

# Some Notes on the Notion of Identity in Reflexion (1)

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## Introduction : Long Ago, Back Now

How long is it, I wonder, since the problem of identity in reflexion grew into the central theme of my philosophical pursuit ? I now recall, when young, being involved, year in and year out, in working out the abstrusest phrases of essence and reflexion in Hegel's Science of Logic. This volume of 'Greater Logic' seemed like one of the sealed secrets that would not allow me to get the slightest idea of what it all meant. Each page was filled with what seemed like so many enigmas, such as *«The reflexion is, as the abolition of the negative, the abolition of its other, which is the immediacy. Inasmuch as it is, therefore, the immediacy as the coming back or the coming together with itself, it is equally the negation of the negative as the negative. So it is prepositing.»*<sup>(1)</sup> ; I had sensed some truth lying hidden in this speculative book of logic. I had wanted to unveil it by some means or other. Those words of riddles had to be deciphered, I resolved.

For many years in my youth, those enigmas always occupied my mind. Like an obsessed one, I lost myself in solving them. I racked my brains, like cracking the codes, over several lines a day. I read them so many times that I almost learned by heart some of the puzzling sentences, without so much as getting the meanings revealed to me at all. I read aloud, as much as to say a long spell, *«Oder die Unmittelbarkeit ist als Rückkehr nur das Negative ihrer selbst, nur dies, nicht Unmittelbarkeit zu sein ; aber die Reflexion ist das Aufheben des Negativen seiner selbst. Sie ist Zusammengehen mit sich.»*<sup>(2)</sup> It all sounded as hollow as an echo. I strove further for elucidation.

The more deeply I read, however, the more confused I became. I sat ruminating, with legs crossed. I meditated, with eyes closed. I longed for a streak of light to shine in. But no light came from anywhere. After all the struggles, I was forced to admit that the logic, born out of the subtlest motion of dialectical thinking, still remained almost as enigmatic as the 'K-ōan' of Zen Buddhism. It stood before me just like a wall. 'It's too hard a nut to crack,' I had to persuade myself at long length. I felt all weak to find that I had failed to capture a plumed serpent that I had so much longed to see alive ; Thus the enigmas had to be left

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unrevealed, and I was left at my wits' end.

At that time, I was already a few years past the age at which a Chinese sage remarked that a man ought to stand on his own in society. The logic still kept coming to mind. But could one have lived on air ? I had to orient myself anywhere. I had to stay alive in any walk of life. 'Now is the time,' I thought aloud, 'when you should shake yourself free from all the attachments and heavy burdens.' — I bid farewell to my past life, to those bitterest days full of struggles and despair. ... In embarking on an unknown life abroad, I said to myself that I would never return to those tormenting days of futile brooding and rumination.

Years flowed away. Nearly a couple of decades later, when my long wandering had come to an end, I found myself beginning to feel more and more inclined to get back to the old, afflicting problems that I once thought I had thrown off. It gave me a mild surprise to realize that the logical problems of essence, reflexion and identity had not yet ceased to be one of my chief philosophical concerns.

In recent years, I find myself pondering, from time to time, over these logical problems. — Late at night, when I am seated alone, lost in thought, I seem to hear from nowhere someone talking softly in whispers. I look back around, but hear nothing. I fall back into my rambling reveries. Again, a distant sound of low murmurings. Now I am listening in, all ears, when it ceases. The mere work of imagination? No, young voices, perhaps. Now I shut my eyes, hands cupped over the ears. A profound silence all around. I am seated half musing, far deep into small hours, when suddenly out of my bygone days there loom like apparitions some small human figures, flickering and wavering, as if beckoning me to come nearer and to discern them. I look them hard in the face ; they huddle up in the shade and recoil. Then, a memory comes back to me, but scarcely do I recognize them when they begin to recede, fading away into nowhere. 'Now, come back here, and let me see you,' I say to those dream children who might have seen the light long, long before...

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This is how the idea of identity in reflexion has begun to take form; out of the nightly soliloquay, or rather out of a self-dialogue through the inner journey far back to my lost young days.

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*In  $A=A$ , als dem Satze der Identität, wird reflektiert auf das Bezogensein, und dies Beziehen, dies Einssein, die Gleichheit ist in dieser reinen Identität enthalten ; es wird von aller Ungleichheit abstrahiert.  $A=A$ , der Ausdruck des absoluten Denkens oder der Vernunft, hat für die formale, in verständigen Sätzen sprechende Reflexion nur die Bedeutung der Verstandesidentität, der reinen Einheit, d.h. einer solchen, worin von der Entgegensetzung abstrahiert ist.*

*Aber die Vernunft findet sich in dieser Einseitigkeit der abstrakten Einheit nicht ausgedrückt ; sie postuliert auch das Setzen desjenigen, wovon in der reinen Gleichheit abstrahiert wurde, das Setzen des Entgegengesetzten, der Ungleichheit; das eine  $A$  ist Subjekt, das andere Objekt, und der Ausdruck für ihre Differenz ist  $A$  nicht  $=A$ , oder  $A=B$ . Dieser Satz widerspricht dem vorigen geradezu ; ...<sup>(3)</sup>*

*(G.W.F. Hegel, Differenz Schrift)*

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### 1. What is meant by the identity in ' $A$ is $A$ ' ?

- 1 There are two types of identity. One is the identity in a proposition of ' $A$  is  $A$ '. The other is the identity in a proposition of ' $A$  is  $B$ '. Between the two propositions there seems to be no particular difference, and in either proposition 'is' may be seen to be just the same copula combining a subject and a predicate.
- 1-2 In the logical structure of copula, however, there is a basic distinction between ' $A$  is  $A$ ' and ' $A$  is  $B$ '. What, then, is the difference and where is the difference thought to lie ? Close examination has to be taken into either of these two types of identity, especially as regards the manner in which they function logically.
- 1-3 Before considering the logical nature of identity, we must be clear beforehand ; in ' $A$  is  $A$ ',  $A$  can represent anything, but in the case of the proposition we are going to deal with,  $A$  should not be taken for any particulars that actually exist. It rather stands for any kind of property or adjectives, such as 'man', 'child', or 'human'. Only in this sense is the word 'thing' employed here.
- 1-4 Another thing that should be noted here is that in a proposition of ' $A$  is  $A$ ',  $A$  which

is a subject is identical with *A* itself which is a predicate. It is, therefore, not something else other than *A* that puts identity in *A*. The proposition simply means that *A* as such stands in identity with *A* itself. Thus our enquiry begins with the attempt to clarify, first, the objective state of identity found in '*A is A*'.

**1-5** '*A is A*' is a proposition, in the form of which a thing is described as being in its own identity. Everything that is placed in this form of proposition stands in its own identity. What, then, is signified by the identity? It means that a thing is completely at one with itself, or that a thing *is* just what it is.

**1-6** A thing is what it is, and what a thing is, namely its essence, is in an immediate identity with itself.

**1-7** Everything essential must be in its own identity. Put differently, nothing that is ever-changing can be called essential. (Continuous change or becoming is what occurs in the sphere of immediate beings.)

**1-8** What does it mean that a thing is the thing itself? It means that it is what it is, not anything else. A thing ought to be what it is, and it is what it ought to be. This is the very reason why everything that stands in its own identity is essential and everything essential is identical with itself.

**1-9** A sheer identity of a thing with itself is what we call self-identity. And self-identity is the first characteristic of the essence of a thing. Essential is a thing that is in and for itself.

**2** Admitting, however, that identity is the very way in which a thing is essential, it should not be taken to be only static. If it can rightly be said that the truth of identity is self-identity, identity on its way to self-identity is not in a fixed state, but in a sort of motion.

**2-1** What '*A is A*' shows is an immediate position of *A* as *A*. That is, *A* posits itself and is posited as being identical with *A* itself. '*A is A*' means, therefore, that *A* which posits itself is quite the same with *A* which is posited by itself. It is a positing motion from oneself to oneself. Identity is bottomless, as it were, because it is made possible only as a self-positing motion.

2-2 Everything essential that stands in its own identity is in a pure motion of positing and being posited. Identity is a self-motion starting from oneself and coming back to oneself.  $A \rightleftharpoons A$ .

2-3 This selfsame motion of identity is called '*reflexion*' .

2-4 The reason why identity is reflexive is that it is essentially an endless movement getting nowhere other than to itself.

2-5 Identity has no other base or ground than reflexion. And identity where reflexion functions is bottomless.

2-6 Reflexion is like pure fluidity. It is, as Hegel put it, 'eine Bewegung aus Nichts zu Nichts' <sup>(4)</sup>, in which there is nothing to be seen but a sheer motion of positing and being posited.

2-7 There are three general characteristics to be discerned in the nature of pure reflexion.

- (1) Reflexion is *positive* or *absolute* in the sense that it is, first of all, a self-positing force of identity.
- (2) Reflexion is *infinite* in the sense that there is in its pure identity no otherness by which it gets limited.
- (3) Reflexion is quite *empty* in the sense that all the position of a subject in a predicate reveals no other content than what a subject is. A sheer tautology.

2-8 Reflexion, whose character is found in being positive, infinite and empty, should not be regarded, however, as something fixed and inactive. On the contrary, as is pointed out in 2-6, reflexion as such is nothing but a purely positing motion which can only present itself as a sort of perpetual swing to and from oneself.

2-9 What is most remarkable in the motion of pure reflexion is that it turns immediately into just the opposite of what it is.

- (1) The positing reflexion of  $A$  as  $A$ , i.e. the position of identity of  $A$  is *negative*, since the positivity of reflection is itself an impulse to repel every possible identity with otherness.

- (2) For the above reason, reflexion, though infinite in itself, turns into the finite when the posited  $A$  gets reflected *as* something that is not identical with non- $A$ .
  - (3) Identity in pure reflexion is devoid of any other content than itself, but identity can not rest in its own emptiness. The void itself is an urge to fulfill oneself. Out of its own emptiness there must emerge an infinite impulse to get filled.
- 3** With the emergence of something negative, identity becomes reflexive. Reflexion, which is negativity itself, is now the proper movement back to oneself by repelling, and being repelled by, every otherness. Otherness is something negative in reflexive identity that ought to be repelled or negated as being something other than itself.
- 3-1** Thus, identity is permeated with the negativity of reflexion.
- 3-2** What now constitutes the nature of identity is a sheer necessity of negation trying to expel from itself all possible identity with otherness.  $A$  must be  $A$  itself, not non- $A$ . This necessity of identity or the necessary movement of identity toward self-identity stems from the negativity of reflexion.
- 3-3** As is shown in 2-6, reflexion in its purity is nothing but an endless motion of vacuous fluidity from nothing to nothing. In the negative reflexion, however, in which  $A$  is posited as *not* being non- $A$ , identity is definitely a motion driven from non- $A$  back to  $A$  itself.  $A \neq \text{non-}A \neq A$ . Which means that the positing reflexion of  $A$  is at the same time the negating reflexion of non- $A$ .  $A = A \neq \text{non-}A$ . Here, reflexion is both positing and negating, without either activity of which reflexion or the position of essence in identity would cease being at play.
- 3-4** Reflexion is the very moment by which essence can be set at play. Everything essential that stands in its own identity is reflexive.
- 3-5** Suppose identity were not reflexive, there would be no possibility of essence ever manifesting itself.
- 3-6** Identity would not be identity, if it were not reflexive. The essential moment in reflexion by which reflexive movement of identity gets started is the posited presence of otherness, non- $A$ .

- 3-7 In order that  $A$  can be  $A$ , there has to be the otherness of  $A$ . Unless there is any such otherness posited in the identity of ' $A$  is  $A$ ', there is no reason at all why on earth  $A$  should be posited *as*  $A$ . That is to say,  $A$  without any moment of its otherness would lose the significance of being identical with itself.
- 3-8 Identity is essentially a negativity in that it is a force which cannot exist without the negation of the negative.
- 3-9 Needless to say, the other posited in ' $A$  is  $A$ ' is not the otherness in general, but the other of  $A$  itself, just as the shadow is the other of light, not of anything else. Shadow is what light is not, and *vice versa*. Non- $A$  as such would be pure nothing. It can be brought into existence only as something negative in inner relation to  $A$ . Non- $A$  is no less the other of  $A$  than  $A$  is the other of non- $A$ . That is, either of them is quite essential to the posited existence of each other.
- 4 Everything essential that is in its own identity, namely everything that stands in its essential identity has within itself the other of its own. This other is the essential ingredient of reflexive identity.
- 4-1 Neither  $A$  nor non- $A$  can exist separately from each other. They are both so deeply involved in one reflexive relation that neither of them can be thought of as being apart. Reflexion and relation means the same thing.
- 4-2 Reflexive relation is by its very nature the inner relation of reciprocal negation. The most essential recognition in the notion of identity is that there lies in this relation a factor whose development must inevitably lead to the complete dissolution of all presence of identity in reflection.
- 4-3 No sooner does  $A$  posit itself in its own identity ( $A = A$ ) than the potential otherness is implicitly posited as something that is not  $A$ . The posited identity of  $A$  can consist only in inner relatedness to its own other that has to be negated.  $A = A \neq \text{non-}A$ .
- 4-4 The identity of  $A$  cannot be posited except in so far as this non- $A$  is both posited and negated.

- 4-5 'A is not non-A' is a reflexion of A coming back from the negation of non-A. More concretely, 'A is A and not non-A' is a reflexion meaning that A is only A as an explicit negation of non-A. Thus the identity of A is essentially negative, as shown in 3 to 3-8, and in the nature of negative identity lies a bud of all potential contradictions.
- 4-6 A is posited as being in the reflexive relation to non-A. For A to be identified with non-A would be a sheer self-negation of 'A = A'. In order that A can be A, there must not be any identity possible with non-A. The identity of A is basically different from the identity with non-A. Absolute distinction between identity and non-identity.
- 4-7 In this non-identity with non-A, what would A be like, if it were not for the other, non-A ? If non-A is left out of existence through the negation, A as such will lose its own ground on which it stands. The ground is reflexion and the identity in reflexion is groundless (bottomless) as is seen in 2-5. To be sure, the possible identity of 'A = A' can be confirmed only by the negation of non-A. That is, non-A has to be posited not only as an ingredient indispensable to the identity of A, but at the same time as something that has to be negated by A. *How, then, is it possible that A can be A if and when this non-A is actually negated ?*
- 4-8 The necessary dependence on, and the absolute incompatibility with, each other. This inconsistency involved in reflexive identity must evolve into an obvious contradiction.
- 4-9 As is readily seen, a bud of absolute contradiction is inherent in the nature of the inevitable movement of reflexion or in the reflexive negativity of identity.
- 5 Contradictory is a state of affairs in which a thing cannot consist with itself without having some other thing that it must put out of existence.
- 5-1 Without the other, a thing cannot be identical with itself, and with the other, it cannot be allowed to be itself. The presence of the other is an impediment to the freedom to be oneself. But everything that will exist through the negation of the other can fail to exist itself; for the supposed negation of the other implies the simultaneous extinction of itself. It would simply disappear, like a rainbow, with the total negation of the other.



- 5-1** To negate the other in relation is to have oneself negated.
- 5-2** Identity involves contradiction.
- 5-3** What is aimed at in the reflexive movement of identity is the recovery from the inevitable complication with the other ,i.e. the movement of reflexion is an urge of identity to attain to its self-identity. 'A is not non-A, but A' means that A must be A through all negation of non-A. This urge of negativity is the way to the self-identity of A. The other has to be driven out of identity, if self-identity is to be attained.
- 5-4** But the self-identity cannot be attained as long as it is reflexive. Being reflexive means having the other from which to come back to oneself. As shown in **5-1**, as long as it is with this other, reflexive identity will have to grow into the contradiction and without the other the reflexive movement itself will have to be abolished.
- 5-5** Contradiction is, in a sense, the end of negative reflexion, since with the negation of the other that ought to be negated the reflexive relation as such will have to vanish.
- 5-6** Self-identity, whose nature lies in negativity or reflexive identity, leads inevitably to its own extinction, no matter how hard it tries to establish itself. Self-identity in reflexion is logically impossible for the above reason.
- 5-7** The identity, whose negative movement of reflexion is nothing but a tautological confirmation of a subject in a predicate, may justifiably be called formal. In the final analysis, formal identity ends up in being reduced to the state of nothing before the position of reflexion.
- 5-8** As has been shown in these processes of reflexion, identity is not a mere motion of reflexion, but the movement of self-confirmation toward the final stage of contradiction. First the position of  $A = A$ , then the negative position of non-A, and thirdly the total exclusion of non-A from A. The last movement ends up in sheer extinction of the posited identity in reflexion.
- 5-9** Contradiction, latent in reflexion, must grow fullfledged into its own ruin. It has to get dissolved sooner or later.

- 6 Contradiction is the ultimate negative reflexion brought forth to its extremity. It never fails to fall asunder, logically. For in contradiction the two ingredients in reflexive relation must be set at naught. It is at the same time the end of reflexive relation and of reflexive motion of identity as well.

(to be continued)

### Note

- (1) Wissenschaft der Logik II (Bd. 6. der Theorie Werkausgabe, Suhrkamp) P.26
- (2) ibid, P.26~P.27
- (3) Differenz der Fichteschen und Schellingschen System der Philosophie (Bd.2. der Theorie Werkausgabe, Suhrkamp) P.37-38
- (4) Wissenschaft der Logik II. P.25

(Received October 28, 1996)