



How Hegelian is Hegelian thought in Simmel?

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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

Simmel never finished his book on Hegel. Simmel rarely mentions Hegel throughout his collected works. But when he does, it is often with praise. However, Simmel explicitly distances himself from Hegel in those places where, as readers, we find Hegelian traits. What should we make of this complex relationship? With the aim of contributing to understanding Simmel's systematic thought, I assess the extent to which Simmel was and was not influenced by Hegel. I refer to two lesser-known writings, in which Simmel addresses Hegel's philosophy at length, along with some of the more incidental mentions of Hegel that Simmel makes throughout his oeuvre. I show that Simmel adopts Hegel's conception of philosophy while rejecting its system building. I then argue that what most scholars consider to be Hegelian in Simmel's philosophy, namely dialectics, in fact represents his weakest, or most general, form of Hegelianism. Moreover, I show that given Simmel's aesthetic focus, he may have been more influenced by Schiller than by Hegel in this regard. Finally, among other Hegelian features that are often overlooked, I consider Simmel's conceptual relationality of individual–society as well as his critique of Kantian ethics.

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How Hegelian is Hegelian thought in Simmel?

Abstract. Simmel never finished his book on Hegel. Simmel rarely mentions Hegel throughout his collected works. But when he does, it is often with praise. However, Simmel explicitly distances himself from Hegel in those places where, as readers, we find Hegelian traits. What should we make of this complex relationship? With the aim of contributing to understanding Simmel's systematic thought, I assess the extent to which Simmel was and was not influenced by Hegel. I refer to two lesser-known writings, in which Simmel addresses Hegel's philosophy at length, along with some of the more incidental mentions of Hegel that Simmel makes throughout his oeuvre. I show that Simmel adopts Hegel's conception of philosophy while rejecting its system building. I then argue that what most scholars consider to be Hegelian in Simmel's philosophy, namely dialectics, in fact represents his weakest, or most general, form of Hegelianism. Moreover, I show that given Simmel's aesthetic focus, he may have been more influenced by Schüller than by Hegel in this regard. Finally, among other Hegelian features that are often overlooked, I consider Simmel's conceptual relationality of individual–society as well as his critique of Kantian ethics.

“We come to the most difficult task of the programme.”¹

Simmel on Hegel during a lecture

¹ For helpful comments, thanks to Frederik-Emil Friis Jakobsen, Martin Hauberg-Lund Laugesen, Kresten Lundsgaard-Leth, Mads Lund Mikkelsen and Alfred Sköld.

From Rudolf Pannwitz's *Nachschrift*
(Pannwitz [1903–1904] 2010: 382) [my
translation]

1. Introduction: Simmel, the Hegelian?

Simmel scholarship has long since moved beyond characterising Simmel as an unsystematic, even chaotic thinker. However, in the absence of a grand-scale system, the focus has been on interpreting the ways in which Simmel's philosophy may be said to be systematic. To this end, within the fragmentary nature of his work, Simmel's *Wechselwirkung* has served as a point of departure, often by being labelled 'dialectics'.² Indeed, many scholars cite Hegel as one of Simmel's main influences, usually without further specification, sometimes by highlighting 'dialectics' as their most obvious common denominator (e.g., Spykman 1925, xxivf; Weingartner [1960] 1962: 161, 183f; Christian 1978; Landmann 1987; Schermer and Jary 2013; Thouard 2021).

Yet, on account of Simmel's methodological pluralism (Lichtblau 1993), his neo-Kantian affiliations and his later turn towards Goethe (Podoksik 2016), it has been unclear to *what extent* Simmel was a Hegelian, or indeed integrated Hegelian elements into his philosophy. Recently, it has been argued that Simmel was not a Hegelian to any significant degree, nor did he integrate his thought to any major extent (e.g., Mele 2022: 96f; Mele 2023: 123ff). Using comparison as a method of clarification, this article revisits the issue of how much of Simmel's thought adopts or contrasts with Hegel's philosophy.

The aim of this endeavour is not only to clarify the relationship between Simmel and Hegel but also to understand Simmel's thought more systematically. To this end, I will investigate Simmel's own reading of Hegel as well as Simmel's relationship to dialectics

² Although, of course, other labels have been used too, e.g., relationalism or interactionism, each harbouring different implications.

and his understanding of philosophy. I will do so both methodologically in terms of Hegel's 'monistic prejudice' (Simmel's word) and system-building; and thematically with regard to Simmel's social philosophy and ethics. Attending to both methodology and thematic content, we may at the outset distinguish between *methodological* and *content* congruence between Simmel and Hegel. In other words, I will distinguish between the ways in which Simmel thinks *like* Hegel (mode of thought) and the ways in which Simmel thinks the *same things* and reaches the same conclusions as Hegel (content of thought).

To anticipate the key finding of the conclusion, Simmel shares crucial elements with Hegel both in terms of mode and content of thought, but he also significantly differs from him in both regards. I will attempt to show, among other things, that Simmel begins his dialectics from the conceptual unity of an opposition, whereas Hegel always begins from a concept that appears to be one-sided and only arrives at unity through its negation. Put crudely, while both think dialectically, Simmel seeks unity and finds opposition, whereas Hegel seeks opposition and finds unity (see illustration in Figure 1).

The background of this article is not only that Simmel's understanding of Hegel and his Hegelian influence are largely neglected in the literature. Hegel has also been revived in recent decades as an object of study and, consequently, of reassessment. Since we have gained a different or more nuanced understanding of Hegel's philosophy, this invites us to reconsider the presence of Hegelian elements in the works of other philosophers. In this article, I thus take the opportunity to try to identify forms of Hegelian thought in Simmel that were previously unrecognisable, not least to Simmel himself.

The article is structured as follows. First, I will attempt to bring Simmel's Hegel to light by turning to Simmel's two extensive but often neglected accounts of Hegel (Section 2). I then show how Simmel adopts Hegel's understanding of philosophy, while at the same time criticising his metaphysics for its system building, its

functional monism, and its inherent contradiction (Section 3). Turning to the analysis of their mode of thought (Section 4), I argue that Simmel's *Wechselwirkung* shares only specific properties with Hegel's dialectics (logical stringency, determinacy, and reconciliation), while also exhibiting fundamental differences, as already hinted at (Section 4.1 and 4.2). In Section 4.3, I consider and defend the view that Friedrich Schiller may have had a more significant influence on Simmel with regard to dialectics than Hegel, given Simmel's aesthetics. Finally, in Section 5, I shift the focus away from mode to content of thought by investigating the extent to which Simmel has Hegelian elements in his philosophy beyond dialectics. I argue that a stronger form of Hegelianism can be concretely identified in Simmel's conceptual pairing of individual–society (Section 5.1) and in his criticism of Kantian ethics (Section 5.2). I summarise the results in the conclusion.

2. Opening: Simmel reads Hegel—with the intention of writing *Hegel*?

Simmel's familiarity with Hegel remains unclear, even at the level of how much of Hegel Simmel knew. When and which Hegel texts did Simmel read? Ingo Meyer writes: "Simmel did not read Hegel extensively before 1905." (2021: 192) This may be true, but it is hard to prove, especially because of the relative qualifier 'extensively'.³ As an introduction to Simmel's Hegel, let me therefore offer three brief points of discussion which indicate that Simmel had an earlier and more than precursory knowledge of Hegel. Furthermore, they suggest that Simmel engaged with the writings of Hegel throughout his entire career.

³ Meyer agrees. However, he maintains that the claim "could be demonstrated indirectly" (2021: 192) without providing evidence besides referring, not to specific textual passages, but broadly to the student transcripts of Simmel's lectures in GSG 21.

First, Simmel commented on Hegel several times already in the early 1890s. His comments cover different aspects of Hegel's philosophy and do not, in my assessment, reflect a cursory reading (I highlight, however, certain problems with his conclusions, cf. Section 5.1 and 5.2). Simmel seems already familiar enough with Hegel in *Einleitung in die Moralphilosophie* (1892–93) to note what is 'characteristic' of him (quoted below, Section 5.1). One would expect such an adverb to denote a certain degree of confident familiarity with Hegel's texts, although of course it is difficult to judge whether we should give more weight to his confidence or his familiarity here.

Second, despite the fact that Simmel engaged relatively little with Hegel compared to thinkers such as Kant, Goethe, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, to whom he dedicated entire works and to whom he was explicitly philosophically indebted, Simmel engaged with Hegel's philosophy more than any of the other German idealists (e.g., Fichte, Schleiermacher, Schelling). He did so to the extent that he even intended to write a book entitled *Hegel*, with the aim of completing a trilogy consisting of *Kant* (1904) and its sequel *Schopenhauer und Nietzsche* (1907), as Simmel mentions in a letter to philosopher Heinrich Rickert in 1906 (Simmel [1906] 2008: 546). If Simmel had planned the trilogy from the outset, his 'extensive' reading of Hegel may have predated 1905 (although, of course, Simmel may have been intrigued by Hegel without extensive knowledge of him).

Third, one may further speculate on the structure of this trilogy and Simmel's choice of placing *Hegel* as its third part. Perhaps Simmel intended the third book to conclude or, in a dialectical Hegelian manner, reconcile the previous books? After all, Simmel does mention in his letter to Rickert that he considers the second book to be the "counterpart" (*Gegenstück*) of the first (Simmel [1906] 2008: 546). This legitimises a similar interpretation of the planned third book, suggesting a dialectical organisation of the trilogy and, ostensibly, suggesting an early Hegelian influence (or at least knowledge of Hegel's philosophy).

Simmel commented on Hegel throughout his career, from *Moralwissenschaft* to *Rembrandt* (1916), but he dealt with him intensively in the early 1910s. From this period, we find two longer and often overlooked pieces, an essay published in Simmel's time and a section in then-unpublished lecture notes, both of which extensively engage with Hegel's philosophy. Were they perhaps parts of Simmel's *Hegel* book project?

2.1 *Essay on Becoming*

Published in 1911, the essay “Das Problem des Werdens in der Hegelschen Philosophie” (The Problem of Becoming in Hegel's Philosophy) (Simmel [1911] 2016) originally made up the last part of the second chapter of *Hauptprobleme der Philosophie* from 1910 (Simmel [1910] 1996, 66–79). Simmel begins the essay by stating that, in the history of philosophy, ‘Becoming’ as a philosophical project has found, on the one hand, its most minimal expression in the fragments of Heraclitus and, on the other hand, its most elaborate expression in the works of Hegel. Simmel focuses on Hegel's tenet “Die Selbstbewegung der Idee” (The self-movement of the Idea), which, according to Simmel, contains “a unique elaboration of metaphysical Becoming” (Simmel [1911] 2016: 11) [my translation]. The essay reveals Simmel's admiration for Hegel's philosophy, whose “fundamental motive ... is by no means as outdated as its expression [Ausdruck], in which, on the contrary, a basic grounding of Spirit [ein Grundverhalten des Geistes] forming the image of the world is revealed in full originality and depth” (Simmel [1911] 2016: 11) [my translation]. With this phrase, as we shall see later, Simmel points to a deeper agreement with Hegel regarding the nature of philosophy (cf. Section 3).

In the final verdict of the essay, however, Simmel finds Hegel guilty of committing a logical error at the base of his entire philosophy. Simmel argues that if everything is always in the process of becoming—as concepts, in Hegel's philosophy, incessantly find their opposition (meaning that every concept is realised only

through its negation and so on)—then ‘becoming’ must also apply to the very logical schemata Hegel proposes *as his philosophy* (Simmel [1911] 2016: 22). Hegel’s philosophy fundamentally claims that all concepts are conditioned by their reciprocal relationship with other concepts. So why should this conditionality not apply to his whole system as well? According to Simmel, Hegel’s philosophy provides an *unconditional* structure for his metaphysics. But since Hegel’s central idea is *conditionality at every level*, he should also be obliged to assert it at the system level (Simmel [1911] 2016: 23).

Simmel adds the afterthought that Heraclitus must, as a philosopher of universal becoming, both have believed and disbelieved that everything is *really* in flux. If he only believed it, the absolute truth value of his ‘everything flows’ doctrine (*Panta rei*) would subject itself to its own claim of relativity and, thus, invalidate itself (Simmel [1911] 2016: 23). Therefore, he must also have disbelieved it, as a philosopher, to avoid committing this logical fallacy, to avoid his claim of ‘complete relativity’ from becoming an absolute claim. Simmel’s general point in the essay is that such a fallacy not only pertains to Heraclitus as well as to the elaborate Hegelian system, but in fact sums up the central problem for any philosophy of Becoming. It even haunts Nietzsche (Simmel [1911] 2016: 23).

Here, we glimpse Simmel’s justification for his anti-system-building approach to philosophy. Arguing that one cannot build entire philosophical systems of Becoming without contradicting oneself at *some* level, philosophers must abandon the effort. Abandoning this effort does not, however, preclude pursuing systematicity. Philosophy may still make use of the rigour of those systems, but it must carve out concepts locally, be domain specific, and avoid connecting all concepts into a larger whole that detaches itself from its own process of becoming. That Simmel argues against *unconditional* philosophical systems and avoids it in his writings captures his modernism, often expressed through a ‘snapshot’ (*Momentbild*), an ‘aesthetic attempt’ (*ästhetischer Versuch*), or a single concept, in which the object of study, rich in content and structure,

is indeed *systematically* investigated but not *systematised* into a *system* of concepts.

Thus, Simmel uses Hegel as a lever for two points in his essay “Das Problem des Werdens in der Hegelschen Philosophie”: First, problematising unconditional system-building in philosophy, but not systematicity as such. Second, retaining Hegel’s philosophy, despite its flaws, as yielding *ein Grundverhalten*, a basic grounding or scheme, to the formation of Spirit, but without explicating what he refers to by such a *Grundverhalten*. I shall argue later that Simmel refers to the accordance between his and Hegel’s philosophies (Section 3).

Before doing so, let us turn to the other exposition, namely Simmel’s lesser-known Hegel lecture.

2.2 *Lecture on Hegel’s philosophy*

We find Simmel elaborating Hegel’s philosophy in his *Kolleghefte*, his notes for the lectures on the history of philosophy that he held in Berlin in the winter semester 1913–1914. The course begins with the Stoics and ends with Henri Bergson. Perhaps surprisingly, Simmel devotes the longest section of the lecture notes to Hegel (19 pages), marginally exceeding those on Kant (16 pages), and more than doubling those on Schopenhauer (9 pages), Nietzsche (4 pages), and Bergson (3 pages). We can only guess why Simmel deals so extensively with Hegel compared to the others: Does Simmel consider Hegel the most prominent figure in the history of philosophy? Is Simmel working on his aforementioned Hegel-book and therefore has a lot to say about Hegel at this point in time? Is Simmel, on the contrary, able to have brief notes on Kant, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Bergson because he has dealt with them extensively elsewhere and can therefore recall the material more easily from his memory (this should then also be true for all the other philosophers in the notes)? Moreover, why does Simmel have elaborate notes to his lectures if, as numerous eyewitnesses

have reported,⁴ improvising rather than *vorlesen* marks his lecturing style? Perhaps the notes just helped him prepare for the lectures *and* his writing? Difficult as it is to provide clear answers to these questions, the mere length of the Hegel-section indicates that he was no negligible figure, neither in Simmel's opinion nor in the history of philosophy, and Simmel wanted to convey this to his students.

As with the first text, it becomes clear from this lecture that Simmel admired Hegel as a philosopher: "This explanation of the world in general as the life process of the Idea remains under all circumstances one of the *greatest* attempts ever made, may it have *failed*, may it be an attempt with *ineffectual means*." (Simmel [1913/1914] 2010: 117) [my translation and italics] What is the meaning of 'ineffectual means', *untauglichen Mitteln*? Simmel may be referring to Hegel's method (emphasising *means*), or to what he previously referred to as an 'outdated expression' (emphasising *ineffectual*) in his earlier Hegel-essay from *Hauptprobleme*. The latter would be a rather superficial, even cosmetic, critique of Hegel's nomenclature, vocabulary, style. The former would be substantial, perhaps referring to Hegel's dialectics and its functional systemic coherence, which, as we shall see below (Section 3), Simmel explicitly challenges. But like in the previous essay, Simmel's praise remains unelaborated.

One of the main points of the lecture is Hegel's pursuit for stable knowledge in a world of change, a theme not unrelated to the absolute conditionality fallacy (cf. Section 2.1). Simmel argues that Hegel fails to acknowledge how science progresses by continuously questioning its own established truths, revising itself and ultimately replacing its own framework periodically (Simmel [1913/1914] 2010: 115). Not recognising this made Hegel attempt to bridge two fundamentally opposing ideas, historical development and rational

⁴ See e.g. the numerous accounts in *Buch des Dankes an Georg Simmel* (1958), edited by Kurt Gassen and Michael Landmann.

absoluteness, that is, to close the unclosable gap between contingency and necessity.

Hegel failed, according to Simmel. His project ended with himself because the heirs failed to continue along their master's path. Hegelianism thus forked into two opposite political traditions: conservatism and Marxism. The former justifying the status quo of bourgeois society, the latter justifying historical progress (and, ultimately, revolutionary class struggle) (Simmel [1913/1914] 2010: 115). Two rationalities, one wanting to change nothing, the other wanting to change everything. The Hegelian system disintegrated into a contradiction, only to be vindicated in its logically opposing, but not *aufgehobenen*, parts by rival schools of thought. Thus, Simmel adds *irony* to the scene of the collapse of Hegel's dialectical philosophy as, in his view, it (dis)continued as static oppositions without any prospect of reconciliation.

In this way, Simmel not only formulated his critique of Hegel, but also highlighted for his students what he understood as the fundamental contradictions present in Hegel's philosophy. On the one hand, Hegel's conceiving of the world as a set of conditions and of science as a worldview of *continual advancement*, while, on the other hand, an absolute framework to those conditions and to science as a *final result*. Each had a political manifestation; and each, seeking no common ground, seeking no unity in their duality, lost what the other gained and vice versa.

In addition to these concerns, Simmel's expositions offer valuable insight into his reading of Hegel. Simmel does not reject Hegel's philosophy in any overt sense, as seen in his later writings. Let us therefore turn to the textual evidence scattered throughout Simmel's work, which contains (again) both an appraisal and a critique of Hegel. I will argue that Simmel's understanding of philosophy is closer to Hegel's than has been previously acknowledged, in the sense that Simmel, although distancing himself from Hegel's system-building, that reveals a *functional* monism, nevertheless endorses a *substantial* monism, wherein all

unifying processes of oppositional relations are incorporated. Moreover, I will argue that Simmel's substantial monism reveals another crucial distinction for a systematic understanding of his philosophy, namely the operative difference between art and philosophy, which cannot be reduced to each other.

3. What is philosophy? Simmel adopts Hegel's monism

Simmel's criticism of Hegel continues in *Rembrandt* from 1916. Here, he finally pronounces what he finds valuable in Hegel's philosophy in a more technical or clearer fashion. In terms of critique, Simmel still argues that Hegel "elevated all empirical details, externalities, and accidents of life into the sphere of the absolute, the holy, the absolute sense." (Simmel [1916] 2005: 117) Simmel remains critical of Hegel's system-building approach to philosophy as underpinned by the assumption that all philosophical reasoning "necessarily converge[s] at *one* ultimate point, and thus must be made to fit into a philosophical system" (Simmel [1916] 2005: 3). But he then proceeds to a more supportive stance, cryptically but concretely stating that although Hegel's philosophy, by converging into a comprehensive philosophical system, holds "a monistic prejudice", this philosophy also "contradicts the—rather more functional than substantial—essence of philosophy." (Simmel [1916] 2005: 3) Simmel seems to justify a certain degree of agreement between them. What does it mean that Hegel does not contradict the substance but "only" the function of philosophy?

In light of the two previous expositions, I think that the functional problem Simmel detects in Hegel is that Hegel's monism is at odds with Simmel's—and other theorists and philosophers of (post)modernity—anti-system-building approach (sketched above). Monism, *functionally* interpreted, operates on the assumption that all concepts perform specific roles in a system due to a common end that modernity has eroded, making monism understood as system-building untenable. But why does Hegel not contradict the *substance* of philosophy? What monism, *substantially* interpreted, is tenable?

We find an answer if we consider Simmel's most pronounced conception of what philosophy is, namely his 'aesthetic pantheism', which he proposes as early as 1896 in his essay "Soziologische Ästhetik". As Mele (2022: 108) notes, the essay "can truly stand as a programmatic writing", and it may thus be the closest Simmel comes to explicitly developing a fixed philosophical position. With his aesthetic pantheism, Simmel sought to establish a *systematic* way of thinking without leading to a *system*. That is, where each object can have philosophical underpinnings subscribed to it without being unified in a framework. Simmel presents his position as follows:

The essence of aesthetic contemplation and interpretation for us consists in the following: What is unique emphasizes what is typical, what is accidental appears as normal, and the superficial and fleeting stands for what is essential and basic. It seems to be impossible for any phenomenon to avoid being reduced to what is important and of eternal value. Even the lowest, intrinsically ugly phenomenon can be dissolved into contexts of color and form, of feeling and experience, which provide it with exciting significance. To involve ourselves deeply and lovingly with even the most common product, which would be banal and repulsive in its isolated appearance, enables us to conceive of it, too, as a ray and image of the final unity of all things from which beauty and meaning flow. Every philosophical system, every religion, every moment of our heightened emotional experience, searches for symbols which are appropriate for their expression. If we pursue this possibility of aesthetic appreciation to its final point, we find that there are no essential differences among things. Our worldview turns into aesthetic pantheism. Every point contains within itself the potential of being redeemed to absolute aesthetic importance. To the adequately trained eye the totality of beauty, the complete meaning of the world as a whole, radiates from every single point. (Simmel [1896] 2020: 96)

By 'aesthetic contemplation'—a central idea in Simmel's philosophy—one can dissolve all things into fundamental

principles, without presupposing that all objects are related to each other in the sense of being mutually dependent or logically necessary, as Hegel's philosophy functionally asserts. Simmelian aesthetics aim to unify opposing principles—unique–typical, accidental–normal, superficial–essential, but also part–whole, upward–downward, inward–outward⁵—and claims that this can be done on *any* scale and on *any* object. Hence 'pantheism', in the sense of a ubiquitous strategy of analysis, so to speak, which does not lead to the construction of a system.

Since for Simmel the *substantial* essence of philosophy is to analyse and conceptually articulate the local unification of opposites, which is embedded in Hegel's philosophy, Hegel does not 'contradict' Simmel's idea of 'aesthetic contemplation' in his aesthetic pantheism. One can even see Simmel, on a general level, highlighting a sketch of what we may still call Hegelian dialectics *as* the essence of such conceptual work—and it may be what Simmel finds attractive in Hegel's philosophy, as we saw above when he underscores Hegel's explication of the *Grundverhalten* of Spirit. In an essay on Rodin, Simmel seems to reformulate this *Grundverhalten* with a striking Hegelian undertone:

For this is after all the formula for the development of the modern spirit, that it separates the elements of life from their originally undifferentiated, primordial [wurzelhaften] unity, individualises them, makes them conscious for themselves, in order to bring them together into a new unity only after they have been thus separately formed (Simmel [1902] 1995b: 98) [my translation]

As a counterweight to modern fragmentation, aesthetic pantheism is a reconciliatory monism and perhaps an alternative

⁵ These general categories or principles can be found throughout Simmel's oeuvre. In the respective order of the listed pairs, see, for example, the essay on the picture frame (Simmel (1902) 1995c: 101-108), on the Alps (Simmel [1911] 2001b: 162-169), and on the bridge and door (Simmel [1909] 2001a: 55-61).

contemporary philosophical articulation of Hegel's *Grundverhalten*. But unlike Hegel, Simmel cannot guarantee reconciliation secured by logical unity. We see reconciliation, Simmel claims, only in "every grand artwork [as they] naturally actualises the unity of this dualism" (Simmel [1902] 1995b: 98) [my translation]. Such unification brings to us "the deepest gratification ... that the elements of life are ultimately not as disjointed as life would us have believe." (Simmel [1902] 1995b: 98) [my translation] Art reveals unified coherence not easily comprehended by the intellect. Yet, art cannot *prove* the union of opposing elements in life, art can only *portray* it, i.e., portray the solution to the problem of reconciling two mutually excluding elements in a unity. This is what Auguste Rodin's art has done, and thus "solved in the way art solves intellectual problems: not in principles, but in singular representations [Anschauungen]" (Simmel [1902] 1995b: 94). What is revealed in artworks' ability to represent a unity of ontological relationality (i.e., to reveal life's continuity through dynamic relations, which are grasped as opposites) is the limit of intellectual proof or logical expression. Thus, Simmel clearly parted ways with Hegel in terms of how much art can do. According to Hegel, the historical demand of Spirit, in Hegel's day, required articulating truth through philosophical conceptualisation, instead of through aesthetic representation (art) or religious dogma (theology). In contrast, Simmel understands artworks as having the ability to perform—or rather portray—epistemological operations that are inaccessible to philosophy.

In his *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (§553–577), Hegel placed art and religion as historical forms of absolute spirit (i.e., modes of knowledge-production) that, compared to philosophy, had become inadequate in modernity. Thus, Hegel also distanced himself from Schiller's aestheticism, since Schiller understood art as compatible with philosophical inquiry, not as domains that should be separated. To understand why Simmel occupies a middle position between Schiller and Hegel, we must take note of Simmel's distinction between art as an activity of the artist and aesthetic contemplation as an activity of the

philosopher. When Simmel proposes aesthetic contemplation as a fruitful form of philosophical inquiry, there is not necessarily a conflict with Hegel; the conflict arises when Simmel argues that art and philosophy are equally important as truth-tracking inquiries, which they for Hegel were not. For Simmel, both reveal aspects of reality, but each in the opposite direction of the other: philosophy dissects unity into oppositions; art unites oppositions. The philosopher reveals the inner oppositional dimensions of an artwork, the artist seamlessly unites them.

We can sum up the conclusions of this section in the following way: encapsulated by the label ‘aesthetic pantheism’, Simmel adopts a substantial, but not functional, monism, which, according to Simmel, is compatible with (not contradicting) Hegel’s philosophy. Moreover, in Simmel’s thought, there is an often unexplicated difference between art and philosophy: between aesthetic contemplation (i.e., philosophical inquiry) on the one hand and art on the other. Artworks harmoniously unite logical tensions or oppositions in historical time. The philosophical operation, while unable to unite the oppositions, scrutinises concepts, or objects, and articulates the oppositions hitherto united (and unarticulated) in them. So, while Simmel adopts Hegel’s understanding of philosophy (in the sense of doing away with its functional system-building but retaining its substantial side, that is, to constantly seeking the oppositional relationality of singularity), he is less optimistic about reconciliation than Hegel when it comes to philosophical analysis, instead reserving for art the ability to actively merge logical oppositions through concrete artworks. This leads us to the following question.

4. Mode of thought: How Hegelian are Simmel’s dialectics?

In this section, I examine three aspects: First, in Section 4.1, I show how Simmel does not follow Hegel’s dialectics in terms of nomenclature, system coherence, and what I call ‘dialectical direction’. Instead, he follows Hegel in understanding dialectics as an internal property of thought rather than as an external method.

Second, I show how Simmel also follows Hegel when his dialectics are logical, self-enclosed, and reconciliatory. This offers an alternative account to those readings that understand Simmel's *Wechselwirkung* as ambivalent, open-ended, and non-reconciliatory (Section 4.2). Third, I shall try to show how Simmel and Hegel's dialectics may have a common ancestor in Friedrich Schiller, and how Simmel's dialectics, in relation to aesthetics, are closer to Schiller than to Hegel (Section 4.3).

One preliminary clarification is in order here, namely the labelling of Simmel's *Wechselwirkung* as dialectics. Several scholars are ready to name Simmel's thought as such (see e.g., Schermer and Jary 2013: 17–46 for numerous references). But since Simmel rarely used the term 'dialectics' to characterise his systematic thinking, our interest here is to use 'dialectics' as our term of reference to find the common ground between Simmel and Hegel in relation to describing their systematic thought. For this reason, *Wechselwirkung* and dialectics will be used interchangeably.

4.1 Simmel's dialectics is only partly Hegelian

As we saw above (Section 2.1), Simmel criticises Hegel's system-building philosophy as well as its "Ausdruck", that is, its "expression". Indeed, he does not follow Hegel's technical vocabulary describing the logical phases of thought, viz. the moment of the understanding (introducing the stable or fixed concept), the dialectical moment (introducing the negatively rational), and then the speculative moment (introducing the positively rational) in which the previous moments or determinations are drawn together into a new unity (the concept or idea). These three moments are sometimes summed up by others in the triad of thesis–antithesis–synthesis. Hegel does not suggest in his *Logic* that the three schematic moments are predetermined. Their

arrangement is only illustrative.⁶ Only the rules that ‘thought’ yields during its own process determine the logical structure. Therefore, Hegel’s ‘dialectics’—which in general terms comprise all moments, not only the negatively rational (“the dialectical moment”)—should not according to Hegel be considered as a method applied from the outside, but as a central organic feature of philosophical inquiry (Hegel [1820] 2017: §31 (Zusatz), see also Hegel’s Preface and Introduction to his *Phänomenologie des Geistes*). On account of the claimed self-adjustment of rationality in Hegel’s philosophy, one may therefore object to Simmel’s account of Hegel as *applying* rules to thought that are *ahistorical* (cf. Section 2.1 and 2.2). Rather, only when seen *in retrospect* does Hegelian dialectics appear as a coherent result structured and methodologically determined beforehand (see Houlgate 2005: 39ff). In this way, one could bypass Simmel’s critique of Hegel. Hegel’s philosophy *would* represent a never-ending historical process of internal revisions, also with regard to its philosophical foundation. Does this move Hegel’s logic of becoming, dialectics, closer to Simmel?

In his essay on the ruin, Simmel writes of an “original enmity that permeates the world” (Simmel [1907] 1993: 125). A world, Simmel later writes, “subject to its own immediate laws” (Simmel [1916] 2005: 3). I understand the enmity, *Feindschaft*, as the opposing forces dealt with in Section 3 that signify the fundamentals of the world. The inner dialectical movements of the concept—take for instance the concept of the ‘ruin’—*stem* from the world’s basic tension. Here, as readers of Simmel, we stand at a crossroad: Simmel sometimes gives primacy to a primordial unity (quoted in Section 3), and sometimes to an original disunity.⁷ However, the origin of

⁶ Hegel writes that the “determinations” (Bestimmungen) and the “ordering” (Einteilung) of the logical (des Logischen) are merely “anticipated” ([1830] 1986: §79) [my translation]. The justification (Rechtfertigung) or proof (Beweis) of the logical division “can only result from the thorough treatment of thought itself” ([1830] 1986: §83 Zusatz) [my translation].

⁷ Mele (2023) has given an account of this point of conflict.

this relationality is not our main concern. Here, we merely need to state it to distinguish Simmel from Kant's understanding of dialectics as 'the logic of illusion' (Kant [1781/1787] 1998: A61/B86) and to establish an account of Simmel where dialectics, or basic relational tension that must be thought, stand as an inherent feature of the world.

Simmel and Hegel share the idea that dialectics arises as the dynamic logical conceptual structure that thinking produces, which at the same time reveals something inherent about the world. Unity leads in philosophical inquiry to a relation. Digging deeper reveals complexity, or with Hegel, the more concrete the more the nuance. There is, however, a difference between Simmel and Hegel on their 'dialectical direction' with regard to their conceptual starting point. In contrast to Hegel's dialectics, in which the starting point for the thinking of a concept is always the fixed concept of the understanding, Simmel starts backwards, as it were, with the concept of unity. From there, Simmel explicates the fundamental opposition residing within the concept. Where the immediate concept for Hegel is abstract and one-sided, the immediate concept for Simmel contains the fundamental opposition. This is evident in Simmel's choice of metaphor when describing philosophical inquiry in *Rembrandt* as lowering "a plumb line through the immediate singular, the simply given, into the depths of ultimate intellectual meanings" (Simmel [1916] 2005: 3). That is, the concept at our disposal (be it the ruin, door, bridge, frame, or handle) is the unity of contradiction, of opposing forces. And so, beginning from the unity, we find opposition. In contrast to Hegel where we go from one-sidedness via the opposition to arrive at unity. In other words, Simmel's philosophical investigation of a concept leads backwards to the inner oppositional workings of its unity. Hegel's philosophical investigation of a concept leads forward via negation to another concept with which it reconciles into a third (as illustrated in Figure 1 below).

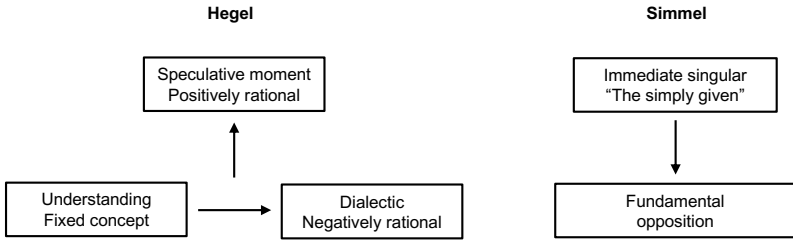


Figure 1 The difference in 'dialectical direction' with regard to conceptual starting point in Simmel and Hegel.

The difference is that while Simmel's concept *reveals* a unity of oppositional forces and is satisfactorily understood as that unity, Hegel's concept *reveals* one-sidedness and must therefore negate itself. In this difference, we also see the relation between philosophy and art (pointed out in Section 3) more systematically: In Simmel, philosophy seems to find oppositions in life's unity, whereas artworks unite oppositions and reveal life. Philosophy and art are two different operations, both of which are truth-seeking or truth-explicating, and may thus be applied in order to do different things. Perhaps to understand that life's continuity is both relational unity and united relationality at one and the same time.

4.2. *Why Simmel's dialectics are not ambivalent, open-ended, or non-reconciliatory*

If Simmel's dialectics, in a general manner, amount to his unpacking of a concept and parcelling it into two logical opposites, then it follows what we can refer to as Simmelian dialectics minimally exhibits three qualities comprising—unlike the preceding arguments in the literature—being logical, self-enclosed, and reconciliatory.

First, I agree with Denis Thouard that Simmel, unlike Hegel, avoided enclosing his thought in a “complete logic” (2021: 111). But Simmel, Thouard argues, inherits “the meaning of ambivalence from Hegelian thought” (Thouard 2021: 111). However, recent scholarship on Hegel's logic (e.g., Ficara & Priest 2023) attempts to

replace claims of ambivalence—or lack of logical rigour and therefore lack of modern relevance—on Hegel’s part by showing how Hegel’s logic *is* stringent and therefore not “antiformal”, not “incompatible, in principle, with the mathematical appraisal of logic”, nor “with the logical tradition and with Frege himself” (Ficara 2021, 2). This does not imply of course that Simmel’s philosophy is stringent too, but I have attempted to defend the view above that Simmel’s treatment of concepts embodies strict—logical or clear-cut—oppositions. In deducing from a concept a logical relation of opposites, Simmel is always on the track to demonstrate *which* conceptual unity, and thus which tension, is at play in his essays. Often right at the beginning of an essay, Simmel declares the logical groundwork (e.g., part–whole, upward–downward, inward–outward, human–nature, individual–society) structuring his analysis of his target, ‘the immediate singular’.

Second, Elisabeth Goodstein argues that “Simmel’s methodological argument for money as a philosophical object describes a modernist phenomenology in which dialectics part ways with systembuilding to trace the complex relations between surface and depth, materiality and ideality, contingency and ultimate values *without* seeking univocal answers or final resolution.” (Goodstein 2019: 179) [my italics] Goodstein rightly claims that Simmel’s modernism runs contrary to system building and emphasises complex relations. I understand Goodstein’s claim that Simmel lacks ‘univocal answers or final resolution’ as if open-endedness reigns in his conceptual analyses. But is there not a difference between the open-ended nature of modernity and the singular forms which under Simmel’s scrutiny reveal a particular dialectical structure? I have sought to show above that Simmel’s philosophy embodies systematicity without a system, meaning that his essays are self-enclosed attempts to say something determinate about an object or phenomenon in the modern—chaotic and fragmented—world. For Simmel, philosophy shows that objects are, as stated above, already united oppositions; therefore, they do *not* acquire an open-ended (non-determinate) nature. Rather, concepts, as

denoting definite things in the world, are dialectical in the conclusive way of having meaning elaborated always through a *particular* relationship. In fact, these *specific* relations give history its determinate contours, its variations, its “colour and values” (Simmel [1901] 1995a: 48) [my translation].

This leads us to the third and final point: Is Simmel’s dialectics reconciliatory? I defend the claim that it is, against Landmann’s (Kantian) claim that Simmel’s *Wechselwirkung* is one of “dialectics without reconciliation”, of “unbridgeable antinomy” (1987: 16) [my translation]. Landmann finds evidence, among other places, in Simmel’s diary, where he writes about fundamental oppositions that never reconcile (1987: 17f). However, this only recaps the above-mentioned problem in Simmel’s thought about whether unity or duality, primordially, characterise the world (cf. Section 4.1). Even if this were to be settled in favour of duality, this does not endorse antinomy: Conceptually, dialectics is, as I have shown, at play in the specific concept as a ‘third’ (the concept containing, as a unity, a duality). Metaphysically speaking, Simmel’s aesthetic pantheism is an anti-system building monism where artworks are to be seen as reconciling the oppositions of the elements of the world in a stable, unifying way. Seeing artworks, or contemplating the world aesthetically, reduces, as it were, all things to their basic oppositional elements that in turn are found harmoniously united in their respective concepts. Aesthetic contemplation would not work without dialectics. It certainly would not work without reconciliation either.

4.3 Hegel or Schiller?

This idea of reconciliation of opposites is encapsulated in a technical sense in the famous German concept of *Aufhebung*. Often translated as *sublation* to simultaneously denote the cancellation and preservation of opposites, the concept was widely used by Hegel; and one should therefore think it useful to draw parallels between Simmel’s philosophical unification of opposites and Hegel’s *Aufhebung* operation. If one traces the degree or scale of Hegelianism

in Simmel's thought, as is the goal here, then dialectics in particular is the broadest and thus also the weakest Hegelian element present. Why? Because Hegel is of course not the only dialectical thinker nor even its inventor in the German context. One generation Hegel's senior, Friedrich Schiller may have influenced Hegel's dialectical thinking, and he may also have influenced Simmel, forming a common ancestor of both. It is likely that Schiller's influence does not reach Simmel via Hegel, but is more directly connected, especially since Schiller combines dialectics with aesthetics and thus forms an affinity to Simmel's interests that Hegel does not satisfy.

Friedrich Schiller developed a dialectics in his *Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* from 1795. Otto Pöggeler (1981) positions him as an antagonistic rather than dialectic thinker, in ways similar to Landmann's portrayal of Simmel above (Section 4.2). Pöggeler justifies his claim by referring to Schiller's 13th letter, in which impulses of form and sense remain ununited. However, the rest of the letters, as is the goal of the entire work, attempt to reach a union between them, not only a balance. Schiller specifies that union in the 18th letter, where he develops a *logical* union of these oppositional impulses.

It is really a question of two utterly different operations, which in this enquiry [concerning Beauty] must necessarily support each other. Beauty, it is said, links together two conditions which are *opposed to each other* and can never become one. It is from this opposition that we must start; we must comprehend and recognize it in its whole purity and strictness, so that the two conditions are separated in the most definite way; otherwise we are mixing but not uniting them. Secondly, it is said that Beauty *combines* those two opposite conditions, and thus removes the opposition. But since both conditions remain eternally opposed to one another, they can only be combined by cancellation [*aufgehoben*]. Our second business, then, is to make this combination perfect, to accomplish it so purely and completely that both conditions entirely disappear in a third, and

no trace of the divisions remains behind in the whole; otherwise we are isolating but not uniting them. (Schiller [1794] 2004: 88f)

The structure of the union sketches a paradigmatic example of the dialectical structure found in Hegel. But this passage not only relates Hegel to Schiller. It also finds a striking resemblance with passages found in Simmel's writing, as quoted above in Section 3 regarding 'the development of the modern spirit', which, first, 'separates the elements of life', then 'individualises them' to put them together again 'into a new unity'. Whenever the uniting operation fails, Simmel wrote, the "characteristically modern fragmentation" appears ([1902] 1995b: 98). And it closely sums up the sketch I proposed in Simmel, that philosophy begins at oppositional duality, while Beauty (as art) reconciles that relation.

The link to Schiller is evident elsewhere. Simmel refers indirectly to Schiller's *Über Anmut und Würde* from 1793 (On Grace and Dignity), the preliminary aesthetic work to *Briefe*, in his 1901 essay "Aesthetik der Schwere", when he provides an alternative account of both 'grace' and 'dignity' in relation to 'the beautiful soul' (also a Schillerian concept). Simmel was thus working to provide solutions to specific points formulated by Schiller. In conclusion, Schiller may thus be an overlooked trajectory from which Simmel developed his dialectics, a likely and alternative source of fundamental Simmelian elements alongside or perhaps in competition with the often automatically subscribed Hegelian origin.

5. Content of thought: Society and Ethics

I have dealt with the similarities and differences between Simmel and Hegel regarding their mode of thought, that is, mainly how they think about dialectics. I proceed here to analyse their relationship through the lens of what I called 'content of thought' in the Introduction, namely in terms of the results of their thinking. Within the scope of this article, this must of course be done in a quite selective manner, and I will limit the discussion to two points. Nevertheless, it is important to keep a focus on thematic

comparison and not merely to restrict the analysis to methodology, because dialectical methodology (as I have shown above with the inclusion of Schiller) is the broadest and therefore also the vaguest form of Hegelianism in Simmel. The shift of attention to content below reveals on the contrary two stronger forms of Hegelianism in Simmel, namely his concept of society and his adaptation of Hegel's critique of Kantian ethics.

5.1 *Simmel's Hegelian concept of society*

Simmel never mentions Hegel in *Soziologie*. Yet there are Hegelian elements in his portrayal of the relation between individual and society that resemble Hegel's *Philosophie des Rechts*. First of all, both Simmel and Hegel underscore their methodological starting point as conceptual rather than empirical (see Simmel [1908] 1992: 17f). Hegel investigates 'freedom' and seeks to merge two logically opposite conceptions, exemplarily sketched one year before by Benjamin Constant ([1819] 2002) as the freedom of the moderns (individualism) and of the ancients (statism)—a pair that Isaiah Berlin ([1958] 2002) much later labelled negative and positive freedom, respectively. Hegel's system of right provides a lens through which one may see the freedom of each person as embedded in, and made possible by, the framework of societal institutions that are ultimately upheld by the state. 'Society' may here be seen as a complex of background conditions through which individuals gain a repertoire with which they can exert and form their personal lives. Thus merging the two opposites. This precise dual relationship is what Simmel later called the *Doppelstellung* of the individual (Simmel [1908] 1992: 56), meaning that society

is contained in it [the individual] and at the same time is opposed to it, [the individual is] a part of its [society's] organism and at the same time itself a closed organic whole, a being for society and a being for itself. ... [T]hat the inside and the outside between the individual and society are not two coexisting determinations ... but that they *designate the completely unified position*

of the socially living human being. (Simmel [1908] 1992: 56) [my translation and italics]

The relation between individual and society in which Simmel takes an interest is not only the ‘socially living human being’ as a description of the notion of what it means for humans to be social or to be living in society. Like Hegel, Simmel is interested in freedom, but he derives its dialectical form from the concept of society. Here we see the philosophical operation of finding opposition (i.e., the *Doppelstellung*) in unity (i.e., society as concept) at play. Social life is “based on the precondition of a fundamental harmony between the individual and the social whole” (Simmel [1908] 1992: 59) [my translation]. Harmony is understood not as “ethical or eudaemonistic perfection, but rather conceptual” (Simmel [1908] 1992: 59) [my translation]. Conceptually, ‘society’ is neither about everyone’s happiness (utilitarianism) nor moral politics (Kant). Studying the concept of society means articulating “not the perfect society, so to speak, but the perfect society.” (Simmel [1908] 1992: 59) [my translation, Simmel’s italics] In a rather Hegelian manner, Simmel’s individuation and socialisation are mutually dependent processes. That is, without the “integrating necessity of his particularity, determined by his inner-personal life,” in society, then neither is the individual ‘socialised’ (*vergesellschaftet*), nor does society become “the seamless interdependence that its concept suggests” (Simmel [1908] 1992: 59) [my translation]

Simmel illustrates this mutual dependence of opposites through the concept of vocation, in German *Beruf* (Simmel [1908] 1992: 60f). Both the English and German word originally derive from the meaning of an inner call and refer, in contrast, to an external position in society, a profession or occupation. This duality resides in the unification of, on the one hand, the wants of an individual and his or her individual life goals set by the individual to realise his and only his existential project and, on the other hand, the configuration of society, its historical framework, which is external and alien to any individual project. As if coincidental, society makes

possible a vocation by which the individual identifies and feels fulfilled. Thus, the vocation, as a concept, merges these inner and outer forms of necessity into a united form.

However, Simmel does not make this connection to Hegel. Rather, we can go back to his own account of Hegel in *Moralwissenschaft* and see that Simmel positions Hegel along with Kant, Fichte, and Schelling as regarding “the human being as a social being” (*dem Menschen als Sozialwesen*) in the sense of only being “the bearers of social movements” (*der Träger sozialer Bewegungen*) and for whom there is no “truly individual life” (*eigentlich individuellen Lebensbeziehungen*) (Simmel [1892/1893] 1991: 186) [my translation]. According to Simmel, these philosophers understood the state concept so “comprehensively” (*Allumfassung*) that they left no room for subjective freedom (Simmel [1892/1893] 1991: 186) [my translation]. So, no individuation, only socialisation.

It is evident that Simmel does not establish a connection between Hegel and his own philosophy here. This must have been due to a different interpretation, not a lack of comprehension or familiarity with the source text. We know that Simmel was acquainted with Hegel’s social philosophy from *Philosophie des Rechts*. In *Moralwissenschaft*, he references the book’s structure and comments that Hegel “characteristically enough” places his “actual ethics” in his political work (Simmel [1892/1893] 1991: 80) [my translation]. Thus pointed towards ethics, let us proceed to Hegel’s critique of Kantian ethics, again from *Philosophie des Rechts*, which Simmel adopts.

5.2 *Simmel’s Hegelian critique of Kantian ethics*

Hegel finds Kant’s proposition problematic, that universalising a maxim produces a script for a morally correct act if, and only if, the universalisation does not lead to a formal contradiction. He argues that since Kantian morality requires doing one’s duty only for duty’s sake, and since such duty has no informative content (its

universality is abstract), then willing to murder the whole of humankind (Hegel's example) is not *formally* contradictory, because it is *formally* possible to will the end of humankind, that is, in a way that does not lead to *logical* contradiction (Hegel [1820] 2017: §135). For Hegel, sociocultural values *inform* the distinction between right and wrong (whereby we in this moment in time understand killing humankind as *wrong*). Therefore, a purely formal framework alone cannot guide us in our pursuit of understanding how to make morally right decisions.

Simmel adopts this critique. He refers to “Kant’s ethical rigorism” as the moral counterpart to “aesthetic rigorism” in the *l’art pour l’art* dictum, where art is not only simply analytically distinguished but also entirely isolated from other spheres of life. In the same way, Kant “removed moral [sittlichen] value from the overall context of life” (Simmel [1914] 2000: 14) [my translation]. Simmel argues that ethics (Sittlichkeit) are not simply rule-making abstractions one should internalise, but a part of life and therefore also nourished by its many dimensions. Indeed, Kant’s achievement was that he portrayed “the strictness of the concept of morality [Moralbegriffs]”, but at the cost that he “did not find the way back into life.” (Simmel [1914] 2000: 15) [my translation].

That Simmel adopts the Hegelian critique of Kantian ethics is, again, not in accordance with his own understanding. Quite surprisingly, in criticising Kant’s logicalism in *Moralwissenschaft*, he targets Hegel’s ethics for committing the same mistake as Kant (“in gewissem Sinne auch bei Hegel” (Simmel [1892/1893] 1991: 80)). Of course, endorsing Hegel’s *critique* of Kantian ethics is not equivalent to endorsing Hegel’s *ethics*. But given that Hegel’s critique is a part of the sketch of Simmel’s own view of ethics, it seems odd that he would target Hegel—now that we know Simmel was familiar with Hegel’s ethics in *Philosophie des Rechts*—with an accusation of Kantian-like logicalism.

Perhaps a reason for this could be that Simmel changed his view on *Moralwissenschaft*, as he states in the new preface to the work in 1904. Did he therefore also change his view on Hegel from the early

1890s to the 1900s? Was that his motivation for beginning to write his *Hegel* book? That seems likely to me, but it is of course difficult to assess with any certainty.

In summary, I have sought to highlight two significant points on which Simmel come to similar conclusions as Hegel. First, Simmel's focus on society as a concept rather than as an empirical subject aligns with Hegel's treatment of freedom in *Philosophie des Rechts*. When Simmel describes the fundamental structure of what it means to live freely in a society as the *Doppelstellung* of the individual, who is part of society without being entirely subsumed under it, he adopts Hegel's framework of the autonomous modern individual, who should actualise his life on the basis of the conditions given by society. Second, Simmel seems to adopt Hegel's critique of Kant's ethics, according to which Kant had detached ethics from the content of life.

6. Was Simmel a Hegelian? Concluding remarks

We learn from the analysis of Simmel's Hegelian critique of Kant and from Simmel's Hegelian view on the individual–society relation that, although Simmel did not regard himself a Hegelian, as he had another reading of Hegel's view on ethics and society, it should not preclude us from emphasising the parallels between them and ultimately situating Simmel as a Hegelian, nonetheless. It also teaches us that Simmel was only a Hegelian in specific ways. As I have shown, he adopts Hegel's understanding of philosophy but first by rejecting what he calls its functionalism, which referred to its comprehensive system building. Simmel only, yet essentially, endorses Hegel's philosophical view that philosophy operates in oppositions. These oppositions are comprehended by Simmel with his own monism called 'aesthetic pantheism'. It is, however, a *modern* monism in the sense that it does not have an aim nor progresses towards final unity. Unlike Hegel, philosophy for Simmel cannot reconcile oppositional relationality; only art and the artist can unite these dualisms. What philosophy through its aesthetic

contemplation meaningfully *can* do is investigating these unities. Philosophy reduces objects and concepts to fundamental oppositional elements, which are contained in the object or concept under scrutiny but hidden from the non-philosophical eye.

In terms of mode of thought, I have argued that Simmel's dialectics are only partly Hegelian. Both thinkers think dialectically, but in different ways: Simmel begins from the unity, which for him is the immediate concept (bridge, handle, door), and through scrutiny finds that there is a basic opposition within the concept. In contrast, the immediate singular for Hegel is only the concept of the understanding and as such the first of three moments in the dialectical structure. Through negation and then sublation, one is led to a philosophical comprehension of the concept altogether. In other words, Simmel's dialectics begins at unity and leads to opposition, whereas Hegel's dialectics begins at one-sidedness, leads to negation and finds unity via this opposition. So in contrast to Hegel, Simmel conceives the immediate concept as a true unity. Put simply, Simmel's immediate unity is complete, Hegel's immediate unity incomplete. Both thinkers concur, however, that dialectics leads to a better understanding of the immediate concept.

Moreover, I have argued that Simmel's *Wechselwirkung* exhibits at least three systematic features: It follows a logical scheme (duality); it is determinate (yields a particular relationship of this duality); and it depends upon reconciliation (begins from the concept or object which initially is conceived in its unified form, but which becomes analytically reduced to oppositions). These features link Simmel to Hegel, but as these properties are also shared by Schiller's conception of dialectics, I argued that Schiller may be seen as a common ancestor of dialectics to Hegel and Simmel. Since Simmel connects beauty in the form of aesthetic pantheism to philosophical operations in modernity, which Hegel emphatically does not, Simmel may therefore be said to lean more towards Schiller than Hegel regarding dialectics. At the same time as dialectics may be the broadest form of Hegelianism in Simmel, it is also the weakest form, as Simmel's dialectical thought thus could be drawn from a non-

Hegelian source too, and from a source that seems more aligned with Simmel's own thinking.

In terms of content of thought, I argued that there are points in Simmel where he specifically draws upon Hegelian elements in his thought. First, Simmel's concept of society is similar to Hegel's in the sense that while 'individual' and 'society' oppose each other, they are contained in an oppositional relationality in which neither works without the other. Second, I argued that Simmel adopts Hegel's critique of Kantian ethics, since both criticise Kant's rigorism and his isolation of ethics as a sphere separate from the social life that inevitably pervades moral decisions.

That Simmel never finished nor really began his *Hegel* book symbolises in a way the intricate relationship Simmel had to Hegel. He praises him but rarely mentions him. In those places where we today may find Simmel to have Hegelian elements integrated into his philosophy, Simmel himself highlights that Hegel stands in opposition to him. Given the complex history of Hegel's reception of the last 200 years, and the surge of interest over the last 30 years in a more liberal reading of Hegel, it is only natural that we now begin to reassess the Hegelian elements in Simmel's philosophy which may not have been discernible a hundred years ago. As we have learned from Simmel, philosophy and its contents are moving targets. So too is the Simmel–Hegel relationship.

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