

SILENCING THE PHILOSOPHER

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Abstract:

I firstly argue that there are two ways of thematizing silence philosophically, either as a phenomenon of the world or as the silencing of the philosopher, and that the second way constitutes a problem without whose solution the first way of thematization cannot occur. Secondly, I discuss Pyrrhonian scepticism as that philosophical theory which generates the silencing of the philosopher and repudiate three objections to the claim that this scepticism is *not* spuriously constructed. Next I show how the German philosopher Georg Hegel proposes to refute Pyrrhonian scepticism in his *magnum opus*, the *Science of Logic*. Finally, I draw the consequences of Hegel's solution to the problem for a specific attempt in the history of philosophy to secure a place for silence in ontological theory and practice.

Keywords: silence, Hegel, scepticism, Plato, discourse, mysticism

Resumo:

Em primeiro lugar argumentarei que existem dois modos de tematizar filosoficamente o silêncio: como um fenómeno do mundo e como o silenciamento do filósofo. Este segundo modo constitui um problema cuja carência de solução impede o primeiro modo de tematização. Em segundo lugar, discutirei o cepticismo pirroniano como aquela teoria filosófica que origina o silenciamento do filósofo e contestarei três objeções que defendem que este cepticismo *não* é construído em modo espúrio. De seguida mostro como o filósofo alemão Georg Hegel se propõe refutar o cepticismo pirroniano no seu magnum opus, a *Ciência da Lógica*. Finalmente, delinheio as consequências da solução hegeliana a este problema para uma tentativa específica na história da filosofia de assegurar um lugar para o silêncio na teoria e na prática ontológica.

Palavras-chave: silêncio, Hegel, cepticismo, Platão, discurso, misticismo

I. The Problem

The concept of silence has quietly but steadfastly become enormously fashionable in continental philosophy. Traces of a philosophy of silence have been discovered in the writings of Martin Heidegger (*Being and Time* 161, 164f., 322; *Beiträge* 408, 510; Pöggeler; Inwood 197-8), Maurice Merleau-Ponty ("Le Langage Indirect"), Immanuel Kant (Palmquist) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (*Tractatus*; Palmquist), and such philosophy

occupies a central place in contemporary continental feminism (Blunt; Walker), philosophy of religion (Blodgett and Coward; Simon; Ueda), literary theory (Bradford; Budick and Iser; Kalamaras; Steiner), philosophy of art (Cage) and political theory (Padden and Humphries; Taylor). An overview of the literature shows that there are two clearly distinct ways in which silence is thematized.

On the one hand, silence is examined as a phenomenon of the world, a phenomenon that exists alongside other phenomena. Silence is in this case examined pretty much in the same manner that, for example, perception, sexual abuse, labour market and causation are examined. The philosopher may introduce her analysis of silence by empirically observing the existence of such a phenomenon in the world or she may do so because the development of a certain theory obliges her to refer to this phenomenon. I may, for example, notice the long periods of silence in Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns and decide to develop a theory that gives a philosophical account of them. But I also may be in the process of developing a philosophical theory about the abuse of women in medieval France and have come to the point where I realize that the silence of those women constitutes an important element of the phenomenon I have set out to investigate.

On the other hand, however, silence comes out as a phenomenon which the philosopher can neither base a theory upon nor discursively examine in the first place. In this case the concept of silence appears only because the development of a certain philosophical theory makes its appearance unavoidable. This would be a theory whose development comes to establish the thesis that expression of truth is utterly impossible. If we agree that the purpose of philosophy is the expression of (at least some) truth, the outcome of the theory in question necessarily leads to the abandonment of all philosophical activity, to the silencing of the philosopher. The concept of silence becomes thus the highest philosophical concept (for a specific theory), to wit, the concept in which philosophy culminates, but at the same time it becomes a concept that cannot be philosophically examined, for its establishment immediately cancels philosophy out.

The relation between the two ways of thematizing silence is not one of indifference or one of equal standing. Evidently, the second, the one that thematizes silence as the cancelling out of philosophy has a logical priority over the first, which thematizes silence simply as a phenomenon of the world. This is so because the second thematization generates a problem – the cancelling out of philosophy – without whose solution the first thematization cannot meaningfully occur.

The problem the second thematization generates can be resolved either by showing that it has been generated in a spurious manner or by offering a solution that really solves it. In the present paper I will first argue that there is at least one way in which the problem is non-spuriously generated and will then offer a solution to the problem in this regard. I will finish by drawing the ramifications of the offered solution for the attempt to secure a place for silence in ontological theory and practice.

II. Pyrrhonian Scepticism

The theory I had in mind that engenders the cancelling out of philosophy is so-called Pyrrhonian scepticism. I will now give a brief exposition of this theory and then explain why the manner in which it brings about the silencing of the philosopher is not spurious.

Philosophical inquiry is generically defined as that human activity whose principal aim is the *expression of truth*. As this activity, philosophical inquiry has a *minimal structure* determined by the positing of judgements or propositions in the universe of philosophical discourse. The propositions come forth with the intention of being *taken* as true. This, however, is not enough: For the principal aim of philosophical inquiry to be accomplished the posited propositions must also *be* true.

Each and every proposition posited in the universe of philosophical discourse can be in either one of two states. A proposition is in a state of “mediation” when its relation to other propositions is made explicit; it is in a state of “immediacy” when that relation is not made explicit. The crucial thing to note here is that this “immediacy” is a necessary feature of each and every proposition’s overall existence. Simply, there is a moment in a proposition’s life when it is necessarily not characterized by means of its relation to other propositions; this is undoubtedly the case when the proposition emerges for the first time in the universe of philosophical discourse.

Our problem is to determine when a proposition *is* true. But why do we not simply declare that each and every posited proposition *is* true? This cannot be done, for not only certain propositions but also their negations are posited in the context of immediacy of the universe of philosophical discourse. The negation of each proposition that, freely and legitimately, is posited in that context is, equally freely and legitimately, also posited therein. In other words, nothing prevents a proposition, whether positive or negative, from being posited in the universe of philosophical discourse. Thus, this universe is initially (or immediately) *necessarily* occupied with pairs of *contradictory* propositions. The universe of philosophical discourse is a space where initially the silencing of the philosopher is strictly prohibited, but the price paid for this is a domain fully occupied with contradictions.

The problem has to do with the function of negation to *undermine* the truth of the related proposition. Indeed, this is exactly what the prime function of negation is, to make us reject a certain proposition and accept its negation. But all propositions in the universe of philosophical discourse come forth with the intention of being taken as true; their own function, therefore, is to undermine the truth of their *negation* (precisely because the function of the latter is to undermine *their* truth). Yet while a proposition aspires to undermine the truth of its negation and *vice versa*, initially and immediately the one is as true as the other. In a context of immediacy, to wit, when a proposition is considered solely in its immediate existence, the truth of this proposition is reduced to its sheer existence. An

equilibrium of propositions has thus been established, which, however, should not have been established.

The relation between a proposition and its negation in the context of immediacy of the universe of philosophical discourse is, then, *problematic*. For philosophical inquiry to accomplish its principal aim, the expression of truth, at least some of the contradictions occupying the context of immediacy of the universe of discourse should be resolved and, furthermore, this resolution must have a positive, non-contradictory outcome.

The problem of resolving contradictions in the universe of philosophical discourse is historically and systematically linked to Pyrrhonian scepticism. The latter aimed at showing that the problem is irresolvable and, consequently, that philosophical inquiry is a futile enterprise (Sextus Empiricus I 112, 26, 135). Recent research, however, has shown that Pyrrhonian scepticism is directed only against a specific model of philosophical inquiry (called by the Pyrrhonists “dogmatism”), the one that aspires to resolve contradictions by means of positing propositions in the universe of philosophical discourse which would function as *grounds* (or “reasons”) for the truth of one of the two contradictory parts (Trisokkas “Presuppositionless Scepticism”, “Σέξιτος ο Εμπειρικός”, *Pyrrhonian Scepticism*). The Pyrrhonian sceptics argued that this model of philosophical inquiry generates with absolute necessity either vicious infinite regress or vicious circularity (Sextus Empiricus I 114-7, 122-3, 166, 169; II 9, 20, 34f., 196, 199, 202). Indeed, since it is necessary that in the context of immediacy a proposition is entangled in a problematic relation with its negation, the same happens with the proposition that is posited as the ground of another proposition. In this way, the contradictions in the universe of philosophical discourse remain eternally unresolved.

The Pyrrhonian argument basically destroys the conception of philosophical inquiry as the-giving-and-taking-of-reasons, a conception that dominated the history of philosophy since Aristotle (himself “a deluded and self-satisfied dogmatist,” according to Sextus (I 62, 90)). The argument is simple but effective: As each and every proposition is necessarily at a certain moment characterized by immediacy, each and every proposition is necessarily at a certain moment entangled in a relation of contradiction with its negation. But since grounds or reasons are themselves propositions, they themselves are entangled in contradictions which in turn are in need of resolution. In this way no contradiction can ever be resolved and philosophical inquiry proves to be a futile enterprise. The philosopher must thus be forever silenced:

According to the mode deriving from dispute, we find that undecidable dissension about the subject-matter has come about both in ordinary life and among philosophers. Because of this we are not able either to choose or to rule out anything, and we end up with suspension of judgement. (Sextus Empiricus I 165)

III. Why the Manner in which Pyrrhonian Scepticism Generates the Silencing of the Philosopher is not Spurious.

A decade of research on Pyrrhonian scepticism has convinced me of its non-spurious character. I will now discuss and repudiate what I think are the three most important objections to the above argument.

First objection: The conclusion of the Pyrrhonian argument is that no contradiction can ever be resolved because each and every proposition that is posited in the universe of philosophical discourse is itself immediately entangled in a contradiction. But then the same holds for the propositions employed for the construction of the argument. The argument, therefore, cannot be constructed in the first place. It is, if you like, a self-refuting argument: its conclusion undermines the premises that have led to it. So, the silencing of the philosopher has been generated in a spurious manner.

Reply: The ingenuity of the Pyrrhonian sceptic lies exactly in the fact that none of the premises of the Pyrrhonian argument is a proposition which has been posited in the universe of philosophical discourse by the sceptic herself. They are rather propositions which have been posited therein by the philosophers and which are fully accepted by the latter! These are propositions which simply describe what must minimally occur for philosophical inquiry to exist. All the sceptic has done is to have drawn the conclusion from premises which are accepted *by the philosopher* and are minimally conditional of the latter's very existence (as a *philosopher*). Therefore, the self-refuting character of the argument does not actually undermine the sceptic's position – rather, it undermines philosophical inquiry itself. In either way, then, the philosopher must be silenced: For if the argument is not self-refuting, philosophical inquiry has proved to be a futile enterprise; and if the argument is self-refuting, it is the very nature of philosophical inquiry that has shown itself to be unsustainable.

Second objection: The reply to the first objection states that the self-refuting character of the Pyrrhonian argument does not undermine its conclusion because the premises of the argument are premises which the philosopher herself cannot avoid to accepting. The philosopher, however, may choose *not* to accept the following:

- (1) Each and every proposition that is posited in the universe of philosophical discourse has necessarily a moment of immediacy.
- (2) Each and every proposition that is posited in the universe of philosophical discourse is immediately entangled in a relation of contradiction with its negation.
- (3) The ground that is used as a means to resolve a contradiction in the universe of philosophical discourse is necessarily a proposition.

In this way the whole argument proves to be spuriously constructed.

Reply: It is not true that the philosopher may choose not to accept the above three premises. **(a)** The first premise cannot be denied because it follows directly from the fundamental notion of “a proposition's being posited in the universe of philosophical

discourse.” When a proposition is posited for the first time, it necessarily has an independence of its own. Its relation to other propositions requires reflection and therefore comes second in the order of existence. Theories or systems, in other words, are always constructed from individual propositions, a fact that proves the logical priority of the latter over the former. Surely one may argue that a proposition’s “belonging to a system” is *implicitly* present, and I will be the first to agree with this statement, but what the first premise describes is only what occurs *explicitly* in that very moment when a proposition is posited for the first time in the universe of philosophical discourse. The fact remains, then, that the relationality of a proposition requires *further* thought, a *reflection*, which exactly proves that there is a moment in a proposition’s life in the universe of discourse when it has a character of immediacy. **(b)** The second premise cannot be denied either because its denial would undermine the generic definition of philosophical inquiry as that human activity whose principal aim is the expression of truth. For if the philosopher is indeed genuinely interested in discovering the truth, it is impossible that she would forbid *any* proposition *whatsoever* from being posited in the universe of philosophical discourse; otherwise, a great chance of finding the truth may be missed. The universe of philosophical discourse, by being a realm of the discovery of truth, is necessarily also a realm of freedom. Thus, the negations of propositions can freely and legitimately be posited in this universe. Since, however, each and every proposition is posited therein as an immediate existence, all propositions have initially an equal truth-status. So it is absolutely necessary that each and every proposition that is posited in the universe of philosophical discourse is immediately entangled in a relation of contradiction with its negation. Therefore, there can be no genuine philosopher (a seeker of the truth) that rejects the second premise. **(c)** Finally, the third premise cannot be denied either, because if the ground were not a proposition, it would not have the power to adjudicate between *propositions*. Take the case of a fact that is not expressed in some kind of language – whether private or public, well-formed or not. It would be a meaningless sound or state of affairs and as such could not adjudicate between two conflicting *meaningful* entities (cf. Ueda 1: “our understanding of [...] the world is linguistically constituted” and “any reality that we perceive is already a reality that is interpreted through language”). As soon as a fact becomes something that is expressible, it becomes, implicitly or explicitly, a proposition. Note here that this is not to say that the suggestion cannot be made that a proposition is true if it corresponds to a fact. (This suggestion would belong to the domain of “attempted solutions to the problem of Pyrrhonian scepticism.”) The rejection of the objection implies nothing about the correspondence theory of truth. All it implies is that a ground that is meant to have a power of adjudication in the universe of philosophical discourse cannot be an inexpressible fact.

Third objection: The response to the second objection presupposes that the philosopher accepts the generic definition of philosophical inquiry as that human activity whose

principal aim is the *expression* of truth. The philosopher, however, might choose *not* to accept this definition and instead define the fundamental structure of philosophical inquiry without making any reference to the element of expression. But if this holds, the Pyrrhonist's silencing of the philosopher has been spuriously effected.

Reply: Well, if this objection were valid, the Pyrrhonist would have no reason to provide an argument for silencing the philosopher in the first place, for then the philosopher would be living in total silence anyway! In this case the activity of the philosopher would be no different from the activity of a tree. The objection, therefore, fails, because its validity entails exactly the same state of affairs that the Pyrrhonian argument entails. Note here that the generic definition of philosophy as that human activity whose principal aim is the expression of truth does not exclude the possibility that a philosophical theory would, rightly or wrongly, come to *establish* the thesis that "silence is the ultimate fulfilment of the philosophical quest" or that "experience, not expression, of truth is what matters in philosophy." But it does exclude the possibility that philosophical inquiry is *nothing but* silence or non-expressible experience of truth. A *philosopher* who argues for the latter claim has, of course, every right to do so, but she should realize that by doing so she has already refuted herself.

IV. Hegel's Refutation of Pyrrhonian Scepticism.

Having shown that none of the aforementioned three objections is valid and therefore that the Pyrrhonian argument has not been spuriously constructed, let me now present a refutation of that argument, attempted by the German philosopher Georg Hegel, a refutation that I believe is a successful one. The original argument is extremely complicated and, in fact, rather abstruse (the trademark of Hegel's prose), so its full clarification would require much more space than I am allowed to use here. The basic structure of the refutation will nonetheless be lucidly laid out.

Hegel was convinced by most of the argument of the sceptics and, furthermore, believed that a solution to the problem of contradiction based on the notion of correspondence to facts could not possibly work. The first is evident in his early essay *The Relation of Scepticism to Philosophy* and the second in the Introduction to his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. He thought, though, that the success of the Pyrrhonian argument has a limited scope, to wit, that it can work only against that model of philosophical inquiry that aspires to resolve the contradictions by means of positing *grounds* in the universe of philosophical discourse (Trisokkas, "Hegel's Early Response"). This means that for him there is some other way to resolve contradictions, distinct from the activity of positing grounding propositions.

Hegel's ingenious idea was that, logically speaking, a contradiction in the universe of philosophical discourse could be attempted to be resolved not only *regressively*, by

means of grounding, but also *progressively*, by means of unification. Had a way been found for the contradictory propositions to be unified in a third, “higher” proposition, the contradiction in question would be resolved. Nevertheless, this suggestion could work if, and only if, the “higher” proposition was not simply the conjunction of the contradictories – otherwise the contradiction would simply repeat itself. The proposition in which the contradictories are unified had to be shown to have a positive content, a content distinct from either the simple conjunction of the contradictories or the content of any one of them. This is then the main challenge Hegel sets upon himself with respect to the task of refuting Pyrrhonian scepticism: He should explain how it is possible for unifying propositions in the universe of philosophical discourse to have a content that is not simply a conjunction of the unified contradictories. Such an explanation is provided in his *magnum opus*, the *Science of Logic*.

Hegel’s main concern in the *Science of Logic* is to express the fundamental determinations of what there is (*being, das Sein, το ον*) (Houlgate 115-143). The term “fundamental determinations of what there is” denotes those determinations which characterize being *necessarily*. The necessity of the determinations is meant to be established by means of their *immanent* derivation from pure, indeterminate being, that is, from the very subject-matter of being, taken without any characterization whatsoever (*Science of Logic* 67-78). Since, however, the *expression* of this necessity occurs necessarily by means of propositions, the whole project is susceptible to the threat of Pyrrhonian scepticism. Moreover, since Hegel does not acknowledge the dogmatic distinction between language and non-linguistic reality, each fundamental determination of being *has* the structure of proposition (Lau 269-274).

Hegel’s solution to the problem of contradiction, then, has to apply to the project of expressing the fundamental determinations of being. But this exactly means that he should find a way to explain how it is possible for unifying propositions in the universe of *ontological* discourse to have a content that is not simply a conjunction of the unified contradictories. So Hegel’s problem is the nature of the *ontological* proposition (namely that proposition which expresses the fundamental determinations of being). Given, however, the solution to the problem of contradiction he himself proposed, there is *only one way* for him to provide such an explanation: The nature of the ontological proposition must emerge through a process of conflicting and unified ontological propositions.

The huge importance of Hegel’s *Science of Logic* for the attempt to resolve the problem of Pyrrhonian scepticism is that Hegel does show therein how a theory of the nature of ontological proposition emerges from pure, indeterminate being through a process of conflicting and unified ontological propositions. However, for his solution to the problem of contradiction to be successful it does not suffice to have a theory of ontological proposition emerge in this way. This theory must also have a specific content, a content that justifies the assertion that the propositions which unify contradictories are not

simply their conjunction, to wit, that they have a character that *adds* to their conjunction. Hegel's second important contribution to the problem of Pyrrhonian scepticism is that his theory of ontological proposition does indeed have such content.

The extremely complex dialectic of the ontological proposition (or "judgement," *Urteil*) in the *Science of Logic* (623-663) proves that this proposition has a dynamic, developmental or processual character by means of which a *single* proposition (the tautology of pure being) develops into the *multiplicity* of propositions that express the *totality* of the fundamental determinations of what there is (Trisokkas, *Pyrrhonian Scepticism*). This developmental character is owed to a particular element of the structure of the proposition, the true nature of the *subject*: For the process of conflicts and unifications in the universe of ontological discourse reveals that the subject of the ontological proposition is an implicit totality of determinations (i.e. the fundamental determinations of being) that *ought* to become explicit. It also reveals that this explication occurs in the predicate-space of the proposition. Thus, every determination emerging from pure, indeterminate being emerges from therein *because* the subject ought to express the implicit totality of its determinations and this expression takes place in the space offered by the predicate. But, then, this means that all those propositions which express a *unification* of contradictories bring forth a determination that is distinct from the simple conjunction of these contradictories; for the subject explicates its own determinations and since it has already explicated the contradictories, it will not explicate them once more: their conjunction does not *enrich* the expressed determinacy of the subject.

The subject continues to immanently explicate its determinations until they are *exhausted*. We acknowledge this moment of exhaustion by witnessing the standstill of the immanent derivation of the ontological propositions: No more propositions are coming out immanently. When this happens, as it does happen in the *Science of Logic*, the *totality* of the determinations of fundamental reality has been expressed.

Take, for example, the very beginning of the *Science of Logic* (82-108; Houlgate 263-296). Hegel shows first that the proposition "being is being" (the tautology of being) immanently generates its contradictory "being is nothing" and then that these two propositions are unified by the proposition "being is determinate being (*Dasein*)."¹ That is to say, Hegel shows that the latter proposition is nothing but the synthesis of the two former propositions (to wit, the ontological determination "determinate being" is the synthesis of the determinations "being" and "nothing."). Is this "synthesis," however, only the sheer conjunction of the contradictories? If this were the case, the truth of the proposition "being is being" and the truth of the proposition "being is nothing" would be independent of the truth of the "higher" proposition "being is determinate being" – pretty much in the same way that in Fregean logic the conjunction "p and q" is reducible to "p." The established theory of the ontological proposition retrospectively excludes this possibility.

“Being is being” (or “being is nothing”) is true only as unified part of the proposition “being is determinate being.”

The way the positive character of the unificatory proposition is established in the project of the *Science of Logic* discloses Hegel’s conception of propositional truth. For if the propositions that are posited in the universe of ontological discourse are nothing but the subject’s self-expressed determinacy, there can be no proposition that is false. That is to say, there can be no ontological proposition whose predicate does not express a determination that belongs to the subject. But at the same time no *single* proposition can be absolutely true either, because the subject is a totality of determinations whose expression requires the gradual positing of a multiplicity of propositions. So, for Hegel, “the true is the whole” (*Phenomenology* 11), in the sense that the totality of the determinations of the subject (namely *being*) is expressed by a multiplicity of propositions, namely those propositions which have emerged immanently from the tautology of pure being. A single ontological proposition is only partially true – it expresses a determination of the subject, but it always falls short of the expressed totality of its determinations.

In this way Hegel’s conception of propositional truth shows itself to be a version of the coherence theory of truth. No proposition is true by itself and it is true only insofar as it belongs to a coherent whole, a totality of propositions. The coherence of the whole, *however*, is neither pre-given nor constructed externally; it emerges immanently from the simple positing of the tautology of pure, indeterminate being and this emergence has the structure of conflicts and unifications of propositions.

This conclusion seems to resolve the problem of contradiction in the universe of ontological discourse altogether. The emergence of a theory of ontological proposition with the above described content in the project of the *Science of Logic* implies that the contradictions which the ontological proposition unifies are not obstacles to the expression of truth regarding the fundamental determinations of being (ontological truth); they are, rather, an expression of a part of that truth. If this is correct, though, does it not mean that the problem of contradiction in the universe of philosophical discourse does *not* after all apply to the ontological project of the *Science of Logic*? Although one would be right to say this, one should also note that one would be able to make this claim justifiably only after the nature of the ontological proposition has been undogmatically disclosed (i.e. proved) and that until such disclosure occurs the ontological project is susceptible to the threat of Pyrrhonian scepticism.

It is exactly at this point that Hegel’s genius shines. The great virtue of the *Science of Logic* is not so much that it comes to furnish an account of the nature of the ontological proposition, but mainly that it deals successfully with Pyrrhonian scepticism until that account emerges. Hegel takes advantage of the ontological phenomenon of unification of conflicting propositions so as to safeguard the theory of the ontological proposition against the Pyrrhonian interruption. So, the process of conflict and unification is not

present in the ontological project *because* of Pyrrhonian scepticism, but it is employed against it *nevertheless*!

All in all, the project of the *Science of Logic* refutes Pyrrhonian scepticism by allowing a theory of the ontological proposition to be constructed through a process of conflicts and unifications of contradictory propositions, a theory that proves to have a content that justifies the assertion that a unificatory proposition is *not* a simple conjunction of contradictories. This process generates the meaning of ontological discourse and thereby defines its subject-matter, the fundamental determinations of being. Hegel's solution has, of course, a limited scope, since it applies only to the domain of ontology, but this does not stop it from being regarded as a successful solution to the problem of Pyrrhonian scepticism. Moreover, it affirms the contradictory (and unificatory) structure of fundamental reality, but insofar as this affirmation is a consequence of a successful refutation of Pyrrhonian scepticism, it cannot be disputed.

V. Ramifications of Hegel's Solution for the Attempt to find a place for Silence in Ontological Theory and Practice.

Hegel's refutation of Pyrrhonian scepticism has grave ramifications for a particular strand in ontological theory and practice, the strand demarcated by the Platonic conception that there are determinations of fundamental reality that cannot be *expressed* in language – thus fundamental reality necessarily incorporates silence – but can be *experienced* in some non-linguistic manner. This view, which entails the silencing of the philosopher with respect to the expression of some part of fundamental reality, is still quite popular today, even though not so much in academic philosophy (for obvious reasons!).

In the *Republic* Plato defined the philosopher as that human being who possesses “true knowledge” (480a). The subject-matter of true knowledge is what Plato calls “ideas” or “forms” or “universals,” which are intelligible elements that unify sensible objects under a predicate (479a, 479e, 484b, 485a-b, 500c, 507b). The idea of “beauty,” for example, unifies all beautiful sensible objects under the predicate “beautiful.” The domain of ideas is itself structured in terms of unification: In the same way that ideas unify sensible objects, certain “higher” ideas, besides unifying sensible objects, unify also “lower” ideas. The ideas have an intelligible (*νοητον*) determinate content which can be known and expressed in language if the philosopher masters and practices the method of *dialectic* (533b, 534e).

Now, it is clear from the three great Similes (the Sun, the Divided Line and the Cave) that there is an idea that unifies all ideas, the “highest” idea, which is the idea of the Good (504d-505a, 506d-509c, 509d-513a, 524a-528b). The latter, Plato believed, is free from negativity, is an absolute positivity, and therefore *cannot* be determined (*Phaedo* 75c-d, 77a, 92d-e). As absolute positivity, the idea of the Good could be nothing but pure, inde-

terminate immediacy. It is “immediacy” because its truth is not mediated by some other idea (to wit, its truth lies wholly in itself) and this immediacy is described as “indeterminate” because it does not have a determinate content. Thus, the method of dialectic, which can take place only in the realm of language, is useless with respect to the highest and most important idea, the idea of the Good.

Nevertheless, Plato was of the opinion that the philosopher could still acquire knowledge of the idea of the Good, through some kind of mystical, non-linguistic experience. According to Crombie, whenever Plato speaks of the grasping of the Good, he always uses a “mystifying and hierophantic language” (562). This is evident especially in the following excerpt from the *Seventh Letter*:

Thus much, at least, I can say about all writers, past or future, who say they know the things to which I devote myself, whether by hearing the teaching from me or from others or by their own discoveries – that according to my view it is not possible for them to have any real knowledge of the matter. There neither is nor ever will be a treatise of mine on the subject [i.e. the idea of the Good]. For it cannot anyway be expressed like other learning, but after community of life with much discussion of the matter itself *it suddenly appears in the soul like light kindled from fire, and thenceforward sustains itself.* (341b-c)

The idea of the Good, then, the most fundamental determination of being, is inexpressible and can be known by the philosopher only through a kind of mystical, non-linguistic experience. In this way silence is incorporated in the structure of fundamental reality and the philosopher is herself silenced in order to acquire knowledge of that silence.

This conception of Plato’s influenced the history of human thought like few others. The Christian concept of God was understood by many religious authors, monks and believers in terms of the Platonic idea of the Good, namely as that Being knowledge of Whom requires communication in silence. In the world of art the artist quite often describes the ultimate reality she aspires to grasp in very similar terms, as an element whose silence makes it inexplicable and beyond rational/discursive comprehension. Finally, the Platonic conception of the idea of the Good has shaped an all-important facet of the history of philosophy: the development of philosophies of feeling and mystical comprehension of fundamental realities, such as the philosophy of Neoplatonism (3rd-6th centuries) and the movement of “enthusiasm” in Germany (18th-19th centuries).

The huge consequence of Hegel’s refutation of Pyrrhonian scepticism is that, if accepted as successful, it renders these philosophies or attitudes redundant. This is so because, firstly, the *Science of Logic* derives immanently the *totality* of the fundamental determinations of being – in other words, the derivation of determinations is *exhaustive* – and, secondly, the truth of this derivation cannot be disputed, as it has a structure that

is *not* undermined by Pyrrhonian scepticism. Inexplicable silence thus vanishes from the domain of fundamental reality and the philosopher gets her voice back.

This, of course, does not exclude the possibility that silence is part of fundamental reality – but this silence would necessarily be explicable and, therefore, it would not be silence in the strongest sense of the world. It would be a silence “that speaks to you” and thereby creates a discursive *sound*. Hegel’s solution to the problem of Pyrrhonian scepticism also does not exclude silence from being a phenomenon of the world. As such it *may* be inexplicable and the philosopher *may* not be able to thematize it. Hegel’s solution does not take a stance on this issue. What it does entail is that *if* there is such a phenomenon, it *cannot* be a *fundamental* determination of being.

VI. Conclusion

In this paper I tried to show, firstly, that the attempt to silence the philosopher through Pyrrhonian scepticism is cancelled out by Hegel’s refutation of this kind of scepticism and, secondly, that Hegel’s refutation has devastating consequences for a particular programme in the history of philosophy, the one that aimed at securing a place for silence in ontological theory and practice. The objection may be raised that the fact that Hegel’s refutation of Pyrrhonian scepticism is successful does not necessarily undermine the Platonic programme in ontology because the project of the *Science of Logic* might not work successfully against *another kind of scepticism*. This would be right if there could exist a kind of scepticism which is *not reducible* to Pyrrhonian scepticism. Hegel certainly believed that no such scepticism could exist, hence his thesis that “ancient scepticism is superior to modern scepticism” (“Verhältnis” 214, 249, 250). And, as far as I can see, he seems to be right on this, for the minimal structure of philosophical inquiry, which Pyrrhonian scepticism thematizes, provides the basis for the construction of any possible philosophical scepticism. But I do not want to exercise a hasty judgement on this issue, so I will leave its full consideration for a forthcoming paper.

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