emergent entities and causal powers. But if, as I have already argued, all changes are spatio-temporal, and space-time is a relational property of the meshwork of material beings, this opens up the phenomena of emergent spatio-temporalities. There are two paradigms here, both instantiated in reality: (a) they could be relata of a new (emergent) system of material things and/or (b) they could be new (emergent) relata of a pre-existing system of material things. In either event they establish new 'rhythms', where a rhythmic is just the spatio-temporal efficacy of the process. (In a Wittgensteinian family circle, process can then be regarded as spatialized tensing, the mode of becoming [as absenting] or [plain] absenting of effects.) A rhythmic may be transfactual or actual, positive or negative (i.e. an inefficacy), intra-active or inter-active, agentive or not (corresponding to 1M–4D). If a substance is paradigmatically a thing, a rhythmic may be substantial or non-substantial (where the non-substantial is
aligned under the class of non-being-mediated). If it is non-substantial, then the causal rhythmic of a process must, and even if it is substantial it may (cf. [b] above), be reckoned to be a sui generis causal power of space-time itself. Space-time thus takes on, potentially, a fivefold character as: (a) a reference grid, (b) a measure, (c) a set of prima facie mutual exclusion relations, (d) a potentially emergent (cf. [c]) property, perhaps with causal powers of its own, and (e) a generally entropic process. Eventually I will want to tie space, time and causality very closely, around the theorem of the reality and irreducibility of (always potentially spatializing) tense and the potential and typical spatio-temporality (and hence processuality) of all causal efficacy in the definition of process as the mode of absenting which is the becoming and begoing of effects.

In the meantime, for those who doubt the propriety of such a close linkage (and emphasis on spatio-temporal process), just ponder the extent to which emergent social things (people, institutions, traditions) not only presuppose (that is to say, are dependent on) but also are existentially constituted by (as a crucial part of their essence) or merely contain (as part of their proprium or accident, to drop into scholastic vocabulary for a moment) their geo-histories (and, qua empowered, possibilities for their spatialized futures). In the same way I will argue, when I come to totality and holistic causality, that emergent social things are existentially constituted by or contain their relations, connections and interdependencies with other social (and natural) things. This is 3L territory. For the moment I want to stick with 2E spatio-temporalities. Constitutive geo-history displayed in contemporary rhythmic or in the processual exercise of accumulated causal powers and liabilities is only one of several ways in which in §8 I will consider the phenomena of the presence of the past (and outside). But just ponder the extent to which although we may live for the future, we live, quite literally, in the past. Generally the phenomenon of emergent spatio-temporalities situates the possibilities of overlapping, intersecting, condensing, elongated, divergent, convergent and even contradictory rhythmic (causal processes) and, by extension, space-time measures (overthrowing, inter alia, the idea of a unitary set of exclusion relations).

In exemplification of this phenomenon let me dwell on intersecting and overlapping times and spaces and times — see Figure 2.2. The last case in the figure shows how discrepant spatio-temporalities can often, but not always, be coordinated either by reference to some explanatory significant loco-periodization or, as here, by reference to a zero-level or base space-time, established by some conventionally agreed (not necessarily physically basic) dating and locating system. As a final example consider the amazing and putatively contradictory juxtaposition or condensation of differentially sedimented rhythmic one can find in a city like Los Angeles or New Delhi, where temples, mosques, traditions, religious rites, weddings, inter-caste conflict, electric cables, motor cars, television sets, rickshaws, scavengers and disposable cans coalesce in a locale.

Indeed specifically conceptual emergence, e.g. as in the a and τ transforms of the epistemological dialectic sketched in C1.9, generally depends upon the exploitation of the past or exterior cognitive resources (once again, Bachelard's 'scientific loans') constituting so much conceptual bricolage. But it may also be effected by means of a perspectival switch, the formation of a new Gestalt, level or order of coherence without any additional input. Emergence is, of course, also necessary for the intelligibility of the actual working of the Hegelian dialectic, which operates merely by filling in, or absenting the absence of, what is from a higher-order perspective a level-specific void. And although in the end Hegel cannot sustain it, this, as Marx famously remarked but insufficiently explained, does give the basic form or essence of many, if not all, dialectics. Emergent entities are, of course, as already remarked, one kind of totality, constituted by the internal relationality of their aspects. This raises the question of the limits or boundaries of an emergent totality. Is it, for instance, an organism, upon whose 'internal teleology' so much of the plausibility of Hegelian ontology intuitively rests; or is it rather the organism in its Umwelt or environment constituted at least in part by the various ' affordances' the environment offers for the organism in question? In general one can resolve the problem of the individuation and articulation of an emergent entity and its various aspects only by reference to the explanatory power of the theory which a particular découpage permits. This, in turn, will depend to a degree upon our explanatory purposes. However, this does not subjectivize explanation in science (or everyday existence), for what I will call the 'reality principle' (invoking its Freudian ancestry) imposes

| Intersecting spaces: Pavements used for sleeping; sofa-beds; table/desks |
| Intersecting times: the Queen's speech written by the Prime Minister's press officer (with advice from an advertising firm) opening Parliament in the House of Lords |
| Overlapping spaces: residencies, offices and factories within the same locale |
| Overlapping times: constitutional procedure, political power, economic process, 'fashion' |

1690 1790 1890 1990

Figure 2.2
its own stratification on science and lay life. Dialectical critical realism sees totalities within totalities (but studded with blocks, partitions and distance) recursively. But they are by no means all, or normally, of the Hegelian, pervasively internally relational, let alone centrist, expressivist and teleological kind. Rather they are punctuated by alterities, shot through with spaces, criss-crossed by traces and connected by all manner of negative, external and contingent as well as positive, internal and necessary determinations and relationships, the exact form of which it is up to science to fathom. Similarly, as we shall now see, not all dialectical connections are contradictory and not all dialectical contradictions are or depend upon logical contradictions in the way I have argued Hegel’s paradigmatically do.

§ 3 Contradiction I: Hegel and Marx

In Cl.9 I isolated the motive force that logical contradiction plays in Hegelian dialectic (at least in theory) in heralding the expansion of the existing conceptual field. But by juxtaposing Marx to Hegel I want to show that logical contradiction is not the same as dialectical contradiction, although the two classes intersect. Moreover, by no means all dialectics depend upon contradiction, and even less violate the logical norms of identity and non-contradiction. First I want to examine contradiction in its widest compass.

The concept of contradiction may be used as a metaphor (like that of force in physics) for any kind of dissonance, strain or tension. However, it first assumes a clear meaning in the case of human action, which may then be extended to goal-oriented action, and thence, by a further move, to any action at all. Here it specifies a situation which permits the satisfaction of one end or more generally hold between structures which are internally related, i.e. existentially presuppose one another.

External contradictions - constraints - would appear to be pervasive — indeed, exemplified by the laws and constraints of nature (such as the speed of light), to be established by the mere fact of determinate spatio-temporal being. But, of course, it does not follow from the condition that every being is constrained, that every particular constraint on a being is absolute or necessary. This should go without saying. Only a blanket actualism would deny it. How about internal contradictions? Their possibility is directly situated by the phenomena of emergent entities (which is why I interposed my discussion of §2), internally related grounded ensembles and totalities generally. However, leaving this aside, it could be argued that for the very fact of change to be possible, even if the source is exogenous, there must be a degree of internal ‘complicity’ within the thing to the change: that is, in that it must, in virtue of its nature, be ‘liable’ to the change, so as not to be impervious to its source, and so must possess a counter-conative tendency in respect of the condition changed, which may be more or less essential to the thing’s identity. (By definition in such a case — of change, not demise — it must also possess a conative one.) Only unchanging, ultimately eternal, things would lack such a tendency, and such things would seem to have to be or contain everywhere everywhen — a Spinozan monism or Leibnizian monadism. In any case this establishes the most basic kind of existential contradiction: finitude. Spatio-temporal location may seem an external constraint, but insofar as it is the fate — condition of being — of such things to perish, i.e. to be limited in extent, it must be reckoned an internal contradiction, even though their extent and duration be entirely contingent. When we turn to human life, existential contradiction may assume the mantle of standing oppositions between mind and body, fact and fancy, desire and desired, power and need, Eros and Thanatos, master and slave, self-determination and subjugation.

Formal logical contradiction is a type of internal contradiction, whose consequence for the subject, unless the terms are redescribed and/or the discursive domain is expanded (as happens in Hegelian dialectic), is axiological indeterminacy: ‘A and -A’ leaves the course of action (including belief) indeterminate, or, at least if relevance, contextual, spatio-temporal and normic constraints are imposed, underdetermined; and so subverts the intentionality, and, ceteris paribus, the rationality, of any praxis that would be founded on, or informed by, it. Such axiological indeterminacy in the intrinsic, intentional or normative aspect of social life is quite consistent with a determinate intrinsitive result, especially if the agent must act — that is to say, if what I have elsewhere described as the ‘axiological imperative’.

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