

Dialectics of External Reflection & Immanence

Have you had enough of dialectics yet? There was my post on [dialectics in general](#), [positive and negative dialectics](#), and here is now a third.

This fine point is something that has come to mind thanks to the comments of a professor on one of the Hegel FB groups considering the status of the first dialectic of the *Logic*, but also prompted by my rereading of the *Science of Logic*'s first chapter where Hegel makes quite a noticeable fuss about external reflections. The difference between **externally reflective** dialectics and *immanent* dialectics is a fine distinction that is imperceptible as a beginner, and yet once noticed seems like such a glaring difference that it is astounding one does not notice it to begin with.

Dialectics of External Reflection

When we reflect on things, we stand back and use all we know to think *about* things. The defining difference of these types of dialectics is precisely this *aboutness* as opposed to *immanence* in thinking them. A reflected dialectic is no less legitimately a dialectic than an immanent one, for it is a contradiction, but often it is a paralyzed contradiction which goes nowhere when it is *externally reflected* unlike immanent ones. Just to say something quick about it: immanent reflections are *key* to Hegel's method as a whole, in fact it is nothing less than the movement of speculation, or sublation (negation of negation), itself.

Have you ever heard about performative contradiction? That is, that in doing or saying something the very thing intended is betrayed by its form or action? This kind of dialectic is one of the most prevalent kind of dialectic as contradiction. If you ever encounter a dialectical example it is highly likely to be of this sort. These dialectics are defined by their character of appearing dialectical only upon reflection, that is, the contradiction is not revealed without the subject stepping back and noticing a contradiction between some factor or another pertinent to the content investigated, e.g. *form* contradicting *content* is such a common reflection. This stepping back itself *is not illegitimate* when we reflect with something already at hand in the investigation, indeed, sublations and speculation *require* that we step back and notice things about the thought we have before us, about structures which repeat on a 'higher' level.

When we externally reflect, however, we bring in factors which are *not* legitimately logically at hand in the investigation we are considering. Most often these are *one-off* contradictions which do not move back and forth like Hegelian immanent dialectics.

Example 1: [Nothing](#)

In the *Science of Logic*, Nothing, in its *abstract indeterminate* form, is a performative contradiction of form and content, as well as intention and action. It is a concept that is supposed to be the absence of Being, yet this absence which is intended to *not be* nonetheless must be stated as a positive being itself. It is in our minds as the concept of this absence, and as concept *is* by virtue of its *existence*. Nothing as such, however, itself does not and cannot speak this contradiction from within, but it is something we notice of it in reflection. At such point in the *Logic* we have no warrant in calling upon Existence as a concept to apply to Nothing; as such, it is an external application. Likewise, it is an external reflection to compare the indeterminacy of Nothing and Being as their identity and in that manner create the contradictory judgment that “Being is Nothing” as a mere proposition.

Example 2: Marx’s contradiction of powers through money

“Money is the alienated *ability of mankind*. . . . That which I am unable to do as a *man*, and of which therefore all my individual essential powers are incapable, I am able to do by means of *money*.”—Marx, Paris Manuscripts

This is simple: in that I *can do* what I *cannot do* through money, we see as an obvious contradiction of A is ~A. Marx notes various ways this contradiction manifests: an ugly man can get beautiful women through money (not really a contradiction...), an idiot can command the intelligent, and an uncreative buffoon can have the work of great artists as his own.

Money’s inversion is not one about *ability* or inability; however, Marx is close enough. With money, I *can do* what I *do not do*—content (what I do) and form (what gets done) are contradictory, i.e. I do nothing yet I have the products of things done. Whether I can or cannot mow my own lawn, if I pay someone else to do it, *I have done* what I have not done. When we’re in a pinch and cannot personally get done what is required of us, sometimes we offload it to someone else and pay them. When asked if we got what we needed to do done, what do we say? ‘*I got it done.*’

This contradiction, however, is not *money’s immanent contradiction*, which is the contradiction of a use-value of pure exchange-value.

Money is always fun and rather easy to notice contradictions with. Take another example of our desiring of money for its power to exchange for any commodity. Nobody *sane* desires money for the sake of its being as object, neither the paper bill, coin, or digital credit amount; instead we desire money *because* we don’t desire money. The use of money is to get rid of it in exchange for what we *do* desire, for the tangible objects of consumption.

Insofar as anyone seems to value money for its own sake, they value not the money itself, but rather its congealed social substance, for money holds a possible social power to command labor and its products. One doesn't even have to spend it to get its social benefits, that others desire our money is enough to command their activity.

Example 3: Marx's Forces and Relations of Production

Here's a *really famous* one from Marx, the contradiction of the forces of production and relations of production, or, technology and economic relations. It is certainly the case that specific technological developments undermine certain economic relations, for example, we're living through such a shift in our own day with the internet and copyright. The ease of reproduction of digital goods makes the old argument of theft near useless. Digital copying can't be theft in the old sense since someone need not lose their copy in it being copied. We're also seeing a shift of copyright becoming increasingly useless for certain things, one being academic research papers behind paywalls, and the main reason is that journals *simply can't stop their content getting out there*. Digital sharing is quite literally destroying an entire industry that use to profit greatly from privatizing *publicly funded* research.

Likewise, certain social relations can *create* forces of production, for example, the American car which was largely pushed by economic factors entering the political sphere to push for the *conditions* which would make cars more attractive than they were without roads and with a decent transportation system. Major and well functioning public transport systems were defunded, roads were built, cities were built around the need for a car to get anywhere important, etc.

But this so-called dialectic is most definitely an external one if one does not see that human subjects are explicitly in the middle. Forces and relations of production don't exist alone beside each other and relate directly, they have human subjects that create them and make them a part of their life world. Technology *does not simply* advance on its own, there is a culture behind it. Take China's history for example: they came up with gun powder first, yet they did not weaponize it immediately like Europeans did. They also had technically better ships than the British for a long time, yet the government consciously chose to not seek to colonize anywhere or seek riches in unknown lands. China had all the makings of exploding onto the world stage as the first great capitalist empire almost 400 years before Europe technology-wise, yet its society did not pursue this very open possibility. Where was the unstoppable rupturing of the relations of production by the forces of production?

Dialectics of Immanence

Dialectics of immanence are different from reflected ones in that they are internally revealed. We need not step back to notice we have stepped into contradiction; the

steps of thinking itself force us to see we have arrived at contradiction by bringing us to the opposite of what we originally intended. In immanence, we need only do one thing: *think through* and *about what we think*, the difference being that if we make reflections they are *not external ones*, but instead reflect prior concepts we have already developed.

Example: [Force](#)

Force, in being one, finds itself forced to express as many, and the many forced to express as one. Force, then, reveals itself as an incessant flux rather than a stable object.

Because genuine Force as such is represented and determined as reflected into itself, it is one aspect of its own concept. It is represented as the durable substantial extreme of Force determined as the moment of the “one.” As *one*, Force excludes its Expression (its unfolding into many matters) as another durable substance which is *other* to Force’s oneness. *However*, since Force *must Express itself*, but in-itself is not yet expressed, its Expression is represented as an external *other* to Force that “approaches” it—it is not just an inert other beside it—and *solicits* it to express itself. Thus, Force *cannot* truly be one, for its essence is the universal medium of many matters—its Expression. *However*, since Force is this Expression and the essence of the multiplicity of matters is the universal medium in which they inhere and are separated in, Force as Expression posits its oneness outside itself as Force that solicits Expression to drive back into itself as a one.

Genuine Force has shown itself to really be the *reflection into itself* as the movement of the oneness of Force and its Expression as *many*. These have shown to necessarily be what they are *not yet posited as being*, i.e. Force is *not yet* its Expression, and vice versa. The *other* approaches Force in this way, as its *not yet being the other*, and *solicits* it to make a reflective turn into itself as the other. Genuine Force as Force is solicited to Express, and Force as Expression is solicited to return into itself as Force. *However*, this other has already shown itself to be nothing but Force itself. Thus, genuine Force has shown itself to truly be this movement of *being-reflected-into-itself* and thus takes Expression into itself; it sublates what was other to it. The *oneness* of Force disappears in the way it appeared, for another Force is posited outside it as the very Expression which is its essential moment. *Force is thus Force driven into itself by its positing itself externally to generate its movement into itself.* Force merely moves from moment of Force to moment of Force.

Example 2: The Commodity

The commodity, in being singular, only reveals itself to necessarily be plural and self-opposed.

A commodity is a concept which is determined as having a use-value and exchange-value in unity. These values first appear as mutually exclusive values. If I have the use-value, I do not have its exchange-value and vice versa. Immanently, the concept of commodity *duplicates itself* (others itself) and differentiates its use-values by virtue of exchange-value's implications. One does not logically exchange a quality for the same quality, a use-value for the same use-value; rather, one exchanges for an other use-value. Different qualities, however, do not have any immediate or given commensurability. Exchange of one use-value for another, then, is not set as 1:1 and can appear as any ratio which the persons engaging in exchange come to agree. In the agreement's execution, however, a third concept is posited implicitly as the commensurability of the incommensurate qualities, and this third is *value*, an indeterminate immaterial substance which reveals itself in determinate exchange-value's ratios.

Example 3: [Perception's](#) One and Many

Through an immanent inquiry into the intelligibility of Perception's conceptual distinctions, we begin with a judgment that in merely being thought through reveals the exact opposite conclusion to what we initially believed.

Perception first believes that its object, the thing, is *one*, and when it notices the plurality of different properties, it no longer attributes them to the object, but to its (Perception's) own doing. The object is white to *my* eyes, salty to *my* tongue, etc. Perception recognizes that it *itself* is the *universal medium* (the *also*) which differentiates the one into the determinate and independent many *through* the given determinate difference of its sense organs. As determinate beings, properties exclude each other—white is in contrast to black, and one is in contrast to many. The thing, however, *is one only through its exclusion of the many*; this is its determinateness, and thus the properties must not merely be Perception's, but *must be part of the thing itself* in order that it may indeed be determined as one against another. As *in* the thing, the properties are its essence for they are its *inner* being, i.e. the one depends on the many to be what it is; as the *thing* is itself the truth, it exists *in-itself* independent of others. As differentiated *within* the thing—as its essence—the properties exist in independent exclusion of each other, and thus exist *in-and-for-themselves*. This being the case, the thing is no longer one; it is perceived to be in truth the universal medium (the *also*) in which the properties exist indifferent to each other and the medium. A reversal of Perception's first judgment has occurred, for the properties now exist in-themselves and independent from each other and the universal medium itself. It is now the unity of the object which is Perception's doing, not the plurality, for the properties exist independent and indifferent to each other and are unified only in the perceiving consciousness.