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Response to Mark Morelli's: "Meeting Hegel Halfway: The Intimate Complexity of Lonergan's Relationship with Hegel"

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First, I would like to thank Fr. Doran and the Lonergan Project at Marquette for putting this entire colloquium together and for inviting me to participate in it as a respondent. It is truly a great honor and privilege. Next, I would like to thank Dr. Morelli for sharing with us the latest fruits of his efforts over the past couple years to comprehend and articulate the indeed intimate and complex nature of Lonergan's relationship with Hegel. It is not only an honor and privilege but also a great pleasure to get a chance to continue to learn from as well as converse and collaborate with my former professor who also happens to be one of the leading experts in Lonergan's philosophy.

Upon reading his paper one might be struck by the fact Morelli generally eschews weighing in on the usual Hegel flashpoints. A surprising fact given that if one were simply to consult most books and articles that come out on Hegel one would likely get the impression that in order to give a truly radical treatment of Hegel it would be necessary to settle such issues as whether Hegel was really an Enlightenment Rationalist or Romantic Expressivist, or whether Hegel was really a Lutheran or Pantheist or Panentheist, or whether Hegel was a political Liberal or Communitarian or Reactionary Prussian Apologist. However, you will find nary a mention of such well-worn Hegelian topoi in Morelli's discussion. Instead, Morelli has chosen to follow a different path in his treatment of Hegel, one, however, which I will argue is both more radical and in fact more properly Hegelian than one is likely to find elsewhere.

Just how, then, does Morelli's procedure reflect a more properly Hegelian and ultimately a more radical approach to Hegel? Let us begin by recalling an aspect of Hegel's philosophical achievement that, while constituting an epoch-making moment in the history of philosophy, has nevertheless been not only misunderstood but often quite simply neglected by much of the subsequent philosophical tradition. What Hegel discovered was that mere philosophical disputation could be explained and ultimately overcome. In contrast, according to what we might call the naïve view, the

fact that there should be a multiplicity of philosophies and that philosophers should disagree are facts simply too obvious to bother questioning. The naïve view says, “Of course philosophers disagree: people are different; they have different mentalities, and consequently different and conflicting philosophies.” Part of Hegel’s discovery, however, was that to explain the fact of a plurality of philosophies by appealing, whether implicitly or explicitly, to the fact of differences in mentality among philosophers was hardly more explanatory than the infamous pseudo-explanation that sleeping pills work because they possess a dormitive quality. The question is why philosophers have different mentalities or what Hegel calls viewpoints to begin with.

What Hegel discovered was that the source of philosophical disagreement lay in the relative inadequacy of intellectual development and self-knowledge among any one or several of the disputing philosophers. Stated differently, philosophers disagree, Hegel realized, inasmuch as any member among the disputants fails to achieve the proper viewpoint necessary to handle the philosophical issue in question. However, in discovering the source of philosophical disagreement, Hegel, in the same stroke, hit upon its solution: mere philosophical disputation could be overcome inasmuch as philosophers attained adequate self-knowledge. Thus, the *Phenomenology* charts the development of adequate self-knowledge in the history of Spirit which results in turn in the successive reconciliation of philosophical disputations through the attainment of ever higher viewpoints.

Needless to say, there is a certain irony in the fact that while Hegel was the first to diagnose and offer the solution to the problem of mere disputation in philosophy, nevertheless Hegel himself has been the source of seemingly endless and irresolvable disagreements. It is just here, however, that one of the distinctive contributions of Morelli’s paper begins to stand out. For, what Morelli has done is to show how certain aberrations in Hegel’s philosophy, aberrations that have given rise to the constant disagreement among Hegel’s interpreters, can be explained by reducing them to a failure on Hegel’s part to attain adequate self-knowledge or what Lonergan calls self-appropriation. The aberrations to which I refer are the fact that Hegel’s philosophy is logicist, or what Lonergan calls conceptualist, closed, necessitarian and immanent. Morelli, however, is able to eschew the fractious, naïve or otherwise disputatious discourse that would claim to critique these aberrations of Hegel, and he does this precisely by performing the properly Hegelian procedure of tracing the aberrations to their source in inadequate self-appropriation on the part of Hegel. As such, Morelli paves the way for

overcoming the mere disputation that surrounds Hegel and for setting Hegelian discourse on the much more fruitful and constructive path of recovering and developing what in Hegel's philosophy represents a permanently valid achievement and reversing the elements that are problematic.

Let us examine, then, how Morelli reduces these oft-disputed elements in Hegel's philosophy to inadequate self-appropriation on the part of Hegel. In order to do this, let us begin by recalling what is among Lonergan's most distinctive contributions to philosophy, namely, his phenomenology and explanatory account of the act of understanding or insight. As regards the concerns of this response what is of particular interest in Lonergan's analysis of insight is his discovery, with the help of Aquinas, that insights ground conception. Thus, it is understanding that grounds determinate conceptualities and it is developing understanding that grounds the successive formulation of ever more comprehensive conceptualities. Yet, as Morelli demonstrates with great precision in his paper, there has been an oversight of insight on the part of Hegel, a failure, that is, on Hegel's part to appropriate the pre-conceptual generative principle of determinate conceptualities. Moreover, it is precisely in this particular failure on Hegel's part that we are to discern the source of the aberrations in Hegel's philosophy mentioned above.

For, again, Hegel succeeded to an entirely unprecedented degree in distinguishing and delineating the historical unfolding of conflicting or disputatious conceptualities. Yet, insofar as he failed to distinguish the pre-conceptual generative principle for this unfolding, Hegel, as Morelli points out, was forced to locate the source of this unfolding and its reconciliation within the conceptual field itself. Thus, Hegel sets for himself the – needlessly – awkward task of articulating within the very framework of the Order of Logic developments and operations that belong more properly to the Order of Method, that is to say, developments and operations that initiate and propel the movement from logically coherent system resting upon a certain set of basic terms and relations to another and possibly more comprehensive logically coherent system resting on an entirely different set of terms and relations. And it is thus right at this crux, that is to say, in the fact that, on the one hand, Hegel profoundly diagnoses the problematic of the historical unfolding of disputatious conceptualities or viewpoints, yet, on the other hand, he attempts to solve the problem within the conceptual field that, as Morelli shows, we can pinpoint the source of the previously mentioned aberrations in Hegel's philosophy, namely, that it is logicist, closed, necessitarian and immanent. Thus, I quote Morelli:

Hegel's Dialectic Method . . . because it deals, now with heuristically defined anticipations that inform and guide cognitional operations, but with the determinate conceptual contents produced by those operations, it is not intellectualist but conceptualist. Because it fixes or determines the conceptual contents that will meet the anticipations, the triadic sets of concepts are complete. Consequently, the dialectical movement is not open but closed. Because the fixed, conceptual solutions are bound by necessary relations inhering in a single, self-unfolding *Begriff*, the dialectic follows a single, unique, necessary and uniformly progressive path toward ever more comprehensive coherence. Consequently, the dialectic is not factual but necessitarian. Further, inasmuch as the entire dialectic is defined by the concepts and their necessary relations, it does not include pre-conceptual acts of understanding that rise upon experience and are controlled by critical reflection. Consequently, the dialectic is restricted to the conceptual field and is not normative and capable of discriminating between advance and aberration, but immanent.<sup>1</sup>

Why does Hegel delineate a single, necessary, immanent and uniformly progressive path for the unfolding and reconciliation of disputatious conceptualities? In providing his response, Morelli can eschew the pseudo-profundities of much of postmodern discourse that cite such things as Hegel's megalomaniac or Promethean predilection to construct a Eurocentric bourgeois theodicy or meta-narrative and instead proceed along much more scientific and phenomenologically rigorous grounds. For, instead, Morelli can show that the source of these aberrations in Hegel lies in the combined effect of Hegel's brilliant insight into the problem of the historical unfolding of disputatious conceptualities and his indeed ill-conceived attempt to resolve this problematic within the conceptual field itself. Moreover, in proceeding just this way Morelli succeeds where other criticisms do not, namely, in out-Hegeling Hegel or in hoisting Hegel on his own petard. For, Morelli shows that these shortcomings in Hegel are due to nothing other than a failure on Hegel's failure to gain an adequate viewpoint for dealing with the philosophical problem of the historical unfolding of different philosophical conceptualities. In order to have achieved this Hegel would have needed to extricate himself entirely from the Order of Logic and appropriate the source of successive conceptualities in the dynamic unfolding of the pre-conceptual Order of Method. In doing so, Hegel could have avoided the logicist, necessitarian and closed aspects of his philosophy. Hegel would thereby have also been able to provide a properly normative notion of dialectic which could account for, not to mention properly criticize, not only an ascending series of higher syntheses, but also a descending series of lower syntheses – the need for the latter procedure having of course emerged with the greatest urgency in light of the outbreak of the unprecedented atrocities, disasters and absurdities that took place over the course of the last century and which have continued on into the current one.

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<sup>1</sup> Morelli, 23

Having thus attempted to articulate the place wherein I find the distinctive contribution of Morelli's paper to lie, I would like to proceed to offering some suggestions as to how Morelli might further his project, in particular I would like to make some rather general suggestions as to how Morelli might look to use his analysis of Hegel's relationship to Lonergan to engage the current postmodern philosophical climate of opinion. Much recent postmodern discourse focusses on the very incommensurability of conflicting conceptualities. Whether on the basis of Thomas Kuhn's paradigms, the Foucauldian notion of epistemes, Wittgensteinian notion of language games, or what have you, the present climate of opinion takes it as an unquestionable fact that the Hegelian effort to overcome mere disputation in philosophy was either an overly naïve or overly grandiose endeavor or both. Needless to say, in Hegel's defense, the fact that the postmodern climate of opinion has managed despite its pretension to the contrary to totalize itself, would not surprise Hegel in the least seeing as how it was Hegel himself, perhaps more profoundly than any philosopher since Socrates, who understood that the untutored consciousness invariably totalizes its viewpoint even, for instance, in the very Sophistic act of explicitly denying a more total or comprehension viewpoint. Moreover, Hegel would likely be the first to point out that, far from being rigorous or explanatory, these putatively critical discourses often represent mere reversions to the previously mentioned naïve view and its pseudo-explanation according to which conflicting conceptualities differ inasmuch as the mentalities of philosophers differ. In any case, what Morelli might look to do is to show more precisely just how Lonergan can recover the Hegelian effort to overcome mere disputation in philosophy by placing it on a more dialectically rigorous and explanatory foundation. For while it may be true that attempting to resolve the problem of conflicting philosophical conceptualities within the conceptual field itself yields the aberrations afflicting Hegel's dialectic that have been discussed above – and, again, it is to Morelli's great credit that he has provided a scientifically and phenomenologically rigorous explanation of this fact – nevertheless, this fact alone does not entail that the effort to overcome mere disputation in philosophy is itself intrinsically misguided or flawed. What I would suggest that Morelli might think about is approaching some aspect of postmodern discourse that purports to take its stand on the incommensurability of conflicting conceptualities and show how, while the putative incommensurability can indeed not be resolved by Hegelian dialectic, it can nevertheless be resolved by the employment of Lonergan's dialectic. That strikes me as something that could be of vital and lasting value to the current postmodern climate of opinion.