

CHAPTER THREE

Explanation by Essence and the Alternative to Realism

I

FROM BEING TO ESSENCE

The “Doctrine of Being” in Hegel’s *Logic* concerns the explanation of the possibility of speaking of the being of individual entities. The motor for Hegel’s explanation is the necessity to distinguish abstract, indeterminate being from nothing. This distinction is accomplished in the passage from being to existence (*Dasein*). In Hegel’s view, we distinguish being from nothing in our coming to conceive it as an existent individual. To be an individual consists in being present in a substrate (which Hegel calls the infinite); individuals, moreover, are either qualitatively or quantitatively determinate individuals. The logic of being consists then of the various logics (or dialectics, to use Hegel’s terms) of qualitative and quantitative determinateness. In order to progress to the next type of explanation, Hegel must show that the entire logic of being itself involves some kind of contradiction or incoherence that it cannot resolve in its own terms.

Hegel claims that the result of such a dialectic is that the category of being becomes indifferent to its determinations. To be is to be a qualitative or quantitative individual, but being per se cannot be identified with just this qualitative or quantitative existence. Why? Existence implies the notion of alteration, coming to be and passing away,

and this requires an unchanging substrate in which this alteration, coming to be and passing away, occurs. Being as the "infinite" is just this substrate. What then can one say of this being, if one cannot identify it with qualitative or quantitative determinateness? Apparently, one can say nothing about it, but this means that being has become indifferent to its determinations (Hegel makes a punning play on the German term for indifference, *Gleichgültigkeit*, noting that as "equivalent to itself" being is literally *gleichgültig* and thus has an *Indifferenz* to its determinations¹.) The only label for a category of being that is indifferent to its determinations is that of pure being.

The dialectical movement has therefore ended up where it began, with the category of abstract, indeterminate being, which, as we know, is equivalent to abstract, indeterminate nothing. The doctrine of being thus finds itself in an infinite loop of sorts: one begins with pure being, finds that one cannot distinguish it from nothing, proceeds to the notion of individual existence in qualitative and quantitative terms in order to make this distinction, and then ends up with a category of pure being. The dialectical movement thus moves in a circle, in a kind of progress that Hegel describes as the "bad infinite." Going in circles is not necessarily a bad thing, except that the circle in question is irrational, since it ends in a contradiction, viz., that between saying that being is different from nothing and is the same as nothing. The particular loop is a contradictory one. This presents Hegel with a new type of dilemma with which to deal. Rather than finding that a specific pair of categories seem to be incompatible, he finds that the entire movement of the "Doctrine of Being" is self-contradictory. Either one stays in the logic of being, with its infinitely recurring contradictory loop, or one must move to a new kind of explanatory logic (a new dialectic of sorts) in which one can avoid this contradiction.

If the loop were not contradictory, then there would be no reason to go on to a new logic. Since the motor of the dialectic is the avoidance of contradiction, and the "Doctrine of Being" ends with a contradictory loop, we are required, so Hegel thinks, to make the speculative leap to a new logic, which he calls "Essence."² This is a logic of substructure/superstructure relations, where the substructure explains the determinateness of the superstructure. Being has thus emerged as the indifferent substructure of the various forms of determinateness of existent individuals. It is the "essence" that explains all the various superstructural moments of itself. Moreover, the substructure is said to "reflect" itself in its superstructure. Just as the transitions in the "Doctrine of Being" were all versions of "passing over" (*Übergehen*),

the transitions of the "Doctrine of Essence" will all be versions of this "reflection."

Hegel is not as clear as he could be as to what reflection is, but the point of the category can be extrapolated from his general program. The "Doctrine of Essence" is concerned above all with the question "Must essence (the substructures of the world) appear?" As Hegel sees the matter, any number of philosophers from Aristotle to Kant have posited the existence of substructures to explain the elements of appearance but none have really explained what the link between the substructures and the superstructures must be. A *realist* would have to hold that we cannot say whether or not certain substructures appear to us. Although it is perhaps odd to think of Kant as a realist, he is nonetheless a prime example of this kind of realism. If we cannot know what things are in themselves, then we cannot say that there are or are not some things in themselves that do not appear; thus, things in themselves need not appear to us.

Hegel apparently holds it to be meaningless that there could be things (substructures) that need have no relation to appearance.³ The goal of his *nonrealist* alternative is to give an explanation of why it must be the case that the substructures have some (at least possible) cognitive relation to appearance. The section of the *Science of Logic* called the "Doctrine of Essence" is concerned overall with two large themes: (1) the exploration of what realism entails and why realism is untenable; and (2) what bearing this has on Hegel's doctrine of the being of individuals.⁴

The category of reflection is the main conceptual tool with which Hegel reconstructs the various categories of "Essence" in his exploration of the possibility of realism. *Reflection* is the relation of the substructure to the superstructure; it is also described by Hegel as a *positing* relation.⁵ The relation between the substructure and the superstructure is an explanatory one: the former explains or "posits" the latter. On Hegel's view, the principles of reflection not only should explain the determinateness of the superstructures but should also ideally explain the determinateness of the substructure and their own determinateness. They should, that is, be self-subsuming explanations. It will turn out, however, that they are not fully self-subsuming, that they fail to realize their goal. This failure will be the reason for moving to the "Doctrine of the Concept."

If we think of explanatory structures as having at least two items, an *explanans* (*p*) and an *explanandum* (*q*), then a self-subsuming explanation would be one in which *p* not only explains *q* but also explains

itself (a limiting case of this would be where q is p itself).⁶ In Hegelian terms, p explains the determinateness of q . What explains the determinateness of p ? Either it is another *explanans* (r), or it is either p itself or some feature of p . If it is p itself, then whatever it is about p that explains the determinateness of q should also explain the determinateness of p itself. If p is not only a self-subsuming principle but also a reflexive principle, then p 's determinateness will be such that any statement of it intrinsically refers to itself. It will apply to itself by virtue of the feature that it bestows on itself in its applying to itself (in a way similar to the way in which, for example, "this phrase here" refers to itself in virtue of a feature that it has by virtue of referring to itself).

Hegel's talk of essence's "return into self" refers to the self-subsuming character of essence.⁷ Hegel is, as it were, asking if there is an essence of essence. If there were (call it X), and X were distinct from essence, then one would want an explanation of X (by Y). One would then want an explanation of Y (by Z) and so on. More prosaically put, Hegel's concern is with the endless positing of substructures to account for substructures, *ad infinitum*. The "essence of essence" ought to be itself an essence. The principles of explanation that are used in explanation by essence ought, if they are to be complete explanations in the Hegelian sense, to explain themselves. (It was in part this deficiency in self-explanatory character in the logic of "being" that motivated the move into "essence."⁸)

His line of reasoning throughout his discussion of essence is difficult to follow, but its lineaments can be picked out. There are two moments present at this level of exposition: mere appearance and the substructure that is to explain it. These are not two different entities; that would be the way in which we would have to conceive of them at the level of the "Doctrine of Being."⁹ Instead, they are moments of the same entity: one of the moments is the mere appearance (the illusory being, as Miller renders it) of the underlying essence or substructure. This moment of mere appearance should therefore be said to be posited by the underlying substructure. Whatever features there are to be found in mere appearance are to be explained by the substructure, and the nature of this substructure should be such that it *must* posit a superstructure. His argument thus seems to be the speculative one that (1) the indifferent being that is the result of the "Doctrine of Being" is identical to what essence is, *viz.*, a substructure that posits superstructures; and (2) that seeing it as this best explains the possibility of its being what it

has in fact turned out to be, a substructure.¹⁰ The category of pure being that began the *Science of Logic* turns out to be the underlying substructure of the world.

Is this enough to show any kind of per se internal incoherence in the realist position? Perhaps it shows that realism does not cohere well with the results that Hegel has thus far attained, but that is far from a demonstration of the kind of internal incoherence that is supposed to be the driving force of the *Science of Logic*. Hegel says, "But it does not have to be shown that mere appearance, in so far as it is distinct from essence, integrates itself and returns into essence . . . all that has to be shown is that the determinations that distinguish it [mere appearance] from essence are determinations of essence itself and further, that this *determinateness of essence* that mere appearance is, is integrated in essence itself."¹¹

It is important to note that Hegel does not say that he will *prove* this. He uses the word *zeigen* (rendered as "shown") in the above quote rather than some stronger term, such as *beweisen*, "demonstrate." His argument seems therefore to be that he can provide an explanation of how it is possible that one could have an account of essence (of substructures positing superstructures) that is not internally incoherent or inconsistent on *its* own account. His argument must therefore be not that the alternative is burdened with some fatal internal contradiction. His argument must rather be that his account is superior to the other alternative explanations in that it does not leave anything left over unexplained. If essence can be shown to explain mere appearance and to explain itself, then that is a better theory than one that holds that there is mere appearance but cannot explain the link between mere appearance and its underlying substructure.

Alternatively, Hegel's claim might be taken as saying that the realist, having by hypothesis accepted the "Doctrine of Being," must now accept the consequences of that line of thought. She must admit that the substructures of which she speaks are intelligible only in contrast to mere appearance, and that without some intelligible link between the two, her conception of an essence that does not appear is incoherent. But this, too, does not show that the realist's position is internally incoherent, only that it is incoherent if it makes the further assumptions that Hegel makes. Hegel's argument at this stage thus falls short in its attempt to show that realism is internally deficient in the strong sense in which Hegel intends (if that is indeed taken to be his goal).

Once again, we are faced with an interpretive decision with regard to Hegel's texts. The strong claim of the necessity of the failure of realism cannot be made out. If we take the Kantian element (the "science of reason") to be essential to Hegel's program, then we are faced with what is perhaps the breakdown of the program. However, if we take the explanation of possibility to be essential to the Hegelian program and downplay the Kantian element (however strongly Hegel stresses it himself), then this need not be fatal to his program. It may be taken simply as the attempt to show how a nonrealist conception of the world would be possible through the speculative construction of a nonrealist set of categories. In this sense, Hegel has not so much shown the necessary failure of realism as he has constructed a coherent alternative to realism. If realism is to be shown to fail, then a stronger argument against its explanatory power must be given.

II

FROM MERE APPEARANCE TO APPEARANCE

The stronger argument against realism may be reconstructed by considering Hegel's other motivation underlying his treatment of essence. This is his view that being is distinct from nothing in being existence, determinate being, specifically, the existence of individuals. What he thinks he has done at the conclusion of the "Doctrine of Being" is show that such a view is not tenable *at that level*, viz., the level of the "Doctrine of Being." The view *per se* concerning the existence of individuals is tenable, he thinks, but a vocabulary richer than that of the "Doctrine of Being" is required in order to make the view acceptable. The "Doctrine of Essence" begins with an examination of the view that the various determinations of being as existent individuals are mere appearance (*Schein*), and that the real is the abstract substructure that explains these appearances.¹² His criticisms of the realist point of view are intended to discredit this view as internally incoherent.

His strategy for doing so is to argue that if essences must appear, then realism (in the sense in which Kant's doctrine of the thing in itself exemplifies a realist position) will prove to be untenable. Hegel's theory of essences aims at showing that the ways in which essences reflect themselves in appearance is best explained by a theory that

undermines this kind of realism. He thus focuses on the types of reflection that his theory allows. Given his view of the nature of the existence of individuals, an explanation of how it would be possible that essence must appear must also depend on showing how it would be possible that essence reflects or “mirrors” itself in the existence of individuals.

His thoughts on the matter, however, do not begin auspiciously. Reflection, so Hegel says, is “the movement of nothing to nothing and so back to itself.”¹³ This is, well, an unfortunate way of putting it; moving from nothing to nothing will not produce something.¹⁴ His further comments only inch us along to get at what he is trying to say: “the other that in this passing over comes to be, is not the nonbeing of a being but the nothingness of a nothing, and this, to be the negation of a nothing, constitutes being.”¹⁵ His special sense of “negation” is a good clue to what he means here, since he takes the movement to be one of negation in his special sense. Thus, we can take his points to be the following. First, we should look for some form of negation. We find that in the idea that the substructure, the essence, posits its superstructure, an existent individual. It is not that nothing posits nothing, as Hegel seems to say. Second, given that we have the negation (in the special Hegelian sense), we should also find the “negation of the negation.” And indeed we do. The self-subsuming nature of the principles of reflection are the negation of the negation. They are supposed not only to explain the “other”; they are also supposed to explain themselves.

We can generalize: in the “Doctrine of Being” the negation of the negation is the third conception that integrates the logic of the first two, thus showing them to be compatible and not really contradictory categories. In the “Doctrine of Essence,” on the other hand, the negation of the negation is not a third conception but is the original conception with which one began.¹⁶ Conception A explains conception B and also explains itself.

What seems for Hegel to be wrong with a realist doctrine is that the realist can make no link between the structure of essence and the structure of the world of appearance. Kantians, for example, can make no statement about how the structure of things in themselves relate to the structure of appearance. Hegel’s argument is hard to disentangle here, but it seems to turn on the idea that in order to say that a substructure posits a superstructure, we must be able to relate the *content* of the substructure to the *content* of the superstructure. Without this kind of connection, one cannot even say that there is a *positing*

of one by the other at all. If that is accepted, then Kantian realism is incoherent, since it rules out precisely such a relation.¹⁷ This seems to be Hegel's main argument against realism, and it is stronger than simply the speculative alternative discussed above.

Hegel takes this argument to be a derivation of the principle of sufficient reason. That principle states that every truth has a reason, the German term for which is *Grund*. We may take this as being equivalent to the proposition that for every truth, there is an explanation.¹⁸ Hegel renders that into his way of speaking as: "what *is*, is not to be regarded as a merely *existent immediate* but as something *posited*."¹⁹ Although this principle is self-subsuming (there must be an explanation for why everything must have a sufficient reason, if the principle is true), it is not self-explanatory (it does not explain why everything must have a sufficient reason). Hegel takes his derivation of the conception of essence to be such an explanation. The conception of essence is required in order to escape the infinitely self-contradictory loop of the "Doctrine of Being." One explains essence by reference to the conception of reflection. This conception of reflection then implies that things be seen as posited by underlying substructures (essences). Thus, the principle of sufficient reason is explained by the principles that require us to move from the proto-contradiction found at the level of "being" and "nothing" to more complex categories.

But is this really an explanation of the principle? It is only if one views the principle of sufficient reason as being explained by the principle "All things should be viewed as mediated" (to use the shortened formulation he uses in the *Encyclopedia*²⁰). But if we are to take Hegel at his word and see the principle of sufficient reason as equivalent to his formulation of it, then his alleged explanation only reformulates it. "All things should be viewed as mediated" is just a different way of stating the principle of sufficient reason, not a way of explaining the principle.

Hegel's real explanation of the principle has to lie in his idea that this principle, like all others, is ultimately to be explained in terms of what he calls dialectical thought. We can phrase this as two tasks: (1) whether the principle of sufficient reason is indeed equivalent to Hegel's principle that all things should be seen as mediated; (2) whether Hegel can offer a satisfactory explanation of this principle in terms of dialectical thought. Hegel's "Doctrine of Essence" may be taken as an extended argument for an affirmative answer to the first question,

and his "Doctrine of the Concept" may taken as an extended argument for an affirmative answer to the second.

To see if the first task is met, we need to look at Hegel's further arguments concerning the categories of "Essence." He distinguishes between various kinds of ground. An absolute ground, Hegel says, is one that not only explains the grounded ("posits it") but also explains itself (is "self-positing"). Essence as explaining existence looks as if it is an example of such an absolute ground. Indeed, it seems to follow from Hegel's explication of it in terms of reflection. In Hegel's terms, the movement of reflection must be such that it mediates itself (that it "posits" itself). In an absolute ground, the reflection — the relation between the substructure and the superstructure — must be both self-subsuming and self-explanatory. Unless Kantian realism is to be accepted, the relation between the substructure and the superstructure must be such that the substructure is not beyond our ability to comprehend it. Hegel asks himself, how would it be possible that (1) the substructure posit the superstructure and (2) that the substructure not be beyond our cognitive grasp. Only if the relation between substructure and superstructure is linked by a relation of reflection, so Hegel thinks, would these two conditions be met.

Since the substructure and superstructure must be linked, it follows that "essence must appear."²¹ If "essence must appear," then the possibility of realism is thoroughly undermined. The appearance of essence is its appearance as a world of existent individuals. Hegel's views on this kind of existence (*Existenz*) remain the same as his views on the more basic notion of existence (*Dasein*); it is a feature of individuals, not of abstract structures.²² True to his compatibilist program, Hegel tries to provide for both views of existence in his system of categories. The more basic conception of existence is that of *Dasein*, qualitative or quantitative existence. The claim that this conception of existence could be understood only when set against an unchanging background — called, abstractly enough, the "infinite"—is now refined in the "Doctrine of Essence" into the claim that the being of individuals requires an explanation by substructures (essences). This is no longer the notion of a brutally existing individual (a *Daseiende*), but an existent individual that is posited by (and thus explained by) a more basic substructure.

This is a reconstruction of a very dense part of Hegel's text. Hegel says many different things in various passages in the *Science of Logic*, and it is difficult to sort them out. One of the things that makes Hegel's

thought often so hard to follow is his proclivity for testing out various hypotheses without telling us that this is what he is doing. This failure of textual pedagogy on his own part is partly to be explained by his view of the nature of his system. Such hypotheses are stages on the way to the complete explanation, and it would be rash, on his view, to announce in advance that any one of them is doomed to failure (in this way, Hegel's dialectic is indebted, no doubt self-consciously, to Socratic dialectic). Hegel finally comes to reject the view that the being of individuals is to be explained by reference to essences, but he also believes that until one has seriously entertained the view that it can be, one cannot understand why it cannot.²³

In this light, Hegel offers what he calls an "analysis" of and not a "transition" to his conception of a thing and its properties.²⁴ He comes to reject this view, although he regards it as an attempt at explanation of the existence of individuals from within the standpoint of what he calls "Appearance," a type of explanation in which the link between the substructure and the superstructure is fully explicit. Explanation in terms of "Appearance" might be thus called nonrealist explanation, since the substructure is not taken to be beyond our cognitive grasp. Thus, if one redescribes the most basic conceptions of the being of individuals (of qualitatively and quantitatively distinct somethings) into the language of "Appearance," the "something" of the "Doctrine of Being" becomes redescribed as a thing with its properties. Instead of the conception of a thing with its specific makeup (its purely qualitative and quantitative features), one has the category of a thing (*Diing*) that is the underlying substructural ground of its properties.²⁵ It is the difference, as it were, between describing something as a glassy white rock and describing it as something that has the sensible properties of glassy and white because of its underlying crystalline structure.

The individual thing has two features: (1) it is the substratum of a set of properties, that to which the properties are ascribed (this corresponds to the thing as that which is referred to by the subject of a judgment); and (2) it is the explanation of why it has these properties and not others (this corresponds to Locke's notion that the properties "flow from" the essence of the thing). This conception of a thing is thus a "reflected" conception (in Hegel's sense) in that it involves this distinction of a substructure, a superstructure and a positing relation between them. Hegel argues that such a conception of a thing is a vacuous idea, however laudable its pedigree. If the

thing is different from its properties, then it cannot be defined in terms of its properties. But in terms of what else can it be defined? The result of trying to define a thing independently of its properties is a conception of a thing as that of a *Grundlage*, a substratum and not a *Grund*, an explanatory foundation of the properties. It becomes simply a support of the properties, that in which they inhere, not that which explains them. Its role would be just to signify the "indeterminate unity" of the thing, "the oneness of something" (*das Eins des Etwas*).²⁶ It is Locke's "I know not what" that underlies the phenomenal properties.

Hegel even toys with trying to explain away the Kantian notion of the thing-in-itself in terms of this conception of a thing. The thing-in-itself is, after all, also an "I know not what," beyond our cognitive grasp. But since it is beyond our grasp, we cannot state what the explanatory connection is, and consequently the conception of the thing-in-itself is vacuous. In fact, Hegel argues, if one follows out the line of reasoning that makes the thing into a Lockean substratum, one finds that the conception of the thing degenerates into that of an "inessential surrounding [*Umfang*]" of its properties, a mere "this," a totally nonexplanatory dispensable conception.²⁷ This conception of the thing contradicts its explanatory intent; it is meant to explain the unity of the properties, but it fails to explain anything at all.

This conception of the thing alone will not explain the unity of phenomenal properties that one encounters in experience. Hegel proposes a second hypothesis to do this: the unity of phenomenal properties is to be explained by their being the posits of general phenomenal laws; the general laws produce the unity of the phenomenal properties, and we rely on the general laws to explain their unity. We could think of each thing as having the mere appearance (*Schein*) of being an independent self-subsistent entity, but the truth of the matter is that individual things are posits of a more general background of natural laws.²⁸

In testing out this conception, Hegel seems to be conceiving of laws as phenomenalist correlations of items of appearance. They are, he says, "not beyond appearance but immediately *present* in it."²⁹ The system of laws should then not be conceived as a hidden substructure but as available within the structure of appearance itself (this nicely mirrors the earlier conception of finite entities being explained by their existing in an unchanging background of the infinite, the picture found in the "Doctrine of Being").

Hegel argues that, like the others, this hypothesis also runs into trouble. To think of phenomenalist laws as explaining the properties of things in this manner requires us to ask how the laws themselves are to be explained. If we are given a law that states, for example, that sugar dissolves in water, then we will want an explanation of why that law itself holds (an explanation in terms of crystalline structure might, for example, fill the bill). This in turn requires us to think of the laws as ultimately belonging to a consistent system of laws (for example, many particular laws being derivable from some more general and basic set of laws). If we do that, we will need the category of a whole and its parts in order to interpret the relation of a system, its laws and the individuals in the system. The whole is the phenomenal aggregate of things, and the laws are the correlations of these phenomenal things taken as a whole. The individual existent is just a part of a larger whole, and the system of laws describe the way in which the whole and the individuals in it typically behave. If we do this, we will have to postulate forces to hold such a "mechanical aggregate" together.³⁰ Forces, however, are not items found in appearance nor are they equivalent to correlations of items of appearance; rather, they are substructural elements that explain the unity of appearance. Nonetheless, although forces are conceptually linked to appearances in a way that makes them knowable, they remain substructural elements.³¹

This is a reconstruction of the main lines of the arguments found in the section of the *Science of Logic* called "Appearance." I have taken Hegel's goal in that section to show that a realist view is untenable, since the categories that would make it possible turn out to be untenable. Realism must hold that it is possible that the world in itself is different than the world that appears to us. Hegel's arguments try to show that the conception of a nonappearing substructure is not tenable. He does not think that realism is just outright nonsense. Realism emerges as the solution to the kinds of dilemmas engendered by thinking of very abstract things, such as the relation of being to the world of existent individuals. It thus has a kind of relative rationality to it; realism solves some problems that emerge out of other strands of thought, but it engenders its own characteristic set of problems, which it cannot resolve in its own terms. The arguments found in "Appearance" resolve the dilemmas of realism, but they, too, engender their own difficulties. As far as Hegel is concerned, that is a good excuse for keeping the dialectic flowing.

III THE ACTUAL WORLD

Hegel's arguments against realism in favor of his nonrealist alternative are motivated by what is always a twofold element of the Hegelian dialectic: (1) the attempt to push alternative speculative explanations as far as they will go in order to show their defects; and (2) the arrangement of these various speculative probes in a kind of teleological ordering. In the "Doctrine of Essence" this arrangement consists of the ordering of worse to better integrations of the various conceptualizations of the relation of substructure to superstructure.

Realism fails because it can show no link between the substructure and the superstructure. The superstructural world becomes a world of mere appearance with no knowable link to the substructural world that is supposed to explain it. Realism's explanations thus yield to the better explanations found in the section called "Appearance." Within the categories of "Appearance" are explanations involving the positing of the superstructural element by the substructure, with the substructure being in principle knowable. For Hegel, an even better explanation would be one involving no separate substructural element at all, having instead the explanatory substructure also present in the superstructure. Hegel interprets explanation by phenomenalist laws as an attempt at this. Such explanations, however, end up invoking "hidden" substructural forces. However, Hegel argues, this need not be the end of the story of explanation by law. When these forces are adequately conceived, we will see that they are not beyond appearance but contained in it. Appearance is only their expression. Hegel proposes that we should not think of forces as entities of any sort but as the "essential relations" (*wesentliche Verhältnisse*) between entities.³²

Hegel calls this kind of structure in which laws express essential relations "Actuality" (*Wirklichkeit*). It is appearance as a self-positing system. This category, Hegel thinks, would be the best possible integration of substructure and superstructure. In such an explanation, there would be no explanatory substructure beyond or behind appearance. Rather, the explanatory structures of appearance are to be found within appearance itself. The basic divisions and developments of the categories of "Essence" thus appear as an ordering of stages of realist thought and its breakdown. "Mere appearance" is realism at its extreme, "Appearance" is mitigated realism, and "Actuality" is the full-fledged rejection of realism altogether.

It is in the section called "Actuality" that Hegel tries to show how his thesis about the being of individuals applies to substructure/superstructure relationships. In doing so, he tries to argue for a compatibilist understanding of Kantian and Aristotelian conceptions of substance within an overall Spinozistic conception of substance as self-causing. In the "Doctrine of Essence" the goal of explanation is to show how it would be possible for a substructure to posit its "other" (a superstructure) and in doing so to posit itself. Spinoza's conception of substance comes closest to being an explanation of this type. His substance not only posits all the features of the world of appearance; as self-caused, it also posits itself. However, if the being of individuals consists in being posited by an all-embracing substance, then what is left of the thesis that the being of individuals belongs properly to them?

From Kant, Hegel takes over the idea that substance is a relational concept. There are important differences in how each understands this idea. Unlike the Hegelian conception of substance, the Kantian conception of substance emerges as an answer to problems about how endurance over time is possible. Kant's argument for it (roughly) is that without an enduring thing over time, we could not mark objective time relations; we could not, that is, distinguish our subjective time sequences (the order in which our ideas subjectively appear to us) from objective time sequences (the order in which things follow each other in the world). Time is possible only in a world with alteration in it, but we need something that is permanent (or just endures) in order to be able to mark alteration (as opposed to just succession). Substance is that which makes such marking of alteration possible. The category of substance, however, is only the subject-predicate form of judgment synthesized with time: the subject becomes "that which endures" (substance), and the predicate becomes an accident, "that which alters." Substance is thus injected by us into experience; it is a logical form of judgment that in being temporalized becomes a categorial structure of appearance.

Hegel removes the epistemological form of this argument. Substance is conceived by Hegel as a relation or proportion (the term is *Verhältnis*) among its attributes. To say of anything that it is a substance is to say that (1) it is identical over time, and (2) it accounts for its properties developing the way in which they do. The latter condition is necessary to differentiate this conception of a substance from that of a thing and its properties. The thing is indifferent to its properties (it does not explain why it has such and such properties), whereas a

substance posits its properties. (In Hegel's argument it emerges that there could be only one substance, but there could be many things.³³)

In the Hegelian dialectic, so we have seen, not all transitions are motivated simply by the appearance of a contradiction that needs to be resolved; often the transition is motivated by Hegel's belief that he can show that a more complete explanation is possible. What turns out to be deficient in the lower level explanation is not its contradictoriness, nor even its incoherence, but its *incompleteness*. This conception of substance, being a more complete explanatory conception than the earlier conception of a thing, is consequently higher in the Hegelian teleology of explanation. The substance is both the unity of its properties and their explanation.³⁴ Hegel calls such a conception the absolute: that conception of a substructure that not only posits its superstructure but also posits itself — a self-subsuming and self-explanatory concept. As such, it would not be something behind or beyond appearance but something to be found within appearance. As the unity of its properties, it "manifests" itself in them: "the actual is therefore *manifestation*; it is not drawn into the sphere of *alteration* by its externality, nor is it the *reflecting* of itself in *an other*, but it manifests itself; that is, in its externality it is *itself* and is *itself* in that alone, namely only as a self-distinguishing and self-determining movement."³⁵ (Hegel incidentally notes that this is only an "explication" (*Auslegung*), a "display" (*Zeigen*) of what substance is, not a deduction of the conception.³⁶)

Many philosophers argue for the existence of universals, but few bother to argue that there are particulars. In Hegel's case it would be surprising if he did not at least try to do this. One would expect Hegel at least to attempt some kind of dialectical derivation of the notion of particulars by trying to show that, for example, the idea that the universal substance need not differentiate itself into particulars is an incoherent or self-contradictory idea.

He does make an attempt of sorts at such an argument when he explicates the modalities of substance, in particular, contingency and necessity. There he claims at least that contingency is a necessary feature of substance and that self-positing substance must necessarily posit a world of individual entities interpreted as individual substances. Moreover, it is clear that Hegel thinks that there are such individuals posited by substance. First, he praises Leibniz's theory of monads as having basically the right idea, but in failing to give the "principle of individuation" its "deeper statement [*Ausführung*]," Leibniz's philosophy fails as a piece of speculative philosophy.³⁷ Second,

in speaking of causality, Hegel claims that there are many substances that interact causally with each other.³⁸

Hegel's question thus seems to be: given a conception of substance as the "absolute," how is it possible that there can be distinct, real individuals (how is it possible, that is, that monism and pluralism are compatible³⁹)? His specific way of putting the problem, which he picks up from Kant, is to explain how it is possible to accept both the unity of the causal relation and the independence of the relata (how, that is, to combine causal necessity with the logical independence of cause and effect). His attempt at a speculative answer to this involves seeing actuality as a causal system, and his argument seems to be something like the following. To try to speak of necessary individual causal relations is hopeless; à la Hume, one cannot find any. All one can find are correlations of individual things in constant conjunction. To look for necessary causal relations at this level is futile, since if successful, such a search would leave us at best with what Hegel takes (mistakenly) to be analytic propositions (such as "rain causes things to be wet").⁴⁰

Hegel's speculative solution is to make causality a systemic conception. To say of any two things that they stand in a causal relation is to locate them in a unitary world system. In Hegel's terms, it is to locate them in the self-identical substance of actuality. To speak of causal relations would then be to describe an ongoing set of regularities, a world order, which is composed of individual substances interacting with one another.⁴¹ The interaction is a causal one when one can show, for example, that without the interference of X, the system would have such and such a configuration. Causal relations thus are of the form: system S would end up in state Φ but for the intervention of X, which resulted in its ending up in state Θ . What counts as a cause and what counts as an effect is thus relative to its location in the system.⁴²

The substance of the world is thus articulated as a system in which various causal relations function as moments of this system. Causality is thus a *Verhältnis*, a relation or proportion between logically independent substances in a world order, and the world as the substance of everything is that ideal order depicted by our mappings of it as a causal system. Substance is the ideality of the particular substances that interact within the order. Causality as a category consists in the mapping of the law-like system of the world. On Hegel's conception of it, causality thus requires both independent substances and a background order in terms of which they are necessarily related.

Without individual substances, one cannot have causal relations, and without some conception of a background order, one cannot order the relations of individuals in any way that could be said to be causal.⁴³

This conception of a substance that posits itself as positing its other—as being an explanatory ground that is self-subsuming and self-explanatory—is Hegel’s candidate for the best possible category of essence. The world as a unitary system posits itself through the kinds of causal relations that make it up.

However, this turns out not to be the best possible explanation, for it necessarily involves us in a self-contradictory loop similar to the one found at the end of the “Doctrine of Being.” Substance (the absolute) is said to posit the various determinations of itself, which turn out to be individual substances involved in causal relations with each other. What, however, is the content of this underlying substance itself? If it is said to be simply identical with the whole system of causal relations, then it cannot be said to be explanatory of them. If it is different, then it is impossible (given the way Hegel has set up the system of arguments) to say exactly what it is. It becomes an unknowable thing-in-itself, and the individual things of the world become the mere appearances of an underlying explanatory substructure. Such a conception, however, returns one to the beginning of the “Doctrine of Essence,” viz., the categories of “mere appearance” and “essence.” The dialectic of the “Doctrine of Essence” thus ends up in a self-contradictory loop, and the process of explanation by substructure starts over again. This can be overcome, as it was in the “Doctrine of Being,” only by moving to a new level of explanation that avoids the dilemmas of the earlier one. Hegel calls this new level “The Concept.”