Eidos volume 6 no. 1 (2022)
A JOURNAL FOR PHILOSOPHY OF CULTURE

DOI: 10.14394/eidos.jpc.2022.0003

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Infinity Now! Speculative Philosophy and Addiction

Abstract
This essay is an attempt to look at the existential phenomenon of being addicted from the perspective of speculative philosophy. The starting point is the description of Walter Benjamin's narcotic experiences. Further in my considerations I am guided by the Kantian categories of the dialectics of pure reason, with particular emphasis on transcendental ideas. However, only the philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel along with the concepts of *desire* and *habit* allows us to comprehend addiction as a wild and unbridled desire for life, taken over by a dead scheme, by a mechanism, automatism. It is in this behavior, and only in it, that we constantly become aware of ourselves, lose ourselves to the specified objectification, obtain finite satisfaction, and repeat that deadness – this what addiction precisely is according to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. Hegel links it with an attitude of "stubborn subjectivity" that clings to the limits of its solipsistic finiteness, to the "bad infinity" and seeks satisfaction within its borders. In this way, the German philosopher links addictive behavior with the structure of dialectics itself.

Keywords:
addiction, dialectic, speculative philosophy, finitude, bad infinity, happiness, Benjamin, Kant, Hegel

1. A Pop-Sci Introduction

From an amateurish, or – if we are optimistic – a popular-science point of view, things could possibly look as follows: in the course of their evolution, humans have acquired the ability to shape their behavior in a specific

and yet complex way. However, what motivates us to take any conscious action at all appears to be quite a simple mechanism, known as the reward mechanism, within which we encounter a kind of dance between neurotransmitters. In *Homo sapiens*, the motivation to take action is generated by dopamine, a neurotransmitter responsible for motivation, desire, willingness, an endeavor. It is dopamine that promises us and demands fulfilment, governs ambition and determination, and defines the horizon of our pursuits (even if, it has to be said, it is mainly about food and procreation). Without dopamine, one lacks willpower and does not want to want. However, by itself dopamine does not produce bliss but rather excitement and anticipation of *more* pleasure, a sensation of goose bumps when we know that in a short while something is about to happen that might let us not want anymore and allow us to relax. And since one cannot live by mere tensions, even the most exhilarating ones, the thoughtful ape also needed to experience the taste of the fruit of paradise: it needed a genuine reward to fight and die for. In our simplified and schematic account, a sheer, self-absorbed pleasure is produced by a number of other neurotransmitters and hormones (e.g., oxytocin, and anandamide), but we can refer to it by a single, eponimic term which is deeply rooted in the common consciousness – serotonin (although serotonin serves many other purposes, for example it is involved in vomiting). It is serotonin that is supposed to ensure the eagerly awaited fulfilment, for example, a sense of social recognition. It is serotonin that makes it possible for the brain, once the latter is bathed in it, to calm down, get satiated and feel at home in the world – a world which henceforth is no longer defined by the horizon of desires, but by the depth of feeling.

In addiction the process producing tension that constrains us and molds our actions (dopamine) and releasing this tension into harmony with the world with the individual, experienced as pleasure (serotonin), is "disrupted." In fact, it can be said that the chaotic flow of mutations propelling evolution has endowed individuals with a slightly different profile of sensitivity to the effects of neurotransmitters and hormones. And it is exactly this increased "sensitivity" of the elements of the reward system observed in some individuals, or – to put it in other terms – this overly unconstrained or effective operation of this system, that can ultimately lead to "misalignment." It appears that the amount of pleasure (serotonin) offered by certain habitual behaviors or ingested substances, as well as the radical shortening of the pleasure pathway (which is affected by both impulsivity and anxiety-proneness of the person in question), causes the previously flexible brain to fixate and freeze (dopamine) on a particular substance or behavior. The frontal lobes, among other things responsible for planning and postponement, are incapable of successful negotiation with the reward system fixated on a particular pleasure, and give up. The addiction becomes the most "rational" choice from the biochemical viewpoint – it is the most efficient and fastest way to satisfy the brain's primary criteria of how to survive. If, ultimately, we are driven by some kind of pursuit of fulfilment, why not take a shortcut – a more efficient, less energy-intensive route to achieve it? Indeed, rather than a "structural" disruption of the reward mechanism, what we are dealing with here is its ultimate exploitation and "chemical improvement." As part of addiction, the reward system functions even better, stronger, and faster than in a healthy person, but mainly because it is already working in an autotelic manner and as if detached from the rest of the organism, outside its homeostasis, in a sense for its own sake.

After all, the evolutionarily developed pleasure center knows nothing about survival whose "purposes" it is supposed to serve. It does its job to the best of its ability, without delays or postponements – it produces excitement and gratification. Its only disease under addiction is what it was designed to do – the provision of a framework for pleasure and pleasure-seeking. Hence, the more our actual survival is threatened, the more effective is the operation of the core mechanism that motivates us to meet survival demands, in other words how much more efficiently it confines us to the realm of reproduction of pleasure (the only message our brain perceives as "you are now well equipped for survival"). To be addicted is to fall ill with pleasure – with the very essence of what presents itself to the brain as a life well lived. And if at some point in life a person decides that

it is time for another dose, the motivation system is in no position to influence that decision – what it can do, at most, is to effectively, by means of the evolutionarily acquired ability to experience pleasure, motivate us to ingest the dose.

This account of addiction, inadequate in scientific terms because of its oversimplification, nonetheless corresponds to a popular intuition which claims to represent the truth. I would like to preserve this intuition, despite its arrogance, and give it the floor, but this time not in the language of popular science but in the language of dialectical philosophy. Why? And why is it worth to write speculatively on addiction? On the one hand, the intuitively sensed dialectic of "tension" and "pleasure," as schematically described above, actually seems to say something significant about addiction. On the other, the dialectic itself demands to have a voice in a speculative project.

Yet is it not a trick of ignorance which favors philosophy over the lack of other competences since it cannot withstand scientism and its claims? Even if this is true, it is still a good idea to listen to a possible "dialectical interpretation of addiction," as even if it does not have anything interesting to say on addiction, it nevertheless may reveal something interesting about speculative philosophy itself, or more broadly, about thinking (for which the frontal lobe, the center of postponement but also of conformism, is supposedly responsible).

2. Benjamin on Hashish

Be it as it may, I cannot so hastily abandon the dominant, scientific (or popular-scientific) outlook. There is a need for an intermediary, someone who can be suspected of having a speculative inclination while at the same time who is clearly immersed in the subject matter, in the *empiria*.

Indeed, as part of his dedication to the said study, one of the leading dialectical philosophers of the twentieth century, Walter Benjamin, used drugs in the 1920s, mainly hashish and opium, and wrote down his experiences.[1] During one of such sessions, Benjamin revealed three "secrets of hashish" to witnesses. The second of these secrets, after being revealed, he spitefully did not allow to make a note of, whereas the other two tell us roughly that the hashish has obviously started to work and that there is nothing more he – Benjamin – needs (i.e., it feels good to be drawn by something bigger which wanders as clouds in the heavenly canopy).[2] These three great secrets were disclosed by Benjamin while being at the heart of hashish, as such as he declared in the same session that he literally *was* the hashish.[3] Thus, we are confronted with a testimony coming from within the drug itself – three truths, one silent, but the other two communicate clearly and comprehensively this: that the drug is good and it is good to take it. That, in principle, is what the drug has to tell us at this point in its eloquent revelation.

For Benjamin, it is difficult even to imagine in this state that one could want anything else but hashish, as he writes in a rather paradoxical passage:

> A primary motive of addiction in very many instances is this: to enhance the addict's suitability in the struggle for existence. And this goal is by no means a fictive one… . One can surmise that in the course of the alterations which the toxin engenders, it also interrupts a pattern of behavior which for the most part hinders the individual. Unkindness, fanaticism about being correct, and pharisaism are traits which one only seldom encounters in addicts. Add to this a sedative effect of

1) Benjamin, *On Hashish*.

2) Ibid.

3) Ibid.

> the toxin, so long as its potency lasts, and not the minutest factor is able to justify the conviction that there could be virtually nothing significant or worthwhile in taking the toxin.[4]

Nothing compares to the toxin, writes Benjamin, and actually from a certain point of view it is impossible not to admit that he is right; in fact, one could even propose a preliminary definition of what is addictive – it is something so "significant and worthwhile" that nothing can match it, as well as of addiction itself – it is a state in which one discovers a certain constant which is so "significant and worthwhile" that nothing can match it. The toxin and the happiness it provides becomes the addict's purpose, pushing out evolutionary survival; happiness becomes an end in itself, no longer just a stimulus. And, according to Benjamin, another name for this infinite happiness – death – is a "zone which surrounds the *rausch*."[5] So far everything is in place.

At the same time, the main reason that motivates Benjamin to use hashish, opium, mescaline, and so forth, is, as we read in the first sentence of the passage quoted above, to enhance our suitability in the struggle for existence. How does the dimming experience of happiness-death benefit our struggle for existence? Certainly, one can consider this passage as one of the many rationalizations used by an addict to glamourize his submission to the drug. Nevertheless, given the fact that one can become addicted not only through recreational but also through task-oriented consumption of psychoactive substances, it is worthwhile to consider what this riddle is actually about. A drug enables an addict, for example to work better, and it also makes it possible for us to reach a point where we do not need to work anymore, actually where we do not need to do anything because everything seems to fit us. In the words of Benjamin – "still the same world – and yet one has patience."[6] Thus, it is surprising that this condition of patience with the world, which allows one not to struggle anymore, is at the same time recognized by Benjamin as supporting the struggle for existence: coping with the world, facing it, and so on. This is all the more remarkable because elsewhere we read the following (which testifies to Benjamin's expertise in the subject):

> The first difficult impairment which took place was the inability to make plans in advance. When we examine it closer it is astonishing that we are capable of making plans from one day to the next, i.e. beyond our usual daydreams. Very difficult to have the dreams (or the rausch) on hashish at one's disposal.[7]

Therefore, on the one hand we have an enhancement of our readiness to struggle for existence. On the other hand, the inability to even plan rationally, or even to think about the future whatsoever.

We are all here and now, in a present moment which no longer demands anything of us. And simultaneously we are fully stimulated to act, we feel our chemically uplifted potential, we experience our existence as vibrant and desirous of fulfilment, while the world to our surprise, presents itself to us as already accomplished, mythically complete. There is nothing left to do, no reason to change anything. There are no limitations. All the energy bursting in us dissolves in contemplation of the delicacy of ornaments, *flânerie*, childish joy, eccentricities, and oblivion. This narcotic entanglement – of desire and fulfilment – as recorded by Benjamin can be understood as a certain sophisticated, dialectical image. And to see it, we must see what the dialectic itself is.

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4) Ibid., 83–84.

5) Ibid., 121. Emphasis added to distinguish a foreign word.

6) Ibid., 216.

7) Ibid., 107.

3. Kant on Disposition

Kant's critique of pure reason as a part of speculative thought is ultimately an unceasingly worked-through (on practical grounds) antinomy between the scattered world of the senses and that which differs from the world. As Kant himself wrote in his "Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectics":

> Thus if … one asks, first, whether there is something that is distinct from the world and contains the basis of the world order and of the coherence thereof according to universal laws, then the answer is: without doubt. For the world is a sum of appearances; hence there must be some basis of these appearances that is transcendental, i.e., thinkable only for the pure understanding. If the question is, second, whether this being is substance, and of the greatest reality, and necessary, etc., then I answer that this question has no signification.[8]

The austere reliability of this expression covers an existential drama. We know that the machine of our reason builds what is beyond the world and provides it with content to form transcendental ideas. These ideas are the universe, the soul, and God. Following Kant, we can think of them as the most perfect rules for the unification of our knowledge, as rules for the application of our principles of intellect. Yet, the questions of whether there really is such an entity as a soul or God are not even so much without answer, as simply meaningless. What for many people is of the greatest metaphysical interest, for Kant of this quotation, as for the neo-positivist scientist, is irrelevant, an issue not actually worth dealing with. Moreover, in *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant seems to suggest that any transcendental use of these holistic ideas does not arise from existential risk or even curiosity, but is rather a result of an unreflective mistake or deception. For Kant, hypostasizing "*merely* a rule" into a form which may be an object of experience – that is, the desire for a direct experience of oneness rather than a oneness mediated by things – may stem either from *ignava ratio*, that is lazy reason[9] (that is simply confused and takes shortcuts), or because of *perversa ratio*, that is inverted reason[10] (which commits intellectual fraud by mixing the conditioned with the conditioning). According to Kant, there is no space here for the cognitive subject's keen interest in what seems to be the most intriguing thing in the edifice of our rationality – what is and how to genuinely get to know the absolute foundation of our cognition. If cognition consists in unification, and this is also the job of the intellect following the guidance of reason, then why is the greatest unity, meeting the highest criteria of rationality, delegated from the very beginning beyond the limits of experience as a mere regulative formula, and not something that we can experience beyond the limits of our experience? And, in turn, what could such an experience look like? Would it be a possible experience or rather an experience of consciousness? For reason, this may be a kind of offence, but for the individual this is a pivotal question.

But the intellectual integrity of the wise man from Königsberg made him admit at the very outset of the chapter on the dialectic of pure reason that we are indeed facing here a deeper problem than just mistakes or deceptions. The transcendental illusion – namely the substantial and real existence of the object of a transcendental idea – although identified as an illusion, a mistake, fraud, paralogism, or antinomy, does not disappear and continues to haunt our reason like a ghost:

8) Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 657.

9) Ibid., 654.

10) Ibid.

> Hence the transcendental dialectic will settle for uncovering the illusion of transcendent judgments, and for simultaneously keeping it from deceiving us. But that the illusion should even vanish as well … and cease to be an illusion-this the transcendental dialectic can never accomplish. For here we are dealing with a natural and unavoidable illusion that itself rests on subjective principles and posits them on us as objective ones… . Hence there is a natural and unavoidable dialectic of pure reason … a dialectic that attaches to human reason unpreventably and that, even after we have uncovered this deception, still will not stop hoodwinking and thrusting reason incessantly into momentary aberrations that always need to be removed.[11]

This ever-recurring error was finally recognized by Kant not as some contingent, mechanical overlapping of the transcendent and the transcendental, but as an integral constituent of human cognition. Already in *Prolegomena* the problem of the attitude of reason – which by its very nature transcends its boundaries – has earned itself a name: "metaphysical disposition." As initially noted by Kant: "there yet remains a problem worthy of inquiry, which is to find out the natural ends intended by this disposition to transcendent concepts in our reason, because everything that lies in nature must be originally intended for some useful purpose."[12]

Kant manages to find this alleged "useful purpose" for our everyday transgressions. It is the pedagogical diversion of human reason from what is finite and sensory to what is beyond, what is supra-sensory and thus sublime and moral. But even this hostile seizure of dialectics by Kant does not eliminate the question about the structure of this natural, but not entirely pathological, tendency to transcend boundaries:

> That the human spirit will ever give up metaphysical researches is as little to be expected as that we should prefer to give up breathing altogether, in order to avoid inhaling impure air. There will, therefore, always be metaphysics in the world; nay, everyone, especially every reflective man, will have it and, for want of a recognized standard, will shape it for himself after his own pattern. What has hitherto been called metaphysics cannot satisfy any critical mind, but to forego it entirely is impossible; therefore a critique of pure reason itself must now be attempted or, if one exists, investigated and brought to the full test, because there is no other means of supplying this pressing want which is something more than mere thirst for knowledge.[13]

The problem of a certain natural disposition, which evidently has something to do with the essence of our cognition and thinking, was the subject to which Kant devoted his third Critique.

Without a doubt, the Analytic of the Sublime is one of the most famous and dramatic attempts in Western European philosophy to salvage sensuality. After having banished what is natural (happiness) outside the margin of morality Kant, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, realized that detaching human subjectivity from the natural world (pleasure) would bring the individual into a complete stupor. That is, if we only act in line with our dispositions, and these are pathological and egoistic, then how can we act morally if morality excludes our dispositions, and therefore also our actions? In the face of this problem, Kant had to reach a dialectical compromise and propose a solution that would mediate between the "good will," which corresponds to the moral law, and subjective motives. This solution is a specific emotion, something natural but at the same time non-direct, already mediated, and an emotion that is not pathological but "moral" – and this is respect:

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11) Ibid., 350.

12) Kant, *Prolegomena*, 95.

13) Ibid., 101.

> The moral law strikes down self-conceit … and inasmuch as it even strikes down self-conceit, i.e., humbles it, the moral law is an object of the greatest respect and thus also the basis of a positive feeling that is not of empirical origin and is cognized a priori. Therefore respect for the moral law is a feeling that is brought about by an intellectual basis, and this feeling is the only one that we cognize completely a priori and the necessity of which we can have insight into.[14]

Not forgetting the "metaphysical disposition" as a motivator of our thinking, Kant tried to mitigate its transgressive and non-moral nature by attributing to it the status of a relation toward the unconditioned. To the extent that the unconditioned is understood as free, this relation can be called respect. The latter is, on the one hand the attraction and joy of being a moral subject, and on the other hand the fear that our natural drive-propelled side, the one interested in happiness under the governance of the sensual rule of self-love, will find its end in respect. Because obviously, happiness is not the aim of respect. On the contrary, the deeper humiliation we experience from maxims based on the imperative, the better for us as moral beings. In general, happiness, due to its being particularistic and empirically contingent, can never be considered as an element of morality, whose principle is generality and universality. In the words of Kant: "there couldn't be an imperative that in the strict sense commanded us to do what makes for happiness, because happiness is an ideal not of reason but of imagination, depending only on empirical grounds."[15]

Transcending nature, one's self has no content – it is precisely the drive toward the content-less, to that which is not yet human, which can bring hope that things not allowed by determined nature are possible. And while this transcending is managed by reason, it is the source of moral feeling, conscience, and good will. But reason is incapable of harnessing the powers underlying thinking and transcending. The urge to think an absolute totality, beyond the limitations of intellect, reason and sensuality, inevitably misaligns the machine of rationality. The object of alleged respect – the unconditioned – imposes itself too overwhelmingly on the mind for it to introduce any order into our relation to what is, after all, divine. There is no guarantee that this foundation of our freedom demands precisely respect, and not an orgasmic union. What is more, the *emotional* side of respect which was to consist merely in facilitating the determination of our will by the moral law, can still in spite of everything, be understood as something that plays a disconcertingly prominent role in Kant's anti-naturalistic and anti-hedonistic moral thought. Respect was meant to be beyond the feelings of pleasure and displeasure and yet it is still somehow contaminated by a negative pleasure. Hence, in the last critique Kant somewhat revises his understanding of respect and also of the unconditioned, above all in their relation to pleasure. By doing so, the last critique frees itself from content resonance and opens philosophical thought to the possibility of speculation.

As we know, the unconditioned is tantamount to transcendental ideas, but now we can reflect on them beyond the imposed content (they are not necessarily "soul, universe, God"). In *Critique of Judgment*, Kant is more interested in the formal dimension of ideas than in their subsequent "practical" application, and the formal structure in consideration is simply a thought of infinity as totality. Thus, in addition to the idea of reason, all ideological creations that correspond in structural terms to the mind's determination of how the unconditioned is to present itself to us (e.g., the idea of transcendental imagination, i.e., happiness) can also be understood as proper transcendental ideas.

But then – what is an idea devoid of content, as it presents itself by itself as part of the operation of cognitive powers?

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14) Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 97.

15) Kant, *Groundwork*, 22.

And so Kant writes: "there is in our imagination a striving to advance to the infinite, while in our reason there lies a claim to absolute totality, as to a real idea."[16]

Thus, an idea is an absolute totality, infinity as a given. It is what imagination, which transcends subsequent generalizations, aims for. Imagination itself is nothing else than the power of transcending from what is general to what is detailed (determining imagination) and from what is detailed to what is general (reflective imagination). Imagination allows us to associate notions of various abstraction levels, to transgress the boundaries of their meaning which means it allows us to create judgments – it allows us to think. Indeed, thinking is nothing else than a process of combining and unifying data in line with a rule. And in this case, this rule is constituted – only and exclusively – by the formal whole: "now the proper unalterable basic measure of nature is its absolute whole, which, in the case of nature as appearance, is infinity comprehended."[17]
The original source of this rule, its measure and criterion, is reason. This whole is at the same time to be something absolute, something that rules out exceptions, and something that makes it impossible to conceive anything greater than it. At the same time, however, the human mind must in some way experience this whole, or at least think of it without contradiction. This in turn, is a job of imagination which is governed by the conditions provided by reason. But imagination cannot rest on any whole because rest does not belong to its nature.

This conflict of absolute totality and progression *ad infinitum* constitutes the very formal structure of every transcendental idea. Such ideas are living paradoxes, the totality of "progression toward infinity" given here and now in its entirety, at once.

This persistence of our mind in a paradox, in the hiatus between the urge to transcend and the idea of what is absolutely transcendent, this "impossibility of thinking the infinite as even given,"[18] is now referred to by Kant as respect: "the feeling of the inadequacy of our capacity for the attainment of an idea that is a law for us is respect."[19]

Thus, respect is now a much more dynamic, energetic intention of the subject toward the unattainable. It does not represent a mere submission to the law, but a complex of tension toward the unconditioned which turns into pure pleasure resulting from the death of the sensual power of transcending (imagination), and the relocation of the subject into the universe of what is not fully rational, but highly pleasurable. Therefore, respect is only by name a distanced contemplation of the imperative – within the critique of aesthetic judgment, respect is experienced as sublimity, and this means that it is a desire for pleasure which is lethal to the intellect:

> The feeling of the sublime is thus a feeling of displeasure from the inadequacy of the imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude for the estimation by means of reason, and a pleasure that is thereby aroused at the same time from the correspondence of this very judgment of the inadequacy of the greatest sensible faculty in comparison with ideas of reason, insofar as striving for them is nevertheless a law for us… . Thus the inner perception of the inadequacy of any sensible standard for the estimation of magnitude by reason corresponds with reason's laws, and is a displeasure that arouses the feeling of our supersensible vocation in us.[20]

16) Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, 134.

17) Ibid., 139.

18) Ibid., 143.

19) Ibid., 140.

20) Ibid., 141.

On the basis of its inherent activity – transcending – the mind develops a dialectical idea of something which cannot be transcended, a kind of paradoxical "speculation." It is an idea which becomes an object of desire for the power of transcending – the imagination seeks to visualize in an instant what can only be grasped as a series of intuitions, as a process, as a history. The imagination, however, does not care about these things. In its strained transcendence toward the rational idea of total infinity it desires only one thing: to experience in a human way that which is absolutely beyond the limit, that which is Other, and which promises double pleasure and death of the finite and inadequate. And moreover, to experience it now. The sublime is a prelude to this experience, a tension-filled state of excitement and desire in which every dialectical subjectivity has to some extent found itself.

In the end, what the mind desires here is pleasure derived from experiencing its own power. It is the surge of energy when we experience the *impossibility* of experience, the "little death" of imagination, and yet we are still alive. When we transcend the finite and freeze in the stupor of pleasure, in that as Kant wrote, "movement" which "may be compared to a vibration, i.e., to a rapidly alternating repulsion from and attraction to one and the same object."[21]

Is it therefore the case that the transcendental imagination – and with it, our entire subjectivity – is concerned precisely with experiencing such a movement, such a living antinomy? Is this the happiness that was to be its *idee fixe*? Is it, for the transcendental imagination, something so significant and worthwhile that nothing can match it: this enchanted dance of neurotransmitters, exciting dopamine and blissful serotonin? This desire to experience as deeply and as frequently as possible the paradoxical, even if illusory, conjunction of impossibility with omnipotence, tension with relaxation, controlled loss of the senses with the resulting pleasure? Does not Benjamin, smoking hashish and bragging about his patience with the world – this morgue of meanings – think exactly along the lines of the Kantian transcendental imagination? Does not thinking then – to the extent it is speculative, and therefore critical and always under threat from the ideology of totality – have the same objective as an addicted human being? To yearn in a Fichtean manner, to oscillate and to experience again, if only for a brief moment, that spasmodic epiphany when everything fits together? The intellectual intuition of infinity as a totality?

Well, at least one eminent philosopher with an outstandingly speculative mindset had the courage to say no, it is more than that.

4. Hegel on Habit

In Kantian philosophy, not only did the "sensual" nature of speculative thinking become defined in its dialectic, but in the analytic of respect the stake of this thinking finally found its expression: the dialectical negative pleasure, the transcendent "high," and the experience of a realm beyond the rational order which at the same time is assumed to be the condition of the possibility of experience in general.

Thus, the power of judgment organizes subjective intentions and "causations" – desire, pleasure, hope, respect, stubbornness – and endows them with both practical and theoretical qualities. Practical: as the transcendental imagination now desires itself in its totality while it is condemned to its endless parts which delineate the moral and existential conflict of the subject. Theoretical: because the power of judgment constructs and at the same time orientates itself toward a certain object that it wants to experience and explore, a transcendental idea of "infinity now!", but at the same time it cannot embrace this object with experience. This involvement of the power of judgment in creating its limits and transcending them results in its fundamentally paradoxical

21) Ibid.

nature. The subject's structures are imprinted with the desire for everything, in practical and theoretical terms, even though these very structures confine us to finite intuitions, to a finite practice and a finite theory.

This paradox, however, even if it underlies the common discourse of addiction and dialectics, is not sufficient. To speak of addiction, not only the dialectic of pleasure is needed, but also something more. How does an abstract, universal and undetermined hunger for everything become a concrete, particular desire for the one and only which is so significant and worthwhile that nothing can match it?

The question of addiction in the context of dialectics cannot be addressed without reference to Hegel. Having in mind everything that has been discussed above, it is worth turning to the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* in which Hegel writes explicitly about these issues. Nevertheless, before we do so, we must not overlook a work that sets a certain standard in the Hegelian legacy as far as the understanding of desire is concerned, namely *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Here desire appears in the context of life; and it is, moreover, a certain modality of life – to be more precise, a subjective manner of living and experiencing the idea of life. What is life itself? As Hegel writes: "this simple infinity, or the absolute Notion, may be called the simple essence of life, the soul of the world, the universal blood, whose omnipresence is neither disturbed nor interrupted by any difference, but rather is itself every difference, as also their supersession; it pulsates within itself but does not move, inwardly vibrates, yet is at rest."[22]

Life is a constantly changing sum of overlapping, interfering, and mutually disrupting movements within a whole, wherein differences are generated and sublated. It is where life realizes itself. However, within these intrinsically peaceful dynamics, an element of this composite movement appears which is able to relate to itself and to recognize some particular complex of movements and tensions as itself, as its own. This moment, the emergence of self-consciousness, draws at the same time a certain limit which self-consciousness, if it is to remain itself, must respect at least in nominal terms. Thus, the arrival of the "I" is immediately felt by that "I" as a loss of the all-encompassing world of life, as a restriction, as a detachment. In this manner, desire is born – at first it is an intention that under the pretext of nostalgia for the lost totality, reconstructs its own object (i.e. this totality of life), but not in its real immanent dynamics, which is lost, but as an external given, an external boundlessness. A boundlessness which is beyond the "I" is its negation, but also complementary to it, forming a certain affirmative, unattainable totality together with the "I." Understood in this way, the subject's desire is first focused on the supposedly lost unrestricted life, and it is life's boundless totality that the subject wants to experience and assimilate in some objective form.

> The simple "I" is this genus or the simple universal, for which the differences are not differences only by its being the negative essence of the shaped independent moments; and self-consciousness is thus certain of itself only by superseding this other that presents itself to self-consciousness as an independent life; self-consciousness is Desire.[23]

The desiring self-consciousness wants life – it desires to live the totality of life. But its reference to the Other, which in this case is only "the objective idea of life," is negative and appropriative. Every movement beyond itself toward the living object ends in death – either death of the object in its objectivity, or death of desire. In the latter case, it is the subject that meets its ends; in the former case, desire reproduces itself and lasts in its finite infinity.

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22) Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 100.

23) Ibid., 109.

Such a subject, as a reservoir of dull abstract negativity, is the force driving the transformation of self-consciousness forms. And in the world of spirit, it is only due to the stubbornness and maximalism of desire that any meaningful change takes place. Desire serves as fuel for the odyssey of consciousness. This is a lesson learned by Hegel in his criticisms of Kant. However, it is not by chance that desire is here referred to as "dull." Out of itself, desire achieves nothing but death, which is nothing. Since desire is not work, it does not leave any traces; it is unable to restrain itself, to postpone gratification, it does not accept patience and the slavish idea of non-pleasant time, it wants to experience now and here what it dreams of as absolute happiness. Defined as such, desire represents a considerable challenge for the Hegelian system. On the one hand, it is necessary as a reservoir for the power of negativity, while on the other, it does not allow anything to be worked through or sublated, leading the spirit astray into the bad, enumerative infinity. As for bad infinity, here is what Hegel wrote about it in his *Science of Logic*:

> What we have before us is an abstract transcending which remains incomplete because the transcending itself has not been transcended. Before us we have the infinite; of course, this infinite is transcended, for another limit is posited, but just because of that only a return is instead made back to the finite. This bad infinite is in itself the same as the perpetual ought; it is indeed the negation of the finite, but in truth it is unable to free itself from it; the finite constantly resurfaces in it as its other, since this infinite only is with reference to the finite, which is its other. The progress to infinity is therefore only repetitious monotony, the one and the same tedious alternation of this finite and infinite.[24]

The risk of falling into a finite infinity, occurring at every speculative overturn, at every rushing action of desire, is an endlessly recurring problem of speculation. In *Phenomenology*, Hegel demonstrates it in almost every chapter describing forms of consciousness, producing a vivid and educative gallery of ideologies, hypostases, antinomies, and necessary errancies. Nonetheless, considering that we are now talking about desire, it is worth taking a look at what a fixated desire does as a form of *independence and dependence of self-consciousness*.

I have no intention to reiterate here the content of this chapter, which is probably well-known to everyone. What I am interested in is its very ending. This is where Hegel describes a certain historical-psychological possibility: what would happen if in the anxiety (experience of totality) the slave did not experience the assumed totality and his completeness, but only some fragment, some finite, limited element which would become for him a shortcut, a symbol of or simply a cover for this totality, its substitute. "Since the entire contents of its natural consciousness have not been jeopardized, determinate being still in principle attaches to it; having a 'mind of one's own' is stubbornness, a freedom which is still enmeshed in servitude."[25]

This stubbornness consists in the fact that consciousness recognizes the ultimately insurmountable horizon of its own finitude, of its detachment from the whole. It accepts the antinomic nature of the world even though the spirit of time already suggests, that by means of dissolution and change, a new form of oneness is emerging. The stubborn consciousness refuses to let go of its form, even though the latter is already openly a form of sorrow. In anxiety, the consciousness has discovered a restricted, non-autonomous, but above all its own world; one in which it can survive by repeating the same gestures and rituals of desire while experiencing the same thing over and over again and waiting for the end. It is a world troubled by an oppressive desire imposed by the Other, which replicates solipsism of the atomized individual. Thereby, it reproduces the individual's

24) Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 113.

25) Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 119.

suffering and illusory dreams of an inaccessible, unlimited totality as something that can be experienced in immediacy, in a finite form, in some repetitive behavior, and in the affirmation of a transient yet repeatable instant. The stubborn consciousness keeps hold not only of some definite antinomy, not only of some definite function played by the consciousness in this antinomy, but also of some out-of-context concrete, of some part manifested as a whole, and in this *quid pro quo* it keeps insisting on dissolving desire into the finitude of a thing, of a here and now, of a "something." Obviously, this is impossible within the idea of life, so time and again by transcending particular limitations and re-establishing them in desire, the stubborn subject must agree that the transient indulgence in a thing must be intertwined with long moments of a concrete hunger. And it cannot do otherwise. As Hegel writes in *Science of Logic* quoted above: "finitude is the most obstinate of the categories of the understanding… . The understanding persists in this sorrow of finitude, for it makes non-being the determination of things and, at the same time, this non-being imperishable and absolute."[26]

This is what the Hegelian philosophy of desire looks like – it can be interpreted as a multi-dimensional and critical paraphrase of Kant's austere and abstract investigations into disposition and boundaries. The stubborn insistence on "ownness" threatened from everywhere outside, and the simultaneous desire to transcend it into something limitless, where our individual freedom is fully embraced, is the model of dialectical thinking mentioned above, consistent with even a superficial reflection on addiction. However, Hegelian stubbornness is already a manifest example of the fact that an error of the system, an error of the subject-object machine, is virtually inscribed into subjectivity – a possibility for which, as intentional beings, we are condemned. The false infinity, unfolding within the horizon of a certain direct experience of totality, represents a constant clinch into which natural consciousness can fall, driven by desire as a natural form of wanting in general. And it is also the source wherefrom addiction derives the power for its sorcery.

This repeatability of the *motive of stubbornness* of natural consciousness, that is the permanent fixation on one's own finitude in defiance of all the world's wisdom (this repeatability within the stubbornness itself which limits the individual's field of action to a certain narrow sphere of repetition); perhaps all this made Hegel finally refer to this particularity of the subject as mental illness, insanity. This term, in turn, taking into account the whole context of our investigations can easily be understood exactly as addiction.

In *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, the author takes us back to the discourse preceding phenomenology and its dialectic of recognition; here also Hegel wants to deal with the realm *in between* – a realm where a human being is already, at least potentially a human being, but is still completely submerged in the sensual animal world. This is a domain of anthropology where the sentient soul, our present object of interest, dwells and the fundamental aspect of spiritualization of such a merely sentient human subject and its lossless transfer into the domain of generality and spirit is the concept of habit. However, before turning to this concept, Hegel invokes the concept of "feeling of self," present for example, in *Phenomenology*. In that earlier work, he characterizes this moment as follows: "the organism does not produce something but only preserves itself; or, what is produced, is as much already present as produced… . Therefore, what it arrives at through the process of its action is itself; and in arriving only at itself, it obtains its feeling of self."[27]

The feeling of self is a subjectively experienced life in which the moment of individuality; our bodily existence here and now, and the moment of generality, comprehension, abstraction, and generalization, although existing in their unity, are nevertheless meaningless as long as they are not autonomous with respect to each other or with respect to their own totality. In this sense, they blend into one another, exchange, and substitute each other so that the subject is indifferent as to which of the moments is decisive in a given case, because no

26) Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 102.

27) Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 156–57.

moment distinguishes itself to the subject. And they are all only felt as differentiations of themselves, not as a negative difference. The sentient soul, feeling itself and realizing itself in this feeling, is a procession of materially equivalent experiences within which we could think of the "I" accompanying them, although of course, we do not do so. This procession of distinctions, which are not significant and do not yet have the nature of negativity, are as Hegel often puts it, "distinctions, however, which are none."[28]

A structurally identical section is thus echoed by Hegel in the *Encyclopedia*: "Self–feeling, immersed in the detail of the feelings (in simple sensations, and also desires, instincts, passions, and their gratification), is undistinguished from them. But in the self there is latent a simple self–relation of ideality, a nominal universality (which is the truth of these details)."[29]

For the time being, this self is something virtual, assumed, but necessary from the viewpoint of anthropogenesis. As a complementary element of feeling, it is only an empty generality that merely adjoins feeling without negating it. It is a mute consciousness, present and in charge of sensations, but not in the thoughtful way, not consciously, rather like an automaton, and something almost natural. Therefore, the sentient soul is on the one hand, a multitude of sensations that exist in it in a non-relational fashion, like qualities in an inanimate object, but on the other hand, it is a generality that gathers them into one, joins them together into a certain whole, and allows this semi-particular and semi-general conglomerate to last. As commented by Hegel:

> The soul's making itself an abstract universal being, and reducing the particulars of feelings (and of consciousness) to a mere feature of its being is Habit. In this manner the soul has the contents in possession, and contains them in such manner that in these features it is not as sentient, nor does it stand in relationship with them as distinguishing itself from them, nor is absorbed in them, but has them and moves in them, without feeling or consciousness of the fact. The soul is freed from them, so far as it is not interested in or occupied with them.[30]

The void generality of the sentient soul – a seed of the Spirit in the material and sensual – solidifies "sensations" into certain sequences of expressions. These are, on the one hand, pure, living life, while on the other hand – expressions, something devoid of life. This living and at the same time dead state of being of the sentient soul is what Hegel calls habit. In habit, the desire for the infinite that motivates us acquires a concrete form of some action and at the same time ceases to bother us openly.

Habit is a method of dealing with the particularity of our bodily nature. Habit recognizes the substantive oneness of sensuality and generality (non-sensuality). At the same time, this oneness has an active or actual character, to use Hegel's language. Habit brings the definite (the sensual world of concretes) and the indefinite (the sentient soul as a generality of these concretes) into one, but in what way? As Hegel observes: "this process of building up the particular and corporeal expressions of feeling into the being of the soul appears as a repetition of them, and the generation of habit as practice."[31]

Every habit had its beginning in the animal intention to do something, and every act begins with an expected reward – happiness. This original intention is by necessity negative, and as such it establishes an insurmountable boundary between the "desiring animal" and that which it desires – the totality as infinity, permanent happiness. Habit is a means to resolve this unsettling antinomy. Mechanical repetition of a certain

28) Ibid., 157.

29) Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, 432.

30) Ibid., 433.

31) Ibid., 434.

action deprives the intention of its original energy, of its enthusiasm, extinguishes it and its negativity as well. In a habit each expression, which is already a deed of generality, does not have the nature of an intention of an "interest," does not refer the habit itself to its aim, to other habits, nor to a different world than the world depicted by the habit itself in its feelings and actions. Habit fulfils itself in these automatisms; it does not only desire anything more, but in its actions, it desires nothing – it does not even desire these actions. In a sense, it is free from all antinomies, from all pathology, it is angelic and beyond desire, pleasure, and gratification.

Apparently, such repetition has the power to suspend the desire for fulfilment. Habit encapsulates the subjective, original intention in a small unit of totality, a piece of the world comprised of feelings, reactions, and actions.[32] They are all in line with Kant's intuition oriented toward the whole, and due to their acting as part of an element dissected from the whole, they are destined to a covert unfulfillment. This unfulfillment, a sort of automatism of failure which is deposited in habits, nullifies the very possible stake of the habit's action. A morning coffee is no longer a deliberate action meant to wake us up, it becomes something as deprived of our attention as walking; if coffee does not wake us up we will still make it every morning because it is a matter of habit and no reference of that habit to anything else is relevant. We drink coffee in the morning because we are like that. Whatever is habitual, becomes stoically indifferent by itself – and this indifference (this lack of interest within the habit and in the habit) – makes it a substance, a peaceful collection of indifferently joined atoms of action, and the building blocks of our individual existence.

To do not by way of affirming negativity is to do habitually. In habit, the subjective intention itself and to whatever it is oriented to find a substantive balance beyond struggle and overcoming. They happen, they simply are, and they constitute the being of the human subject in their common lasting. By repeating the intention, numerically reproducing it, we finally create a space of generality in which feeling as feeling ceases to be essential. In other words, we generalize nature and liberate ourselves from its chaos through habit, through repetition in which the sensual is preserved, but denied its effectivity. Thereby habit spiritualizes the natural which, in the shape of a mechanical automatism of action, becomes one of the moments of the spirit. Our life is comprised of habits and what we, this time consciously, do with them. This is the material on which the Spirit operates without having to contaminate itself with sensuality (putting, as a clever Spirit should, precisely the habit between itself and nature).

All this alchemical transformation is founded on this peculiar Hegelian idea to make a non-dialectical reconciliation of two opposing elements, that is, to suspend the subject's intentionality, the fact that it wants something at all, does something, and is motivated to act by something in habit. In habit, we do something not because we want to or not. Habit is a subjective action excluding the volitional aspect. This allows something to come into effect at all while at the same time the lack of intention leads to a situation where our habitual action is actually direct, sensual, and natural (more specifically as silent as nature). The negativity of transcending oneself in action is mitigated or made dormant in such action, the purpose of which is not to transcend, but only to reproduce oneself, to reproduce a certain sequence of sensations. The less we change in our default environment through habitual action, the better. Habit is an inhuman way of being human wherein we become absolutely disinterested and indifferent to the world without ceasing to be ourselves, without ceasing to be a transcending human being. We can finally do things in which we are not interested, things of which we do not expect gratification, consequences, nor traces like a Kantian moral subject. We do them because we do them, since we are automatons living life:

32) This "procedure" is called "simplification" by Catherine Malabou in her *Future of Hegel*.

> In habit the human being's mode of existence is natural, and for that reason not free; but still free, so far as the merely natural phase of feeling is by habit reduced to a mere being of his, and he is no longer involuntarily attracted or repelled by it, and so no longer interested, occupied, or dependent [*Abhängigkeit*] in regard to it… . The main point about Habit is that by its means man gets emancipated from the feelings, even in being affected by them.[33]

At last, the possibility of addiction – as the opposite of habit – appears here. Indeed, Hegel now seems to imply that habit is in some sense a remedy for this servitude we feel toward our negativity, this attachment to the idea of absolute happiness that constantly makes us unhappy. This is at odds with the common intuition that in order to go out of addiction one must abandon habitual behavior in general. How to understand this?

In structural terms, subjectivity means negative transcending, and in this transcending it creates both itself and that toward which it transcends. This is the core lesson of German Idealism, discussed above on the occasion of Kant. This outreach, however, in order to be possible, produces a certain antinomy, an antinomy of the particularity of the world elements and of our generality, of our unifying power of imagination/desire. The world comes to be a problem for us as something opposed to us, something different, and possibly even hostile. Something that enslaves us. But with habit, which neutralizes our interest in the sensual by dimming negative intention (but retaining some intentionality), this problem no longer exists. The world does not enslave us because it has never existed for us in its opposite as an opposite – in habit, the world does not oppose us, we join it without conflict, and our actions, free from the pathologies of the senses, are projected at once beyond the oppressive contradiction of the soul and the body, and so forth.

One can refer in a Spiritual way to the world without reproducing antinomies, because the Spirit does not refer directly to sensual objects and their chaos, but to habit, to the particularity of nature already transformed by repetition, generality, and oneness. In this sense, the Spirit in habit – in a healthy habit[34] – is free (also from addiction) because it does not get involved in the antinomy of sensuality and happiness. But there is one more thing – something else that makes repetition which is so important for the settlement of our intention – occur at all. Why do we repeat a habit and what do we repeat in a habit?

It appears that what Hegel has in mind here must be the stubbornness mentioned earlier. It is our stubbornness – the power of abstract negativity inherent to ourselves, our feeling of self which seeks to be fully affirmed, and the fact that we can hold on to any form of consciousness as an expression of ourselves (even a form with the dullest superficiality) – that results in our determination to repeat. We justify it in this way that this time perhaps we can arrive at what was originally hidden in a habit. Stubbornness is just as mechanical as habit, but the latter is a certain complex while the former is merely an intention to get here and now an immediate synthesis of antinomic moments that cause the tension of stubbornness itself. Stubbornness is that peculiar negativity that has been extinguished in the habit itself, but now finds its realization not in its contents, but in the fact that these contents are repeated. In this sense, every habit keeps in its repetitions a certain abstraction of the subject, which can disrupt the totality of habitual action, because the force which makes us keep repeating the habit is stronger than the contents of the habit – this force is ourselves as living beings. And it is precisely this force, this stubbornness, this metaphysical disposition to possess the infinity now, that can turn habit into addiction.

In Hegelian terms, addiction, which is the return of negativity at the very core of a particular habit, can be most accurately described exactly by means of a happiness-hungry stubbornness that has taken over

33) Ibid., 434.

34) Cf. Ibid.

a certain piece of reality, a certain habit, and wants to build another world on it, a world of actual happiness, a world of addiction.

First and foremost, stubbornness is a disease.

> Due to the externality of its existence, the individual organism can not accord with its determination. It finds itself in a state of disease when one of its systems or organs, stimulated to conflict with an organic power, establishes itself for itself and persists in its particular activity against the activity of the whole. For the fluidity and pervasive process of the activity is thus obstructed.[35]

A healthy habit, lacking intentional tension and subjective interest, affirms itself unintentionally and seemingly outside the dialectic of affirmation and negation. It finds its confirmation in the very fact that it is itself, a peaceful substance of the multitude. For it, this is sufficient. Yet, a habit in which negativity so far having been latent, awakens and begins to stubbornly assert its being-in-itself, becomes an unsatisfied habit. This strange formation – an unsatisfied habit – is the essence of what Hegel had earlier described explicitly as "addiction," and elsewhere referred to explicitly as insanity.

> In consequence of the immediacy, which still marks the self-feeling, i.e. in consequence of the element of corporeality … it follows that although the subject has been brought to acquire intelligent consciousness, it is still susceptible of disease, so far as to remain fast in a special phase of its self-feeling, unable to refine it to "ideality" and get the better of it… . In this way the subject finds itself in contradiction between the totality systematized in its consciousness, and the single phase or fixed idea which is not reduced to its proper place and rank. This is Insanity or mental Derangement.[36]

Insanity means holding on to the particularity of the world, to some single element that is henceforth supposed to determine everything that can occur in the world. The world becomes a stage fenced by a habit on which the same boring drama of non-fulfilment, watched so many times before, is played over and over again. Stubbornness, which wants to satisfy its desire, repeats the same set of gestures, acts, actions, and endeavors time and time again because stubbornness pays no attention to other elements of the world, to other possibilities, nor to other habits. Entrenched in its immediacy, in its sensations; it wants to feel everything, the entire world, this infinite totality in the only way it knows, that is in its own way. This way, however, is determined by stubbornness which reduces the whole to one part, to a certain habit, to some habits, and claims this part to be the whole, confines the subject to it, and detaches it from the possibility of seeking pleasure, happiness, and infinity elsewhere. What stubbornness takes advantage of here is the impulsiveness and lack of patience of the subject, the fact that the latter is in such a terrible hurry to achieve fulfilment (this results from the very essence of life). The mindlessness of this abstraction, its futility, consists in the fact that it leaps over the world straight into the reproduction of a fading pleasure. Such stubbornness is insanity, something that condemns us to addiction to a particular sensuality of the world. Without the mediating element of a healthy habit, negativity – previously enchanted and made dormant by repetition – now acts forthrightly as a force affirming ourselves. But this affirmation is a negation of other, stubbornly omitted worlds, infinitely many other worlds attributable to the individual, as well as – in its abstraction – a negation of desire itself, that is a negation of us.

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35) Ibid., 392.

36) Ibid., 430.

Initially, "stubbornness" is overcome by the fact that in every habit, the being of the individual as such is dimmed, automatized, and repeated. But since the individual, even dimmed – with its stubbornness and negativity, with its desire and idea of "speculation" – is still present in habit as a private modus; the risk that habit will escalate into stubbornness and insanity is thus always there.

In this account addiction is the insanity of habit, the stubbornness of individual happiness which exploits subjective conditioning – the fact that the subject desires – to achieve its own goal: the lasting sensation of happiness for that particular individual. And we are apparently not born to feel happiness, but rather to live happily, at most.

While addiction is a disease, so is individual life.[37] In this respect, the two phenomena in Hegelian perspective exhibit a startling structural similarity. Addiction is not an opposite of life – on the contrary, it desires life above anything else even though in the end the totality as infinity, in other words, how a desirable life is understood in addiction, means after all the subject's death. Addiction is faithful to the promise of happiness, although it delivers on it in a truly perverse manner.

The power of stubbornness, the power of subjectivity, is marked in speculative thought specifically as a constant possibility of being addicted to some part of the world, some of its pleasures, in which infinity as a whole is revealed to us for a brief time, the world is revealed to us as not only a longed-for home, but as everything there is. An addict, in the little world of habit, tries to enchant their happiness. But habit is not only a perpetual source of risk, but also a remedy. There is no other remedy for a bad habit, for an addiction to happiness, than another habit. The energy of addiction can only be disarmed by a whole range of other automatisms in which nothing happens anymore because the only thing that happens is that which is supposed to happen. After all, mere habitual subsistence in immediacy in a situation of all-embracing mediation does not necessarily generate bad infinity. Habit simplifies the world, condensing it down to certain rituals that are non-reflective and "automatic," although non-natural. It is itself a paradox. This unnatural naturalness is a trap for our claims to totality – it is our persistence in death (everything we eventually wanted from our corporality), but it is at the same time a life of a body free from addiction, free from the moronic desire for everything here and now to be illuminated by happiness. This kind of life is already constructed in processes later than habit itself – in relationships with other people, in recognition as a fundamental, dialectical gesture of sublation of bad infinity, but that is a completely different question.

37) Cf. Ibid., 395.

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