

5 Hegel's Logic

Hegel's *Science of Logic* does not enjoy the best of reputations. It is invariably criticized for being obscure and impenetrable, or it is simply ignored altogether, as if it had never been written in the first place. Allen Wood speaks for many who have read some of Hegel's dense and difficult text when he maintains that the philosophical paradoxes explored in it are frequently based on "shallow sophistries" and that the resolution to such paradoxes supplied by Hegel's system is often "artificial and unilluminating". With even friends of Hegel, such as Wood, dismissing the *Logic* in this way, it is hardly surprising that (as Wood notes) "Hegel's system of dialectical logic has never won acceptance outside an isolated and dwindling tradition of incorrigible enthusiasts".¹

In the eyes of such enthusiasts, however – who include, for example, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Dieter Henrich, Jean Hyppolite, and John Burbidge – Hegel's *Logic* is by no means shallow or sophistical, but is one of the most subtle and profound works of philosophy ever produced. My aim in this chapter is to shed light on the distinctive purpose and method of Hegelian logic in the hope of enabling many more readers than hitherto to discover that subtlety and profundity for themselves.

THE CATEGORIES OF THOUGHT

Hegel's speculative, dialectical logic is set out in two texts – the monumental *Science of Logic* (or the so-called Greater Logic)² and the more

¹ Allen W. Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 4–5.

² See *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. by A. V. Miller (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999) [hereafter *SL*]; G. W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, ed. by E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel, 2 vols., *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, vols. 5, 6 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1969) [hereafter *Werke*, 5 or 6]. The *Science of Logic* was first published between 1812 and 1816. The first part of the text, "the doctrine of

truncated *Encyclopaedia Logic* (or the so-called Lesser Logic)³ – but its purpose is in each case the same: to derive and clarify the basic categories of thought.

Following Kant (and in contrast to Locke), Hegel argues that our fundamental categories are not drawn from sensory experience through a process of abstraction, but are generated a priori by the understanding and are then employed to comprehend and make sense of what we perceive. Such categories are distinguished by Hegel from mere words: categories are “forms of thought” (*Denkformen*) with a logical structure of their own, whereas words are sounds (or written signs) by means of which such forms of thought (as well as other representations) are given expression. Hegel insists, however, that the use of categories is inseparable from the use of language: “we *think* in names”.⁴ Conversely, language is itself shot through with a priori categories: “everything that [the human being] has transformed into language and expresses in it contains a category [*Kategorie*] – concealed, mixed with other forms or clearly determined as such, so much is logic his natural element”.⁵ Since language informs and conditions all our conscious perceptions, what we perceive is thus always understood in terms of categories. In Hegel’s view, human beings have no unconceptualized perceptions (or at least none of which we can be aware).⁶

Like Kant, Hegel distinguishes between fundamental categories and empirical concepts, such as “dog” or “chair”. Categories are much more general and abstract than empirical concepts and contain no perceptual element. Yet categories are not abstruse or esoteric concepts known only

being”, was revised towards the end of Hegel’s life and was reissued posthumously in 1832.

³ See G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans. by T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991) (hereafter *EL*); G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830). *Erster Teil: Die Wissenschaft der Logik*, ed. by E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, vol. 8 (hereafter *Werke*, 8). Hegel’s *Encyclopaedia* was first published in 1817 and then revised and reissued in 1827 and 1830. On the limitations of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, see *EL*, 1, 39, Preface to first edition and §16; *Werke*, 8:11, 60.

⁴ *Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind*, trans. by W. Wallace, together with the *Zusätze* in Boumann’s text, trans. by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971) (hereafter *EPM*), p. 220, §462 remark; G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830). *Dritter Teil: Die Philosophie des Geistes*, ed. by E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, vol. 10 (hereafter *Werke*, 10), p. 278.

⁵ Hegel, *SL*, 31; *Werke*, 5:20.

⁶ See Hegel, *EL*, 57, §24 addition 1; *Werke*, 8:82: “in all human intuiting there is thinking”.

to philosophers; categories are the general concepts through which all of us – all of the time – make sense of our world. Indeed, Hegel writes, they are “what we are *most familiar* with [*das Bekannteste*]: being, nothing, etc.; determinacy, magnitude, etc.; [. . .] one, many, and so on”.⁷ As we learn in the course of Hegel's logic, other categories include “something”, “other”, “form”, “content”, “whole”, “part”, “substance”, “cause”, and “object”. Categories are thus the basic, everyday concepts that allow us to say the simplest things, such as “there is *something* on the floor”, “the dog *caused* the child to cry” or “this leaf *is green*”.⁸

The fact that categories “pass our lips in every sentence we speak”, and so are deeply familiar to us, does not, however, mean that we always use them appropriately or fully understand their logical structure or meaning. As Hegel reminds us, “what is *familiar* [*bekannt*] is not for that reason *known* or *understood* [*erkannt*]”.⁹ Indeed, Hegel thinks that for the most part we employ categories without a clear consciousness of all that they entail. Furthermore, precisely because the categories are so familiar to us, we do not see the need to examine them directly and thereby ensure that we understand their logical structure properly. As Hegel notes, “*being*, for example, is a pure thought-determination; but it never occurs to us to make ‘is’ [*das Ist*] the subject matter of our inquiry”.¹⁰ Categories permeate all our everyday experience; in Hegel's view, however, our very familiarity with them blinds us to the possibility that we may not actually understand them as well as we think we do.

The task of Hegel's logic is to discover the right way to understand the categories by determining their intrinsic and necessary structure. In this way, Hegel's logic aims to correct any misunderstanding of them to which everyday consciousness falls prey:

At first [categories] enter consciousness separately and so are variable and mutually confusing; consequently they afford to mind only a fragmentary and uncertain actuality; the loftier business of logic therefore is to clarify [*reinigen*] these categories and in them to raise mind to freedom and truth.¹¹

This process of conceptual “clarification” is undertaken partly for its own sake – simply to allow us to contemplate in peace and freedom the true character of our own fundamental concepts – but also to train us to think properly in everyday life. Hegel believes that philosophical

⁷ Hegel, *EL*, 45, §19 remark; *Werke*, 8:67.

⁸ Hegel, *EL*, 27, §3 remark; *Werke*, 8:45.

⁹ Hegel, *SL*, 33; *Werke*, 5:22, translation altered.

¹⁰ Hegel, *EL*, 59, §24 addition 2; *Werke*, 8:85. A similar concern is later expressed by Heidegger; see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*; trans. by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), p. 23.

¹¹ Hegel, *SL*, 37; *Werke*, 5:27.

comprehension does not have to remain cut off from, but can penetrate, everyday life.¹² Philosophy can, therefore, perform a practical function by transforming the way we think in our personal, social, or religious activity. As Hegel writes in the *Science of Logic*, “the study of this science [i.e. speculative logic], to dwell and labour in this shadowy realm, is [thus] the absolute education and discipline [*Bildung und Zucht*] of consciousness”.¹³

Hegel points out that the categories do not just inform our everyday consciousness, but have also been employed by previous philosophers to comprehend the world. Metaphysicians such as Spinoza, Leibniz, and Wolff made self-conscious use of categories to understand the world in terms of “substance and attributes”, “causality”, or “force”. The problem, in Hegel’s view, is that such philosophers did not first undertake a thorough examination of these categories in order to establish precisely how they are to be conceived. They simply assumed that the categories had a certain logical structure and then used them to interpret the world. Hegel does not deny that different philosophers have conceived categories such as “substance” in subtly different ways; but he believes that since the categories were first rendered explicit by Plato and Aristotle they have never been subjected to truly radical, critical scrutiny. What Hegel calls “former metaphysics” thus “incurred the just reproach of having employed these forms *uncritically* [*ohne Kritik*]”.¹⁴ The aim of Hegel’s logic, therefore, will be not only to clarify the categories that inform everyday consciousness but at the same time to provide a critical “reconstruction” of the categories of metaphysics.

Ordinary consciousness and previous metaphysics have often – though not always – presupposed that certain fundamental categories are clearly distinct from or opposed to one another, that is, “that infinity is different from finitude, that content is other than form, that the inner is other than the outer, also that mediation is not immediacy”. According to Hegel, however, the task of logic is to consider whether such distinctions and oppositions are in fact sustainable – without assuming in advance that they are or that they are not. That is to say,

it is the requirement and the business of logical thinking to enquire into just this, whether such a finite without infinity is something true, or whether such an abstract infinity, also a content without form and a form without content, an inner by itself which has no outer expression, an externality without an inwardness, whether any of these is *something true* or *something actual*.¹⁵

¹² Hegel, *EL*, 48, §19 addition 3; *Werke*, 8:71.

¹³ Hegel, *SL*, 58; *Werke*, 5:55, translation altered.

¹⁴ Hegel, *SL*, 64; *Werke*, 5:61.

¹⁵ Hegel, *SL*, 41–42; *Werke*, 5:33.

KANT'S CONTRIBUTION

What prompts Hegel to undertake this critical investigation of the basic categories of thought is, on the one hand, a simple interest in truth and a concern that we not be misled by what is most familiar to us. On the other hand, he is also influenced by the modern spirit of critical freedom. In Hegel's view, we moderns live in a world in which the authority of tradition should no longer be taken for granted, but everything – including our most cherished beliefs and the concepts and principles with which we are most intimately familiar – should be examined with a free and critical eye. This does not mean that our everyday and traditional philosophical assumptions should necessarily be abandoned; but it does mean that they should no longer be taken on trust as *givens* that govern our lives.

Hegel credits Kant in particular with focussing critical attention on the categories employed in philosophy, science, and everyday life. Yet despite inaugurating the “critical turn” in philosophy, Kant is not as critical as he should be, in Hegel's view, for he confines himself to considering the *epistemic status* of the categories – that is, their range of validity – but does not examine their internal *logical structure* and seek to determine whether that structure has been properly understood by previous philosophers. As Hegel puts it in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, Kant's critical philosophy “does not involve itself with the *content* [...] or with the determinate mutual relationship of these thought-determinations to each other; instead, it considers them according to the antithesis of *subjectivity* and *objectivity* in general”.¹⁶ Kant argues that the categories yield knowledge only within the realm of empirical experience – only within the realm of what Hegel here calls “subjectivity” – and should not be held to disclose anything about what lies beyond such experience. Yet Kant did not challenge the way the categories have traditionally been conceived. Aristotle understood substance, for example, to be “that which is neither said of a subject nor in a subject”, and Kant defined it in a similar way as “something that can be thought as a subject (without being a predicate of something else)”.¹⁷ The difference between the “precritical” Aristotle and the “critical” Kant thus does not lie in the way they conceive the categories but merely in the fact that Kant restricted the categories' range of legitimate application.

¹⁶ Hegel, *EL*, 81, §41; *Werke*, 8:113. See also *SL*, 47; *Werke*, 5:40.

¹⁷ See *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. by J. Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), vol. 1, p. 4; I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by P. Guyer and A. W. Wood (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997) [hereafter *CPR*], p. 277 [B 186].

Kant further belies his critical intentions by simply *assuming* that all acts of understanding are acts of judgment and that all concepts, including our basic categories, are “predicates of possible judgments”.¹⁸ For Kant, the purpose of the concept of “substance” is not to stand alone as an independent object of contemplation but to be *applied* to something in a judgment such as “X is a substance”. (It should be remembered, however, that when X is judged in this way to be a “substance”, it is judged to be an irreducible *subject* and not a quality or “predicate” of anything else). Having assumed that thought is minimally judgment, Kant then proceeds to derive the basic categories of thought from the various forms of judgments with which we are familiar from formal logic. The affirmative judgment, “S is P”, yields the category of “reality”, the negative judgment, “S is not P”, yields the category of “negation”, the problematic judgment, “S might be P”, yields the category of possibility, and so on. The categories can, of course, serve as *predicates* in any form of judgment: one can equally well say that “S is possible”, or “S is not possible”, or that “S might be a substance”. Each category, however, has its *origin* in a particular form of judgment (or, more precisely, in the specific way in which the subject and predicate are united in a particular form of judgment).¹⁹ Each judgment form thus gives rise to a specific category that can then serve as a predicate in several different forms of judgment.

Kant’s deduction of the categories is clear and logical. In Hegel’s view, however, that deduction is problematic because the categories are derived not from the very nature of thought as such but from what Kant simply *assumes* to be thought’s fundamental activity, namely, *judgment*. Since Kant never proves that judgment is essential to thought, or that judgment must take certain forms, but just takes all of this for granted uncritically, he cannot prove – at least to Hegel’s satisfaction – that he has discovered all the basic categories of thought or that he has conceived of them properly.

Hegel sees more merit in Fichte’s approach, since Fichte derived the categories sequentially and necessarily from what appears more obviously to be an irreducible feature of thought: the fact that the I thinks or “posits” a distinction between itself and what is not itself. Yet Fichte’s way of proceeding remains problematic, because – like Descartes – he simply assumes from the start that thought is the activity of an “I”. He thus begins from what Hegel considers to be “a subjective standpoint” whose legitimacy is never properly established.²⁰

¹⁸ Kant, *CPR*, 205 [B 94].

¹⁹ Kant, *CPR*, 211 [B 104–105].

²⁰ See Hegel, *EL*, 84, §42 remark; *Werke*, 8:117, and *SL*, 47; *Werke*, 5:41.

Both Kant and Fichte, therefore, take too much for granted in their derivation of the categories and start from unwarranted assumptions about thought. The aim of Hegel's logic will be to make up for the deficiencies of Kant and Fichte by endeavouring to "deduce [the categories] from thinking itself" *without* making unwarranted assumptions about thought or the categories.²¹ If this deduction is successful, it will, in Hegel's view, be the first genuinely critical and self-critical study of the categories. As such, it will reveal not only which categories are made necessary by the very nature of thought but also how those categories are properly to be understood.

Hegel's logic may be dismissed by some as obscure and impenetrable. It is important to remember, however, that it was intended by Hegel himself to be the rigorous, unprejudiced derivation and clarification of the basic categories of thought. It was intended to be a modern, post-Kantian science that would transform for the better both philosophy and our everyday practices.

LOGIC AND METAPHYSICS

Speculative logic is conceived by Hegel as the discipline in which human thought is to achieve full self-understanding and self-consciousness. Yet is that all that is going on in Hegel's logic? Is this logic simply thought's account of its *own* basic categories? For the advocates of the "nonmetaphysical" interpretation of Hegelian logic – inspired by Klaus Hartmann – the answer is "yes".²² Terry Pinkard, for example, insists that "the *Science of Logic* is a reconstruction not of the movement of things in the cosmos but is instead one of *conceptions*". It explains "how these conceptions relate to each other and what principles underlie them".²³

Robert Pippin's interpretation of Hegel's logic is subtly different from Pinkard's. Pippin maintains that Hegel gives an account not just of our basic conceptions and the relations between them but of the "conditions necessary for objects to be objects at all".²⁴ That is to say, Hegel describes not merely how *we* must think if we are to think coherently, but how *objects* in the world are to be conceived if they are to be regarded as

²¹ Hegel, *EL*, 59, §24 addition 2; *Werke*, 8:85.

²² See Klaus Hartmann, "Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View", in *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by A. MacIntyre (1972) (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), pp. 101–124.

²³ Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Dialectic. The Explanation of Possibility* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1988), pp. 12, 14, my emphasis.

²⁴ Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism. The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 176.

genuine objects. It becomes clear in the course of Pippin's discussion, however, that his interpretation of Hegel's logic remains firmly lodged in the nonmetaphysical camp. For Pippin's Hegel does not set out the logical conditions required for objects to *exist* or to *be* objects in their own right, but rather articulates the conceptual conditions required for something to be an "object of cognition" or an "object of a possibly self-conscious judgment".²⁵ That is to say, Hegel's logic analyses "what is required in order for a subject to judge self-consciously about objects".²⁶ Hegel's proof that the categories of "negation" and "opposition" are necessary does not, therefore, establish that "*beings* actually oppose and negate each other and [...] could not be what they are outside such a relation". It shows only that they have to be "characterized 'contrastively'" by *potentially self-conscious thought* if they are to be conceived by such thought as determinate objects.²⁷

On Pippin's reading, therefore, Hegel's logic is merely a transcendental philosophy that shows the conditions needed for objects to be determinate objects of *thought*. It is not a metaphysics or ontology that discloses the intrinsic structure of *things themselves* (or the "conditions" required for them to *be* the things they are).

In my view, however, the "nonmetaphysical" interpretation of Hegel's logic – as presented by Pinkard or Pippin – tells only half the story: for Hegel makes it clear that the categories set out in his logic are both the necessary concepts of thought *and* the intrinsic determinations of beings themselves. That is to say, Hegel's logic, by his own admission, is both a logic and a metaphysics or an ontology. This is stated in both versions of Hegel's logic. In the *Science of Logic* Hegel describes the "logical science" as "metaphysics proper [*die eigentliche Metaphysik*] or purely speculative philosophy"; and in the *Encyclopaedia Logic* he writes that "*logic* coincides with *metaphysics*, with the science of *things* grasped in *thoughts* that were taken to express the *essentialities* of the *things*".²⁸

Hegel conceives of his logic as both a logic and a metaphysics or an ontology because he understands the fundamental concepts of thought to be *identical* in logical structure to the fundamental determinations of being itself. This is true of all the categories analysed in the *Science of Logic*. The logical structure of the concept of "something" – a concept that *we* must employ – is at the same time the logical structure of whatever *is* something in the world. The concept of "something" is

²⁵ Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, pp. 176, 250.

²⁶ Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, p. 248.

²⁷ Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, p. 188.

²⁸ Hegel, *SL*, 27; *Werke*, 5:16, and *EL*, 56, §24; *Werke*, 8:81, translation altered.

inseparably linked to that of "other", "being-in-itself", and "being-for-other" and, correspondingly, whatever *is* something in the world is also inseparably related to what is other than it. (*Pace* Pippin, Hegel's claim is thus that beings *do* "actually oppose and negate each other [...] and could not be what they are outside such a relation".)

Similarly, the logical structure of the concepts of quantity, measure, causality, objectivity, and life *is* the logical structure of those aspects of being themselves. This is even true of "judgment" and "syllogism", which Hegel, unlike Kant, proves to be immanent in – and thereby necessary to – thought. These are not only forms of human thought, for Hegel, but also logical structures in the world. The "syllogistic form [*Form des Schließens*] is a universal form of all things", Hegel writes; "all of them are particulars that unite themselves [*sich zusammenschließen*] as something universal with the singular".²⁹ In Hegel's view, therefore, every category analyzed in his logic, however "subjective" it might appear, is both a necessary concept of thought *and* a fundamental determination of being.

Nonmetaphysical interpreters of Hegel, such as Pinkard and Pippin, have done much to illuminate the complexities of Hegel's logic and to demonstrate that it is a rigorous, modern discipline. In my view, however, Jean Hyppolite is right to maintain that philosophical knowledge, for Hegel, is just as much "knowledge of being" as it is "self-knowledge".³⁰ Hegel's logic is not only a post-Kantian discipline that undertakes a fully critical study of the categories of thought; it also continues the metaphysical labours of Parmenides, Plato, and Spinoza by endeavouring to understand the true nature of being itself.

Hegel notes in the *Science of Logic* that "ancient metaphysics had [...] a higher conception of thinking than is current today". He explains:

this metaphysics believed that [...] things and the thinking of them [...] are explicitly in full agreement, thinking in its immanent determinations and the true nature of things forming one and the same content.³¹

In both the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia Logic* it is made clear that this metaphysical understanding of thought is one that Hegel – even after Kant – continues to share.

²⁹ Hegel, *EL*, 59, §24 addition 2; *Werke*, 8:84, translation altered. See also *SL*, 586; *Werke*, 6:257.

³⁰ Jean Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence*, trans. by L. Lawlor and A. Sen (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997), p. 71.

³¹ Hegel, *SL*, 45; *Werke*, 5:38. See also Alfredo Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 131.

Yet how is it possible for Hegel, as a committed post-Kantian, to adopt this stance? Didn't Kant argue that the categories yield knowledge only of the objects of possible empirical experience, and that they grant us no knowledge of things as they are in themselves? Is not the very idea of a post-Kantian metaphysics or ontology in the strong, Spinozan sense simply an oxymoron?

Hegel thinks not, because he considers the recognition that thought is immediately aware of *being* to be the direct consequence of the modern demand that philosophy be radically self-critical. By contrast, he considers Kant's idea that thought's proper cognitive function is merely to understand what is given in empirical experience, and that by itself, without the aid of empirical intuition, thought can conceive only of what is *possible*, rather than what *is*, to be an uncritical assumption of "*reflective understanding*".³²

Hegel believes that a modern science of logic that seeks to derive and clarify the basic categories of thought without making unwarranted assumptions about thought must abstract from all that thought and its categories have traditionally been held to be and must consider thought at its simplest and most minimal. A radically self-critical science of logic, he argues, "should be preceded by *universal doubt*, i.e., by total *presuppositionlessness* [*Voraussetzungslosigkeit*]"'. This requirement is fulfilled "by the freedom that abstracts from everything, and grasps [...] the simplicity of thinking [*die Einfachheit des Denkens*]"'.³³ At its simplest and most minimal, however, thought is not the thought of what is possible, necessary, substantial, or objective, but simply the thought of being; it is the simple awareness that "there *is* . . . ". Feeling and imagination do not assert that what they bring to mind *is there* or is *real*; but thought is distinguished precisely by its understanding that "what is *thought*, *is*, and that what *is*, only is in so far as it is thought [*Gedanke*]"'.³⁴ Therefore, a fully self-critical philosophy that seeks to take as little as possible for granted about thought must start out by recognizing that thought is minimally the awareness of being.

Furthermore, a fully self-critical philosophy cannot assume at the outset that *being* is anything beyond what thought is minimally aware of. It cannot assume that being is in truth nature or spirit; nor can it assume that being in any way exceeds the reach of thought. If it is to make no unwarranted assumptions about being, such a philosophy

³² Hegel, *SL*, 45; *Werke*, 5:38.

³³ Hegel, *EL*, 124, §78 remark; *Werke*, 8:168. See also *SL*, 70; *Werke*, 5:68–69.

³⁴ Hegel, *EPM*, 224, §465; *Werke*, 10:283, translation slightly altered.

must begin with the idea that being is simply what thought is minimally aware of – no more and no less.

A fully self-critical philosophy must thus start from the twofold idea that (a) thought is the awareness of being and (b) being is itself simply what thought discloses. This means that the science of logic cannot be anything other than *ontology*: because the study of thought must be, at the same time, the study of *being*. In this ontology the structure of being will be found not through sense perception or observation of nature but simply by analysing the structure of the *thought* of being. The structures of being and thought thus cannot but be identical.

The argument above clearly conflicts with Kant's conception of the matter. From Kant's point of view, a properly cautious and critical philosophy should recognise that human thought by itself entertains no more than the *possibility* of things.³⁵ Accordingly, the claim that our thought by itself discloses the nature of *being* or of "things in themselves" is an uncritical and unjustified assumption that attributes to our thought a capacity for "intellectual intuition" it can never enjoy.

From Hegel's point of view, however, "possibility" is itself a highly complex concept that stands in relation to the equally complex concepts of "actuality" and "necessity".³⁶ Significantly, for Hegel, there is much *more* complexity – not *less* – in the thought of "mere" possibility than in the thought of being. Possibility is not, therefore, the least that thought can think. It is that which we come to think when we *reflect* on the being of which we are initially aware. Thought that takes itself to be aware only of possibility thus actually (though unwittingly) claims more for itself than does thought that takes itself to be aware of simple being, even though the latter, from the Kantian perspective, appears to be more presumptuous.

Hegel insists that a fully self-critical science of logic must begin with the least that thought can be. At its simplest and most minimal, he believes, thought is not the thought of "mere" possibility but the thought of simple being. It is thus with this idea that thought is the awareness of *being* – of what *is* – that Hegel's science of logic must begin.

For Hegel, therefore, there is no contradiction in the idea of a post-Kantian ontology, because the post-Kantian demand that philosophy

³⁵ I. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. by W. S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), p. 284, §76.

³⁶ For Hegel's extended discussion of possibility, actuality and necessity in the *Logic*, see *SL*, 542–550; *Werke*, 6:202–213. See also Stephen Houlgate, "Necessity and Contingency in Hegel's *Science of Logic*", *The Owl of Minerva* 27, 1 (Fall 1995), pp. 37–49.

be fully critical and self-critical requires that we take thought at the start of logic to be the awareness of being. Hegel thus rejects Kant's understanding of thought and its limitations, and he retains the ancient conviction that thought discloses the character of being, because he wishes to be *more* self-critical and to take *less* for granted about thought than Kant himself. It is precisely because he embraces the "critical turn" more consistently than Kant that Hegel continues in the wake of Kant to be a metaphysician in the strong Aristotelian and Spinozan sense.

Hegel also believes that the standpoint of speculative logic – in which thought is understood to disclose the nature of being, and being in turn is understood to be identical in structure to thought – is justified by the analyses he carries out in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Contrary to some commentators, I do not think that Hegel regards phenomenology as the indispensable precondition of speculative logic. As we saw above, Hegel states in the *Encyclopaedia Logic* that such logic presupposes nothing but the willingness freely to suspend one's favoured assumptions about thought and to consider only "the simplicity of thought". A similar claim is made in the *Science of Logic*. All that is required to begin speculative logic, Hegel writes, is "the resolve [*Entschluss*], which can also be regarded as arbitrary, that we propose to consider thought as such". Acting on this resolve and actually setting all presuppositions to one side leads directly to the thought of pure *being* with which speculative logic starts. "To enter into philosophy, therefore, calls for no other preparations, no further reflections or points of connection".³⁷

There are those, however, who are not quite so ready to set aside their inherited beliefs and who are especially wedded to the assumptions of ordinary, everyday consciousness. Such consciousness does not deny that the world is knowable, but it understands the world to be something clearly distinct from itself: "consciousness [. . .] knows objects in their antithesis [*Gegenatz*] to itself, and itself in antithesis to them".³⁸ It thus believes that it gains knowledge of the world through perception and observation of, or practical engagement with, that which is *other* than it. As a consequence, everyday consciousness cannot but consider the standpoint of speculative logic, in which the structure of being is discovered simply by examining the structure of thought, to be "perverse" [*verkehrt*].

The role of Hegel's *Phenomenology* is to persuade readers who are reluctant to let go of the assumptions of everyday consciousness that

³⁷ Hegel, *EL*, 124, §78 remark; *Werke*, 8:168, and *SL*, 70, 72; *Werke*, 5:68, 72.

³⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 15; G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. by E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, vol. 3, p. 30.

the standpoint of speculative logic is in fact by no means as perverse as they think it is. The *Phenomenology* carries out its prolonged act of persuasion by demonstrating that the different conceptions of the world adopted by consciousness themselves lead logically to the standpoint of speculative logic. Consciousness may hold to its everyday beliefs as strongly as it likes; Hegel shows, however, that when the implications of those beliefs are fully worked out and taken to their logical conclusion, the standpoint to which consciousness finds itself committed is precisely that of speculative logic. Everyday consciousness itself makes speculative logic necessary, therefore, despite its own best intentions.³⁹

Phenomenology examines "every form of the *relation of consciousness to the object* and has the concept of science [i.e. speculative logic] for its result".⁴⁰ Speculative logic or "pure science" in turn presupposes the "liberation from the opposition of consciousness" that is brought about by phenomenology (or, alternatively, by the free act of suspending one's familiar assumptions). Such logic understands, therefore, that thought by itself discloses the true nature of being and, conversely, that the logical structure of being is identical to that of thought (properly conceived). In Hegel's own words, it understands that "the absolute truth of being is the known concept [*Begriff*] and the concept as such is the absolute truth of being".⁴¹

Hegel clearly takes his speculative logic to be not just a logic or a transcendental philosophy, but a metaphysics and an ontology in the strong, Spinozan sense. At the same time, however, his logic is *nonmetaphysical* in so far as it is a self-critical discipline that accepts none of the determinate assumptions about being made by pre-Kantian metaphysicians. Speculative logic does not begin with the idea that being is "substance", "nature", "actuality" or "form", but starts from the simple idea of being as such, of being "without any further determination".⁴² Similarly, such logic does not retain the traditional metaphysical presupposition that being is an "object" (or realm of objects) *about which* the philosopher has thoughts: "what we are dealing with in logic", Hegel writes, "is not a thinking *about* something which exists independently as a base for our thinking".⁴³ The fully self-critical speculative philosopher has no

³⁹ For a more detailed study of the role of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, see Stephen Houlgate, "G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831)", in *The Blackwell Guide to the Modern Philosophers From Descartes to Nietzsche*, ed. by S. Emmanuel (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 278–305.

⁴⁰ Hegel, *SL*, 48; *Werke*, 5:42. Miller translates *Begriff* as "notion" rather than "concept".

⁴¹ Hegel, *SL*, 49; *Werke*, 5:43.

⁴² Hegel, *SL*, 82; *Werke*, 5:82.

⁴³ Hegel, *SL*, 50; *Werke*, 5:44.

warrant at the outset to assume that being is such an “object”, any more than he can assume being to be substance or nature. All he can claim at the beginning of logic is (a) that there *is* being and (b) that the structure of being itself can be discovered in the structure of the *categories* of thought. The fully self-critical speculative philosopher does not, therefore, look out into the world in order to discover the nature of being, but sets out to derive and clarify the categories of thought in order to discover the nature of being in them. For such a philosopher, “the necessary forms and self-determinations of *thought* are [thus] the content and the ultimate truth itself”.⁴⁴ Since this is the case, speculative metaphysics or ontology is necessarily equivalent to *logic*.

This last point is crucial, in my view, and is worth repeating. Hegel’s speculative metaphysics is a modern, post-Kantian, and therefore fully self-critical discipline that suspends the determinate assumptions about being and thought that are found in pre-Kantian metaphysics. Consequently, it does not take being at the outset to be an “object” outside or over against thought. All it is entitled to claim to start with is that the intrinsic character of being – whatever that will turn out to be – will be disclosed in the categories of thought itself. Since it looks to the categories of *thought* in order to discover the nature of being, Hegel’s post-Kantian metaphysics necessarily takes the form of logic. *Pace* Pinkard and Pippin, Hegel’s logic is, indeed, a metaphysics; but it is a metaphysics in the form of *logic* because it is a modern, “nonmetaphysical” metaphysics that assumes nothing about being except that its true nature will be discovered in the structure of thought itself.

THE METHOD OF HEGEL’S LOGIC

Hegel insists that a free and fully self-critical logic should start by suspending all presuppositions (apart from the conviction that thought discloses the nature of being): “all [. . .] presuppositions or assumptions must equally be given up when we enter into the Science, whether they are taken from representation or from thinking”.⁴⁵ Speculative logic should thus be *presuppositionless*. This claim, however, is easy to misunderstand.

Hegel does not deny that speculative logic presupposes an *interest* on the part of the philosopher in discovering the true character of thought or being.⁴⁶ Equally, such logic presupposes an interest in ensuring that

⁴⁴ Hegel, *SL*, 50; *Werke*, 5:44, my emphasis.

⁴⁵ Hegel, *EL*, 124, §78; *Werke*, 8:167.

⁴⁶ Hegel, *EL*, 24, §1; *Werke*, 8:41. For a more detailed study of the presuppositions of Hegel’s presuppositionless philosophy, see Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of*

philosophical thought be free and unencumbered and a corresponding readiness to set to one side the governing assumptions of traditional metaphysics and everyday consciousness (or, at least, a willingness to read the *Phenomenology* and possibly be persuaded by it). Speculative logic also presupposes the ability to use language – since, as we have already seen, “we *think* in names”⁴⁷ – and the ability to abstract and hold in mind pure and often highly complex concepts. (In this latter respect, Hegel maintains, “[Aristotelian] formal logic undoubtedly has its use. Through it [...] we sharpen our wits; we learn to collect our thoughts, and to abstract”.)⁴⁸ Finally, Hegel’s logic presupposes a certain familiarity on our part with the basic concepts of thought:⁴⁹ for if we lacked this familiarity, we could not recognise that the concepts developed in that logic are in fact revised and “clarified” versions of the concepts we use in everyday life. In all these respects, therefore, speculative logic is clearly *not* presuppositionless.

In two other respects, however, speculative logic is to be presuppositionless. First, the philosopher should not assume at the outset of such logic that the categories of thought are to be understood in a specific way, or indeed that thought entails any particular categories at all. He should keep in the back of his mind the familiar senses of the categories, but in the science of logic itself he should start from scratch by considering the sheer “simplicity of thinking” as such and wait to discover which categories, if any, are inherent in thinking and how they are to be conceived. As new categories are derived in the course of speculative logic, the logician can compare them with the categories with which he is familiar and so determine to what extent our everyday understanding of the categories is adequate.⁵⁰ That everyday understanding should not, however, play any role in the logical derivation of the categories themselves. In speculative logic itself the categories must be derived purely immanently – without presuppositions – from the sheer “simplicity” of thought. The aim of logic, as Hegel puts it, is “to exhibit the realm of thought [...] in its own immanent activity or what is the same, in its necessary development”.⁵¹

Second, the philosopher may not take for granted at the outset any specific rules or laws of thought. He may not presuppose that thought

Hegel's Logic. From Being to Infinity (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2006), pp. 54–71.

⁴⁷ Hegel, *EPM*, 220, §462 remark; *Werke*, 10:278

⁴⁸ Hegel, *EL*, 52, §20 addition; *Werke*, 8:76, translation slightly altered.

⁴⁹ Hegel, *EL*, 24, §1; *Werke*, 8:41.

⁵⁰ See Hegel, *SL*, 708–709; *Werke*, 6:406–407.

⁵¹ Hegel, *SL*, 31; *Werke*, 5:19.

should abide by the rules of syllogistic inference or that it should be governed by the law of noncontradiction, and so may not find thought wanting if it fails to respect these principles. Nor, indeed, may he presuppose that thought should be “dialectical” (and certainly not that it should develop according to the pattern of “thesis–antithesis–synthesis”). The speculative logician may not presuppose such rules and laws because it is the task of logic itself to discover whether any rules or laws are actually made necessary by the “simplicity” of thought. In Hegel’s own words, the “forms of reflection and laws of thinking [. . .] constitute part of [logic’s] own content and have first to be established within the science”.⁵² Until this has been achieved, no rules or laws of thought can be assumed to be valid.

How then is the speculative logician to proceed? Is there any *method* that such a logician must follow? Yes, indeed. The method he must follow is simply to *let* the “simplicity” of thought unfold and determine itself before our very eyes according to whatever principles prove to be immanent in it. Heidegger is the philosopher with whom the idea of “letting be” is usually associated.⁵³ Many years before Heidegger, however, Hegel argued that “letting” lies at the heart of genuinely free, modern philosophizing. “When I think”, Hegel explains, “I give up my subjective particularity, sink myself in the matter, let thought follow its own course [*lasse das Denken für sich gewähren*]; and I think badly whenever I add something of my own”. My role as philosopher is thus not to pass judgment on this or that proposition or argument according to certain presupposed rules and criteria, but simply to “let the inherently living determinations [of thought] take their own course [*für sich gewähren lassen*]”.⁵⁴ If one does this, Hegel claims, one will discover what thought (and being) prove logically to be *of their own accord*. The understanding of the categories that emerges in this way may or may not agree with that of traditional metaphysics or everyday consciousness; but it is the *true* understanding of the categories, because it is the understanding that is made necessary by the very nature and movement of thought.

Our role as philosophers, therefore, is predominantly passive. As W. T. Stace puts it, “it is, in fact, not *we* who deduce the categories at all. They deduce themselves”.⁵⁵ We simply look on as the categories emerge immanently from the very “simplicity” of thought. Yet we are

⁵² Hegel, *SL*, 43; *Werke*, 5:35.

⁵³ See, for example, Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 405.

⁵⁴ Hegel, *EL*, 58–59, §24 addition 2; *Werke*, 8:84–85.

⁵⁵ W. T. Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel. A Systematic Exposition* (1924) (New York: Dover, 1955), p. 85.

not completely passive observers of this process. First of all, *we* are the ones who think through thought's immanent development: that development does not occur outside of us, like a film or a play, but takes place *in our thinking of it*. Second, although each category is made necessary by the one that precedes it and is not simply dreamt up by us, *we* nonetheless have to render explicit the categories that are implicit in thought at any particular point in its logical development. The deduction of the categories, Hegel maintains, is analytic in that it involves nothing more than the "*positing*" [*Setzen*] of what is already contained in a concept";⁵⁶ but *we* are the ones who actually have to carry out this act of "positing" or rendering-explicit.

The speculative logician who *lets* thought determine itself is thus both passive and active: he allows his own thinking to be guided and determined by what is immanent in thought *and* plays an active role in bringing what is immanent in thought out into the open. Indeed, Hegel notes, there is a degree of activity in our very passivity itself: for we can allow our thought to be guided by the matter at hand only if we actively focus on that matter and hold our own bright ideas at bay. Hegel makes this point in these important, but rarely noted, lines:

Philosophical thinking proceeds analytically in that it simply takes up its object, the Idea, and lets it go its own way [*dieselbe gewähren läßt*], while it simply watches, so to speak [*gleichsam nur zusieht*], the movement and development of it. To this extent philosophising is wholly passive [*passiv*]. [...] But this requires the effort to beware of our own inventions and particular opinions which are forever wanting to push themselves forward.⁵⁷

One might be forgiven for suspecting that Hegel's method of simply "letting" thought determine itself is a recipe for lazy, vague, and undisciplined thinking. This, however, is far from the truth. Hegel's method demands "that each thought should be grasped in its full precision [*Präzision*] and that nothing should remain vague and indeterminate".⁵⁸ It also demands that one pay close and subtle attention to the logical structure of categories and render explicit only what is implicit in each category. Indeed, in my view, Hegel's method requires greater mental discipline than any other philosophical method in history. It also requires greater mental flexibility: for the speculative philosopher has not only to achieve a high degree of precision in his understanding

⁵⁶ Hegel, *EL*, 141, §88 remark; *Werke*, 8:188.

⁵⁷ Hegel, *EL*, 305, §238 addition; *Werke*, 8:390–391, translation slightly altered.

⁵⁸ Hegel, *EL*, 128, §80 addition; *Werke*, 8:171. See also John Burbidge, *On Hegel's Logic. Fragments of a Commentary* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981), p. 42.

of categories but also to allow those categories to mutate into new ones before his very eyes as he renders their necessary implications explicit.

BEING, NOTHING, BECOMING

A fully self-critical logic that suspends all inherited assumptions about thought must begin with thought at its most minimal, that is, with thought as the simple awareness of being.⁵⁹ The first category to be considered in Hegel's logic is thus that of "being" itself (*das Sein*). Such being is conceived not as substance or nature but as sheer, indeterminate being as such: "*being, pure being, without any further determination*".⁶⁰ The task of the speculative logician is thus to think this category and discover any other categories that may be implicit in it. The language used to conceive of pure being is, of course, replete with terms, such as "without", "any", and "further", that have a familiar, determinate meaning. Yet these terms are employed to hold at bay all determinate thoughts and allow us to focus on a category that is itself wholly indeterminate.⁶¹

As we consider that initial, indeterminate category, however, something strange and surprising happens: for, due to its sheer and utter indeterminacy, pure, featureless being actually vanishes before our very eyes into *nothing*. Pure being is "pure indeterminateness and emptiness". Accordingly, Hegel writes,

there is *nothing* to be intuited in it, if one can speak here of intuiting [...]. Just as little is anything to be thought in it, or it is equally only this empty thinking. Being, the indeterminate immediate, is in fact *nothing*, and neither more nor less than *nothing*.⁶²

There is an immediate and obvious difference between *being* and *nothing*; but when being is thought in its purity as sheer, indeterminate being, that difference immediately disappears and being evaporates into nothing whatsoever.

Yet this does not bring speculative logic to an end, because the thought of *nothing* immediately turns back into the thought of being. This is because sheer and utter nothing has an irreducible *immediacy*

⁵⁹ Hegel, *SL*, 70; *Werke*, 5:68–69.

⁶⁰ Hegel, *SL*, 82; *Werke*, 5:82.

⁶¹ See Dieter Henrich, "Anfang und Methode der Logik", in Henrich, *Hegel im Kontext* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971), p. 85.

⁶² Hegel, *SL*, 82; *Werke*, 5:82–83.

of its own. Nothing, in its utter purity, *is* precisely nothing and cannot be thought except as *being* the nothing that it is. Nothing thus immediately slips back into being as soon as it is thought. This is not just a trick of language. Pure nothing proves *logically* to be indeterminate being because its very purity as *nothing* paradoxically gives it an immediacy and *being* of its own. Logically, nothing thus turns out to be "the same determination, or rather absence of determination, and thus altogether the same as, pure *being*".⁶³

According to Hegel, therefore, the thought of *pure, indeterminate being* vanishes immediately into that of nothing, and the thought of *pure nothing* vanishes immediately into that of *pure being*. Each proves to be logically unstable and to disappear into the opposite of itself. Indeed, Hegel points out, each proves to be nothing but the *process* of its own disappearance. What we discover at the start of Hegel's logic is thus not only that being and nothing vanish into one another, but that each simply *is* its own *vanishing*. As such, each is immediately the coming-to-be of the other. With this insight we reach a new category: neither being nor nothing is purely itself because each is nothing but the *becoming* of the other. In Hegel's own words:

their truth is [...] this movement of the immediate vanishing of the one in the other: *becoming*, a movement in which both are distinguished, but by a difference which has equally immediately dissolved itself [*sich aufgelöst*].⁶⁴

This is the first major lesson of Hegel's logic: *pace* Parmenides, being is not just pure and simple being after all, but *becoming*. The concept of "becoming" does not, however, simply replace that of "being", and the latter is not revealed to be a mere fiction (as Nietzsche will later argue).⁶⁵ Hegel's point is that there *is* being, but that such being itself proves logically to be becoming. This is a metaphysical claim about what there is, but one that is established solely by considering the *category* of "being".

Several distinctive features of Hegel's logic become evident in these opening moves. First, although Hegel does not presuppose that speculative thought should be dialectical, such thought does in fact prove to be dialectical of its own accord. Dialectic, for Hegel, is not a relation *between* different things (for example, between an individual and

⁶³ Hegel, *SL*, 82; *Werke*, 5:83.

⁶⁴ Hegel, *SL*, 83; *Werke*, 5:83, translation altered.

⁶⁵ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols/The Antichrist*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 36 (in *Twilight of the Idols*, "Reason' in Philosophy", §2).

society), but is the process whereby one category or phenomenon *turns into* its own opposite: “the *dialectical* moment is the self-sublation [*Sichaufheben*] of these finite determinations on their own part, and their passing into their opposites”.⁶⁶ The categories of being and nothing prove to be dialectical by vanishing into one another, and all subsequent categories will turn out to exhibit a similar dialectic of their own. Dialectic is thus not a method devised by Hegel and brought to bear on categories from the outside, but belongs to those categories (and corresponding aspects of being) themselves. It is “the inwardness of the content, *the dialectic which it possesses within itself*”.⁶⁷

Second, Hegel’s logic progresses by simply thinking through the process whereby categories transform themselves logically and dialectically into new categories. This process is wholly immanent in that it is driven by nothing but the logical character of the categories themselves. New categories are not introduced by the *philosopher* in order to avoid contradictions in the categories under consideration (as Pinkard argues) or to move us on from less adequate to more adequate concepts (as Schelling appears to suggest).⁶⁸ They are generated autonomously by the categories that precede them. It is thus “the *nature of the content* alone which *moves itself* [*sich bewegt*] in scientific cognition”.⁶⁹

Third, the development of the categories is *nonteleological* in that it is not propelled forward by any desire on the part of the individual philosopher or thought in general to reach some goal (such as “the Idea” or “spirit”). Nor (as Schelling claims) are the categories judged to be inadequate by comparison with the projected goal of concrete knowledge of the world “at which science finally is to arrive”.⁷⁰ The speculative logician is not aiming to reach any particular endpoint, but simply seeks to understand the specific category that is in view. Equally, the categories themselves are not secretly “striving” to become moments of a greater whole, but transform themselves into new categories simply by *being* – and, as it were, “trying to remain” – what they are.

Fourth, Hegel describes a process of “sublation” or *Aufheben* in which the opposed categories of “being” and “nothing” lose their independence and become mere “moments” of a unity, “becoming”.⁷¹ That

⁶⁶ Hegel, *EL*, 128, §81; *Werke*, 8:172.

⁶⁷ Hegel, *SL*, 54; *Werke*, 5:50.

⁶⁸ See Pinkard, *Hegel’s Dialectic*, pp. 26, 29, and F. W. J. von Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. by A. Bowie (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 143.

⁶⁹ Hegel, *SL*, 27; *Werke*, 5:16, translation altered.

⁷⁰ Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, p. 138.

⁷¹ Hegel, *SL*, 105–107; *Werke*, 5:112–114.

unity, however, is not in any way separate from or "prior" to the categories that come to be its moments. It is the unity that those categories constitute through their own dialectic. Categories, such as being and nothing, are thus *themselves* responsible for generating the very unity of which they are moments. The process of sublation is not, therefore – as is sometimes suggested by Hegel's deconstructive critics – comparable to the process of eating and digesting in which independent elements are assimilated or absorbed into, and thereby subordinated to, a greater whole that is tacitly or explicitly presupposed. Nor does this process have any sinister, "totalitarian" political connotations.⁷² It is the autonomous process whereby categories unite together *of their own accord*.

It is clear, then, that much can be learned about speculative logic from Hegel's initial account of the categories of *being*, *nothing*, and *becoming*. It should be borne in mind, however, that the further development of the category of becoming, and of the subsequent categories that emerge from it, will not take precisely the same form as the development of pure, indeterminate being. All further development will remain immanent, nonteleological, and dialectical; but precisely because it will be *immanent* and thus rooted in the *specific* logical structures of the categories to come, it will take a subtly different form in each case.

FROM BEING TO THE IDEA

In the remainder of Hegel's logic there emerge numerous categories that fall into three overall groups: the categories of "being", "essence", and "concept". The categories of "being" include "determinate being" (*Dasein*) – which arises directly from "becoming" – "something", "other", "being-in-itself", "being-for-another", "finitude", "infinity", "quantity", and "measure" (*Maß*). Each of these categories proves to be dialectical in its own distinctive way and thereby discloses the dialectical structure of the corresponding aspect of being itself. Determinate being, for example, turns out to entail both *reality* and *negation*; so things are determinate, for Hegel, not only through being what they are, but also through *not* being what they are not. Similarly, something proves to be not only something in its own right but also *other* than something else. Every something is thus necessarily related to other things and vulnerable to their effects on it. As Hegel puts it, "it is the

⁷² One such critic is Christina Howells who speaks both of "the all-devouring rigour of Hegel's search for *Savoir Absolu*" and of "Hegelian totalitarianism" in her (otherwise excellent) book, *Derrida. Deconstruction from Phenomenology to Ethics* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1998), pp. 85, 90.

quality of something to be open to external influences".⁷³ Hegel's analysis of the category of "something" thus leads him to a metaphysical position that directly contradicts Leibniz's doctrine that the world is made up of "windowless" monads.

The categories of "being" turn dialectically into one another, but they nonetheless retain a degree of independence.⁷⁴ Thus, even though something is always *other* than – and so related to – something else, it remains something in its own right with its own intrinsic character. (This, indeed, is what enables philosophers such as Leibniz to overlook the inherent vulnerability of things to external influence.) Similarly, quality and quantity remain to a certain extent independent of one another, although a thing may well undergo qualitative change if it gets too big, too small, too hot, or too cold (as occurs, for example, when water reaches a certain temperature and turns into steam or ice). By contrast, the categories of "essence" – and the aspects of being itself to which they correspond – enjoy no independence at all, because each comes to be what it is only through the mediation of its opposite. Identity, for example, emerges only through difference; force comes to be force only in its expression; and the cause becomes the cause only in producing its effect. None of these determinations has a separate character of its own, but each is constituted at its core by its relation to its opposite. The logical distinction drawn by Hegel between the categories of "being" and "essence" thus leads to a significant metaphysical claim: a thing's *qualities* are related to and partly determined by, but also separate from, those of other things; by contrast, a thing's *identity* is established *solely through* its differences from, relations to, and causal interaction with other things and so is utterly inseparable from them.⁷⁵

Note that, in Hegel's understanding, "essential" determinations that are logically prior to others do not simply and unambiguously *precede* those to which they give rise. The cause produces the effect and in that sense is "prior" to it. Yet the cause comes to be a cause only with the emergence of its effect. It is thus only a cause *thanks to its effect*. It cannot, therefore, be a cause on its own and exist as such before its effect. It is, rather, that to which its effect – once the latter has emerged – necessarily *points back*. Like the ground and force, the cause is that which only turns out *at the end* to come first.⁷⁶ The evidently

⁷³ Hegel, *SL*, 124; *Werke*, 5:133.

⁷⁴ Hegel, *SL*, 123; *Werke*, 5:133.

⁷⁵ On the general difference between the doctrines of being and essence, see Hegel, *EL*, 237, 306, §161, 240; *Werke*, 8:308, 391.

⁷⁶ For a more detailed study of Hegel's account of causality, see Stephen Houlgate, "Substance, Causality, and the Question of Method in Hegel's *Science of Logic*",

paradoxical character of determinations such as cause and force does not, however, render them any less real. Together with all the determinations analysed in Hegel's logic, they constitute necessary aspects of *being*.⁷⁷

By Hegel's own admission the doctrine of essence is the most difficult section of speculative logic.⁷⁸ Things get a little easier in the doctrine of "the concept", in which categories are no longer held to be the prior *ground* of others and at the same time to be mediated by those they ground. The "universal", for example, is not the ground or cause to which the "particular" and "individual" *point back*, but rather that which develops into and *continues itself in* the particular and individual.⁷⁹ Like all categories, the universal turns dialectically into new ones. In so doing, however, it preserves its own identity. The particular and individual are thus not simply "other" than the universal, nor are they merely its "effects"; they are the *universal itself* in the form of particular, individual things. Subsequent categories, such as mechanism, chemism, and life, preserve this interpenetration of universal, particular, and individual. Living beings are thus not simply individuals, but individuals of a certain *species* and *genus*.

The final category of Hegel's logic is that of the "absolute Idea". This is the conception of being as a self-determining totality.⁸⁰ This totality includes all the determinations that have been analysed in the course of speculative logic: quality, quantity, identity, difference, causality, mechanism, chemism, and life. The final lesson of Hegel's logic is thus that being is not to be equated with any one of its constituent determinations but unites all of them into one self-determining whole. On the last page of the *Science of Logic* (and in the last paragraph of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*), Hegel then considers one last dialectical move: he shows that the self-determining totality or "absolute Idea" that being proves to be actually exists in the form of *nature*. At this point, speculative logic ends and the second part of Hegel's philosophy, the philosophy of nature, begins.

CONCLUSION

What Hegel shows in his logic is that being necessarily entails a whole range of different ways of being: being something, being finite, being

in *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy. Fichte, Schelling and Hegel*, ed. by S. Sedgwick (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 232–252.

⁷⁷ Hegel, *SL*, 440; *Werke*, 6:75: "an absolute determination of essence must be present in every experience, in everything actual".

⁷⁸ Hegel, *EL*, 179, §114 remark; *Werke*, 8:236.

⁷⁹ Hegel, *SL*, 602; *Werke*, 6:276.

⁸⁰ Hegel, *SL*, 825, 843; *Werke*, 6:550, 573.

causal, being mechanical, being alive, and so on. Not every object in the universe will exhibit each way of being (as Stace claims),⁸¹ since not every object is, for example, *alive*; but every object will incorporate some of the ways of being discussed in each of the three parts of Hegel's logic: the logics of "being", "essence", and "concept". For example, the pen with which I write – or Herr Krug's rather more famous one – is *something* and so is intrinsically related to *other* things that can affect it in various ways. It has a certain *identity* of its own and *causes* marks to appear on paper. It is also an *individual* of a certain kind, namely, a *mechanical* object. What Hegel's logic shows is that each of these different ways of being has its own specific logical structure, and that an object such as a pen cannot be properly understood except by understanding those logical structures. Of course, such structures alone do not suffice to explain everything about a pen: one also needs to understand its physical characteristics (such as its colour and texture), its mode of construction, and the social and personal uses to which it is put. Nevertheless, the pen is what it is at least in part because it exhibits some of the ways of being that are analysed in speculative logic. One can, therefore, deduce a priori certain fundamental ontological features of a pen, if not – as Hegel famously insists – every aspect of its make-up.⁸²

Hegel demonstrates the necessity of the fundamental ways of being by proving that the *thought* or *category* of being turns dialectically into all the other categories he analyses. His ontology is thus established through *logic*. As we have seen, Hegel's logic is a fully self-critical science that presupposes nothing about thought (or being), except that thought by itself can disclose the inherent logical structure of being. This science is, as Hegel himself acknowledges, difficult and complex.⁸³ In my view, however, it contains the most profound and subtle insights and is well worth prolonged and careful study. Indeed, I would argue that Hegel's detailed presentation of that science – the *Science of Logic* – should be counted together with Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* as one of the two greatest works of modern philosophy.

⁸¹ Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, p. 128.

⁸² See *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, trans. by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 23, note to §250 remark; G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1830). Zweiter Teil: Die Naturphilosophie*, ed. by E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, vol. 9, p. 35.

⁸³ Hegel, *SL*, 31, 42; *Werke*, 5:19, 33.