



On Hegel's Idea of a Logical Ontology

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Introduction

However we may interpret the core of the Kantian revolution in the history of philosophy, one of the most crucial questions it has bequeathed to us is the following: Why must a philosophical account of the categories of being be inseparable from a scientific account of the categories of thought?

In my talk, I will provide a theoretical reconstruction of the fundamental features of Hegel's logical ontology. The big issue of my reconstruction turns around what I take to be the most pressing metaphilosophical questions concerning the nature of ontology as a 'doctrine of categories': (i) How should categories be understood? (ii) What is the proper method for an investigation of categories? (iii) What is the motivation for pursuing a rational account of categories?

The answer to these questions should pave the way to the critical evaluation of some questionable presuppositions of any kind of pragmatist actualization of Hegel's idealism, as it is made familiar in the contemporary debate. Because of the limits of time, however, I have to leave this critical confrontation for another occasion.

I.

Any attempt to make some claim about the relation of Hegel's logic to ontology must take its starting point from two related facts: (i) "ontology (*Ontologie*)" designates, for Hegel, a business of the past, an inquiry whose ambition, that is, to disclose *a priori* the most fundamental structures of being, has collapsed under the blows of empiricism and Kant's criticism; (ii) a new science of thinking, namely, a dialectic-speculative logic, has to



“take the place (*an die Stelle treten*)”¹ of the older ontology.

These two Hegel’s convictions prompt us to raise two questions: What is it that makes ontology a thing of the past, a doctrine that cannot lay out truth-claims without being immediately exposed to the stigma of dogmatism? How is the action of *replacing* ontology through logic to be understood? Let’s consider in turn Hegel’s answers to these questions.

The first question already suggests the way to the answer. The problem with traditional ontology is precisely its *dogmatism*. The question then becomes: What does ‘dogmatism’ mean for Hegel? Kant’s definition of dogmatism as the procedure of a reason that neglects the task of its own self-examination was well-known to Hegel. At least two features should strike us in such a definition: first, dogmatism does not just stand for any determined set of unwarranted beliefs about any material or supersensible domain of reality, but rather consists in a universal *procedure*, a way of thinking that can be applied to any content; second, this procedure involves a quite paradoxical state of affairs, according to which dogmatism does indeed belong of necessity to reason, i.e., it is not imposed to reason from without, but, by virtue of its own proceeding, it ends up making reason heteronomous, i.e., dependent on something (it doesn’t matter here if the content is the essence of things, the soul, God, the world or whatever) that is external to the reach of its rules and interests.

Hegel fully recognizes these two features of dogmatism, together with Kant’s principle of the autonomy of reason, but he also enlarges the notion of dogmatism, insofar as he advances an original conception of reason that, being fed with crucial elements stemming from Pyrrhonian skepticism², Spinoza’s idea of substance and Aristotle’s theory of *nous*, involves a critique of Kant’s own conception of reason, starting from the claim that reason

¹Cf. HEGEL, G.W.F.: *Die Wissenschaft der Logik*, eds. K. Michel, E. Moldenhauer, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden* (hereafter, abbreviated as *W*), Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1969-1971, vols.5-6 (hereafter abbreviated as *WdL*, with references to the number of the volume followed by the number of page): “Die objektive Logik tritt damit vielmehr an die Stelle der vormaligen *Metaphysik*, als welche das wissenschaftliche Gebäude über die Welt war, das nur durch *Gedanken* aufgeführt sein sollte. - Wenn wir auf die letzte Gestalt der Ausbildung dieser Wissenschaft Rücksicht nehmen, so ist [es] erstens unmittelbar die *Ontologie*, an deren Stelle die objektive Logik tritt, - der Teil jener *Metaphysik*, der die Natur des *Ens* überhaupt erforschen sollte” (*WdL*, 5/61).

²See the passage from the *Preface* to the *Phenomenology of spirit* in which Hegel gives the following definition of dogmatism: “Der *Dogmatismus* der Denkungsart im Wissen und im Studium der Philosophie ist nichts anderes als die Meinung, daß das Wahre in einem Satze, der ein festes Resultat ist oder auch der unmittelbar gewußt wird, bestehe” (*W* 3/41).



would be a faculty.

Hegel's critique of dogmatism is basically directed against any form of 'foundationalism', understood both ontologically, as the idea that philosophy should investigate the stable, *underlying* structures of the changeable reality that is given for us to experience³, and epistemologically, as the modern (from Descartes onwards) idea that knowledge is a sort of building that *we* are to edify on the solid ground of self-evident (universally valid, mentally accessible, privileged, undeniable) data⁴. As a consequence, the other target of Hegel's critique is any form of dualism, chiefly the dualism between being and thought, objectivity and subjectivity. Every dualism is understood by Hegel as the incoherent attempt to 'put together' the pieces of a division whose inner source has been forgotten.

What all this implies with respect to the status of ontology, is shown in details in the section of the *Encyclopedia* (1817,1827,1830) that is called 'Preliminary conception' (*Vorbegriff*), especially in the paragraphs devoted the acritical presuppositions of the 'First position of thought toward objectivity'.

In the §35 of the first version (1817) and in the §§ 26-32 of the second and third version (1827, 1830) of his *Encyclopedia* Hegel clearly individuates five interconnected presuppositions: (i) the general dualistic opposition between a knowing subjectivity that is devoid of content and an external objectivity that is devoid of subjectivity. (ii) the fixed validity of the determinations of the understanding, posited as limited and opposed to each other, or, in other words, the claim that the 'absolute' (whatever its content turns out to be) or 'what is true in and for itself' can be known by means of the form of judgment, understood, in turn, only subjectively as the "attribution of predicates" (*Beilegung von Prädikaten*)⁵ to external substrates; (iii) the givenness of ready-made substrates in the sphere of representation and their assumption as the criterion of whether the predicates are

³Cf. HOULGATE, S. *Hegel's Critique of Foundationalism in the Doctrine of Essence*, in *German Philosophy since Kant*, Cambridge University Press, ed. A. O'Hear, (1999), pp.25-45.

⁴Cf. MAKER, W. *Philosophy Without Foundations*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1994.

⁵Cf. HEGEL, G.W.F., *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1830). Erster Teil: Wissenschaft der Logik. Mit den mündlichen Zusätzen* (hereafter abbreviated as *Enc.*), eds. E. Moldenhauer, K.M. Michel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, Vol. 8 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), §28 (W 8/94).



sufficient or not to exhaust the representational content; (iv) the conception of knowing as the mere act of relating such ready-made, stable predicates to whatever substrate is given to us through representations; (v) dogmatism in the narrow sense, as the assumption that of two opposite assertions one has to be true while the other is false, that is, the unrestricted extension of the so called principle of the excluded middle to the so called objects of reason (soul, world, God).

The second question pertains to the meaning of the act of replacing such a dogmatic ontology with a new logic that is not committed to the said presuppositions. The text of the “Preliminary conception”, as well as that of the Introduction to the *Science of Logic*, suggest that the ‘*replacement*’ in question is to be understood neither as a mere destruction nor as a mere substitution of a paradigm of thought with another, but rather in terms of a Hegelian determinate negation or *sublation*. This means that Hegel’s logic is somehow meant to negate and, at the same time, to preserve the validity of ontology. What is to be *negated* is the dogmatic side of ontology, which, as we saw, consists in a way of thinking that claims to reproduce reality as it would be in itself, independently of any intervention of thought. This way of thinking is based on a set of presuppositions that determine the form of its assertions and even the content of such assertions, to the extent that such a content must be a representational content. What must be *preserved* of ontology is the side of truth, which is also called by Hegel the “substantial content (*Gehalt*)” or “the subject matter (*Sache*)” of the first position of thought⁶.

If the action of replacing ontology marks a discontinuity with its method and a continuity with its substantial (not just representational) content, then the question of whether Hegel’s logic is an ontology cannot receive a “Yes” or “No” answer, but rather requires further elaboration. The questions now arising are: What is the substantial core of the dogmatic ontology? How does Hegel’s logic develop this substantial core so as to generate a new form of ontology?

This substantial content is expressed as follows: “the *belief* that through *thinking*

⁶Cf. *Enc.* §27 (W 8/93); *WdL* 5/27, 5/29, 5/41-43.



things over the truth comes to be known and that what the objects [*Objekte*] truly are is brought before consciousness”⁷. This passage shows that the standpoint of the older ontology is the same as speculative philosophy, insofar as it conceives of truth as the intelligibility of being. More radically, truth is not just intelligibility, as it were a Platonic realm of pure possibilities to be grasped in thought, but the process whereby the identity of thinking and being becomes an actual reality for the consciousness of finite, thinking subjects. What distinguishes the first position of thought from the logic as “pure speculative philosophy”⁸ is that the substantial content is present to the former as a “*belief (Glauben)*”, i.e., in the form of an immediate knowing that is not passed through thinking’s own oppositions, while the logic is called to present truth in the form of *science*.

II.

The process of gaining the concept of philosophy as science and the full actualization of this concept are, for Hegel, the ways in which the substantial core of ontology must be developed, if ontology has to be understood as a rational account of the categories of being. Hegel’s most important contribution to the field of ontology, therefore, consists in having transformed an old edifice haunted by the specter of dogmatism into the critical task of disclosing the processual identity of thinking and being. This project turns out to be articulated in three complementary moments.

First, it has to demonstrate *ex negativo* the identity of thinking and being by dismantling all the positions that assume the validity of the reciprocal independence of the two terms. As known, this is the job of the *Phenomenology of spirit*, whose content is exactly the education of the ordinary or natural consciousness to the ‘concept of science’ (i.e., absolute knowing) by way of a necessary process (i.e., experience) which is meant to exhibit the series of self-contradictory shapes generated by any criterion which claims to absolutize the standpoint of the separation between knowing and reality, certainty and truth.

Second, it has to demonstrate *ex positivo* the identity in question, by showing how

⁷Cf. *Enc.* §26 (W 8/93): “de[r] *Glauben*, daß durch *das Nachdenken* die *Wahrheit erkannt*, das, was die *Objekte* wahrhaft sind, vor das Bewußtsein gebracht werde”.

⁸Cf. *WdL* 5/16.



thinking, as ‘Concept’, proves to be the subject and the object of the whole process, included the necessary division between being and subjective thinking. This demonstration is first accomplished by the *Science of Logic*. As a consequence of the inner transition from the ‘objective logic’ (doctrine of being and essence) to the ‘subjective logic’ (doctrine of the Concept), the ontological content of the *Logic* is not just restricted to the former, as a reconstruction of the categories employed by traditional metaphysics, transcendental philosophy and empirical sciences, but continues in the latter, which is called to present being as a process that finally comprehends itself and, conversely, the Concept as the subject of its own division into Concept as being (‘Concept in itself’) and Concept that knows itself (‘Concept for itself’)⁹.

Third, what results from within the *Logic* is the idea that the positive demonstration of the identity of thinking and being would not be complete if it took place in the utter “simplicity of thinking”¹⁰ or “thinking as such”¹¹. Since the Concept proves immanently to be Idea and the Idea proves to be ‘absolute’ only insofar as it has to manifest every configuration of itself, the process by which being achieves its true meaning has to continue in the *Realphilosophie* (i.e., philosophy of nature and spirit). The absolute Idea proves to be not an underlying entity that pulls all the strings of the process, but nothing else than its own process, which reveals itself as a double movement: a movement of *Selbstentäußerung* (self-externalization) or actualization in the medium of exteriority (nature, human body, language, work, will, ethical life, history are all progressive stages of this externalization) and a movement of *Erinnerung* (internalization), which transforms the given into the product or ideal moment of a process of self-actualization and, eventually, in the spirit, of self-understanding.

About this double movement, four things must be noted.

(i) Externalization and internalization are simultaneous only for the standpoint of philosophy, which conceives of them as the distinct, yet eternal moments of the unity of

⁹Cf. *WdL* 5/58.

¹⁰Cf. *Enc.* §78 R (W 8/168).

¹¹Cf. *WdL* 5/59.



reason or objective thinking. Yet, they are not simultaneous for the finite spirit, whose process of idealization of the given comes only after the process of externalization has happened and appears, then, as a ready-made externality.

(ii) Insofar as they are necessary moments of thinking's self-realization in the world, externalization and internalization are deeply intertwined in every determinate shape of this process, so that they are not patterns that are indifferent to their instantiations, but they show different meanings according to whether they are working in the sphere of nature (here the animal is the most perfect example of *Erinnerung*) or in the sphere of spirit, and, within the latter, according to whether they expressed by subjective, objective or absolute spirit.

(iii) Externalization and internalization are asymmetrical moments, and this in a double sense: first, in the sense that together they form an innerly teleological movement, whose end is not so much thinking's externality as thinking's acknowledgment of its own essence in such an externality; second, they are asymmetrical because, as *Erinnerung*, thinking knows itself and also the necessity of giving itself the form of externality, while, as *Entäusserung*, thinking is an unconscious activity that constitutes reality without yet knowing itself¹².

(iv) Insofar as the *Logic* is the science that knows that and how thinking or logos (*das Logische*) is this complex movement of giving itself a reality and recognizing itself in it, the logical science becomes the *final science*¹³, Idea's self-knowledge (i.e., spirit) as the Idea of philosophy.

If the substantial content of ontology is the restless process whereby being grasps itself as the Concept's double movement, then the only single task of 'speculation' can be formulated as follows: how can philosophy be a science, that is, how can it demonstrate the processual identity of thinking and being? Hegel's answer to this question is a project of thinking's immanent critique, and this constitutes, in general, Hegel's most important point of connection with Kant. At the same time, it is also where Hegel and Kant part company,

¹²I owe the clarification of this third point to the excellent study by FERRARIN, A. *Il pensare e l'io. Hegel e la critica di Kant*, ETS, Pisa, chapter three (forthcoming).

¹³Cf. *WdL* 6/496.



insofar as Hegel does not understand the project of reason's immanent critique in terms of transcendental philosophy, which means, in Hegel's eyes, as the search for the subjective conditions under which thinking is able to determine its own representation of being, and by this way to transform it into the posit of *our* own judgments.

III.

To conclude this reconstruction of the ontological problem in Hegel, I will comment on the main features of Hegel's idea of *immanent critique*.

Let's start with the clarification of 'immanence'. Hegel's conception of immanence embraces a weak and a strong sense. According to the 'weak sense', immanence designates the feature of philosophy that allows it to be able to justify by itself, from within its own conceptual resources, the conditions of its own intelligibility as well as of its subject matter. This sense of immanence corresponds to a necessary condition for doing philosophy, that is, its independence (although not separation) from experience and the other sciences. According to the 'strong sense', immanence is another word for Hegel's 'absolute', which means thinking's immanence to its own differences or thought-determinations. This means two related things: first, there is nothing outside thinking (understood as "objective thinking"¹⁴); second, immanence is neither a quiet realm of laws nor a cultural posit (as many supporters of the 'sociality of reason' would like to have it), but a "circulation within itself"¹⁵, i.e., a self-referring activity, a process that starts from itself and, through itself, attains its end in itself. This sense of immanence is proper to Hegel's idealism and obtains a different meaning according to whether 'idealism' is understood as the real process that unconsciously constitutes and articulates 'reality' (nature and finite spirit) or as the self-aware activity that reflects on reality and, by so doing, brings it to its own self-comprehension (absolute spirit).

Hegel's idea of immanence, therefore, includes three main aspects.

¹⁴Cf. *WdL* 5/43.

¹⁵Cf. *WdL* 5/70.



(i) *The epistemological claim*: a critical approach to the problem of knowledge requires the dissolution of the presuppositions implicit in the question of how our representations secure an access to the world and the formulation of the question of how thinking's productivity can account both for itself as such (*Logic*) and for the standpoint which experiences the need to overcome the gap between the Concept and its determinate being, subjectivity and objectivity (*Realphilosophie*).

(ii) *The ontological claim*: the identity of reality and rationality means that being is nothing outside objective thinking; nothing is real being except the Idea and, conversely, the Idea is nothing real if it is not the differentiated process of its own self-actualization in nature and spirit.

(iii) Every 'definition of the absolute' must arise from *the union of the epistemological with the ontological claim*: the problem of knowledge is inseparable from the problem of the configuration of the content of knowledge, so that the absolute is nothing else than its own exposition and this exposition is the self-determination of the logical content up to the point where it becomes spirit's knowing of its own logical essence.

If reason is the absolute and this cannot be delimited by anything outside it, then reason's self-critique must consist in a project of immanent critique. By 'immanent critique' I mean not just the idea that of two philosophical standpoints the one is true which is able to refute the other (for example, the standpoint of the Concept is meant to provide the refutation of the standpoint of Spinozism), but, more broadly, the Kantian idea according to which the subject and the object of the critique must be one and the same. What distinguishes Kant from Hegel is not reason's independence from any external presupposition, but rather the substantial content of reason and the quite original way Hegel argues for it.

The main features of Hegel's conception of presuppositionlessness are, in my mind, the following: (i) *idealism* as a philosophical standpoint which conceives of being and subjective thinking as 'ideal' terms or moments of the one process of thinking; (ii) the integration of *Pyrrhonian skepticism* as thinking's 'negative-dialectical' moment and,



accordingly, as dissolution of every form of philosophy of substrates or foundationalism that may want to assume from the outset and absolutize a particular and univocal meaning of thinking; (iii) the exposition of science or speculation in the form of a rational *system*, i.e., of a system that is not a linear derivation of theorems from immediate principles but a *circulation* of the logical element within itself, a living unity between the whole and its articulations.

These features, which entail a radical revision of every received view about what we may usually understand by ‘abstract’ and ‘concrete’, ‘ideal’ and ‘real’, ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’, are by no way a list of alleged presuppositions underlying Hegel’s thought, but, on the contrary, they are reciprocal processes that hang together to form an ‘exposition’ (*Darstellung*), the possibility of which does not depend on external conditions, but realizes itself in those very processes it brings to manifestation¹⁶.

We have seen that Hegel’s critique of dogmatism must be understood within the context of the project of reason’s immanent critique, which amounts to the attempt to bring thinking’s absolute immanence to full manifestation in the form of ‘science’. This project yields a crucial ambiguity in our understanding of ontology. On the one hand, ontology is the name of a dogmatic occupation we have to dismiss; on the other hand, we cannot get rid of the substantial problem of ontology, so that, by the act of replacing ontology, Hegel’s logic preserves it by understanding being as a necessary moment of thinking’s activity of producing its own content.

¹⁶For an attempt to justify the assumption of a perspective of external thematization of Hegel’s system by distinguishing ‘immanent thought’ (restricted to the *Logic*) from a ‘logic of the system’, which would govern both the *Logic* and the *Realphilosophie* as well as their relationship, see NUZZO, a., *Logica e sistema. Sull’idea hegeliana di filosofia*, Pantograf, Genova, 1992, , part. pp. 170-174. I agree with Nuzzo when she says that thinking is immanent only insofar as it can never be considered outside the activity of self-determination through which alone it obtains its own real subsistence. I disagree with Nuzzo when she tries to argue that the *immanent conditions of thinking* (the conditions for thinking’s self-determination) and *the conditions of immanent thinking* (the conditions of its systematic character) are located on different levels. The reason why I disagree has not to do with an underestimation of the difference between the *Logic* and the *Realphilosophie*, but with Nuzzo’s attempt to provide a *formalization* of the logic of the system. In my judgment, this attempt introduces a series of axioms, levels of discourse, conditions and prescriptive rules that suffer from three undesired effects: first, they end up breaking the immanent relation between the *Logic* and the *Realphilosophie*; second, they are formulated according to a finitist standpoint that risks to be only a variable depending on the arbitrariness of the interpreter; third, any formalization requires thought-determinations (‘axioms’, ‘rules’, ‘conditions’, ‘definitions’, ‘theorems’) that are liable to be criticized within the logical system they are supposed to thematize from without.



IV.

The clarification of the *systematic* context of ontology as a ‘doctrine of the categories’ enables an elaborated answer to the metaontological questions raised at the beginning.

-How must categories be understood?

Hegel’s answer to the first question is that categories appear as pre-given structures of reality only for the standpoint of finite spirit, which means, for the form of subjective thinking which has not yet recognized the originality of the Concept. For the latter, movement is prior to any structure, yet structures are necessary as the forms the movement gives to itself in order to take a determinate reality. As the second Preface (1831) to the *Science of Logic* makes extremely clear, categories are “impulses (*Triebe*)”¹⁷, that present themselves first of all as the unconscious ways in which thinking’s activity works *both* as the essence of the things *and* as the innermost moment of the subjective thinking of them. The job of the *Logic* is to bring categories from the form of their “instinctive activity (*das instinktartige Tun*)” to the form of science, that is, to the form of “intelligent and free activity (*das intelligente und freie Tun*)”¹⁸. ‘Science’ in the speculative sense, therefore, is not really a way of thinking *about* this or that given domain of reality¹⁹, but a translation of one form of activity into another within the absolute immanence of objective thinking.

-What is the proper method for the investigation of categories?

Hegel’s answer to this second question is a double one. First, he retorts against the question the degree of skepticism that is implicit in it, by arguing, in the second Preface, that

¹⁷Cf. *WdL* 5/27: “Diese Kategorien, die nur instinktmäßig als Triebe wirksam sind und zunächst vereinzelt, damit veränderlich und sich verwirrend in das Bewußtsein des Geistes gebracht [sind] und ihm so eine vereinzelt und unsichere Wirklichkeit gewähren, zu reinigen und ihn damit in ihnen zur Freiheit und Wahrheit zu erheben, dies ist also das höhere logische Geschäft”.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Cf. *WdL* 5/44: “Es ist in ihr nicht um ein Denken *über* etwas, das für sich außer dem Denken zugrunde läge, zu tun, um Formen, welche bloße *Merkmale* der Wahrheit abgeben sollten; sondern die notwendigen Formen und eigenen Bestimmungen des Denkens sind der Inhalt und die höchste Wahrheit selbst”.



it is not the case that *we* employ categories, as if they were tools in a kit and we were the owner of that kit; on the contrary, categories own us, in the sense that they rule our lives, independently of whether we know it or not. Nevertheless, we can make a difference by deciding or not to translate them in the form of science. From this decision does not follow that we subvert the relation of dominance and become the master of categories. Rather, what happens is that we turn ourselves into the place where they become fully self-transparent, and, by so doing, we gain a relation of freedom to the world we live in. Second, Hegel understands the question of determinacy (‘why this instead of that?’) as the question of working out a concept of *method* that is not affected by the dichotomy between a ‘conceptual scheme’ and its content, or by the extrinsic relation between a rule and its application. Such a method is a peculiar form of reflective thinking that has educated itself to let the self-movement of the Concept hold sway and to consider every determinate thought as the product of an inner particularization of that universal movement.

On the one hand, “reflective thinking” (*Nachdenken*) constitutes an education to the method of logic, insofar as it is a spiritual (both psychological and historical, theoretical and practical) precondition for the study of logic. On the other hand, the method of logic provides an education for reflection, insofar as the immanent development of conceptual thinking accomplishes the liberation of the philosophizing subject from the particularity of its own opinions, prejudices, presuppositions.

Insofar as the method of the *Logic* has to exhibit the inseparability of form (self-knowing) and content (thinking as such), the critique of categories can show their *necessity* by considering them *from within* the simplicity of thinking, as moments or determinations of a process of self-determination that works ‘in and for itself’, i.e., free from the constraint of any external substrate or authority: “the forms of thought [...] are themselves the object as well as the activity of the object. They themselves examine themselves and they must determine for themselves their limits and point up their deficiency in themselves”²⁰.

²⁰Cf. *Enc.* §41 Z.1 (W 8/114).



-What is the motivation for pursuing a rational account ('science') of categories?

The answer to this last question is implicit in what precedes. First, Hegel aimed to show that categories are neither fixed structures of being nor conceptual schemes of our own construction, but determinate articulations of reason, understood as a self-actualizing process that permeates both the essence of things and subjective thinking. Second, an 'account' of categories is rational insofar as it consists in a method providing an immanent explication of the rationality of its content, and this content is rational only insofar as the form is inseparable from it as its own self-movement. But if the subject and the object of the account of categories are one and the same, i.e., reason (the logical element, objective thinking), and reason has not an outside, then the motivation for pursuing science must be internal to reason. Such a motivation is nothing else than reason's impulse to find its own satisfaction in its other. Since, however, according to Hegel's conception of immanence, reason *has* no relevant other (rather, it *gives* itself otherness as a momentary reality in the process of its self-externalization), reason's motivation must not be understood as a sense of lack, but rather as *our* motivation to understand reason as a presuppositionless totality. The motivation for the study of logic is the process by which finite spirit goes on to transform what is familiar (*bekannt*) into what is known (*erkannt*), of turning 'passivity' (understood as instinctive activity, an activity that disappeared from the product to which it gave rise) into 'activity' (understood as intelligent and free activity). Reason's motivation, therefore, finds its satisfaction only through the stages of a long process, in the course of which alone the logical element gains the full richness of its meaning as the truth of all there is.

Conclusion

At the end of my reconstruction, I would like to sum up the main points of my argument in regard to what I hold to be Hegel's reformulation of the task of a self-critical ontology.

First, ontology is a critical investigation insofar as it does not *assume* any kind of isomorphism between thought, or language, and reality.



Second, if the identity of thought and being is not to be a mere presupposition, it must be somehow *demonstrated*.²¹

Third, Hegel's way of demonstrating the identity in question is not *linear* or deductive in the methodological order²², but rather a systematically articulated process whereby are exposed (i) the way various shapes of consciousness undergo immanent contradictions in their own understanding of what they take to be the self-standing reality of their objects (*Phenomenology of spirit*), (ii) the way objective thinking turns out to be the subject of its own immanent division into being and subjective thinking (*Science of logic* and *Realphilosophie*).

Fourth, the way of speculation, which skeptically neutralizes the equipollence between any one-sided claim of realism ("the world is independent from thought") and any one-sided claim of idealism ("the world is dependent on thought"), has to be presuppositionless. Hegel's understanding of presuppositionlessness displays three main features: (i) absolute idealism, (ii) radical skepticism, (iii) science's circularity. Of these features, the first should not be understood simply as a theory *about* objective thinking, but rather as thinking's absolute immanence to itself. Such an immanence presents itself for the finite spirit both in a 'passive' or unconscious form and in an 'active' or self-aware, which eventually culminates in science as the most self-conscious form of thinking's own manifestation.

Fifth, for all these reasons, Hegel's project of thinking's immanent critique has not

²¹I don't agree, therefore, with Halbig's claim that the coincidence between thought and being, logic and metaphysics, is a "metaphysical premise" of Hegel's absolute idealism. See: HALBIG, C. *Objektives Denken. Erkenntnistheorie und Philosophy of Mind in Hegels System*, Stuttgart – Bad Canstatt, 2002, pp. 370-71.

²²A linear method of demonstration consists in a chain of moves in which each subsequent move is justified exclusively by its following with necessity from the preceding moves in the chain, without requiring any involvement from subsequent stages of thought. In the second Preface to the *Science of logic*, Hegel makes clear the relation between linear method and mathematics: "Die Darstellung keines Gegenstandes wäre an und für sich fähig, so streng ganz immanent plastisch zu sein als die der Entwicklung des Denkens in seiner Notwendigkeit; keiner führte so sehr diese Forderung mit sich; seine Wissenschaft müßte darin auch die Mathematik übertreffen, denn kein Gegenstand hat in ihm selbst diese Freiheit und Unabhängigkeit. Solcher Vortrag erforderte, wie dies in seiner Art in dem Gange der mathematischen Konsequenz vorhanden ist, daß bei keiner Stufe der Entwicklung eine Denkbestimmung und Reflexion vorkäme, die nicht in dieser Stufe unmittelbar hervorgeht und aus den vorhergehenden in sie herübergekommen ist. Allein auf solche abstrakte Vollkommenheit der Darstellung muß freilich im allgemeinen Verzicht getan werden" (*WdL* 5/30-31).



a transcendental character, since transcendental philosophy make presuppositions about thinking (and, consequently, about being) that it is not ultimately able to justify.

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