

Hegel's Account of Contradiction in the *Science of Logic* Reconsidered

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I. INTRODUCTION

HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY IS notorious for its alleged claim that all things are contradictory. Whereas Marxists took this claim to support their view that the social-political world exhibits "real" contradictions, non-Hegelian philosophers of various breeds have used it to argue that Hegelian dialectic annihilates the very principle of scientific reasoning.¹ Yet, even if it is granted that Hegel did not intend to violate the law of non-contradiction, the stakes of Hegel's account of contradiction in the *Science of Logic* are far from clear. According to Robert Pippin, Hegel's claim that all things are contradictory is "one of the most important, even if most obscure things said in the *Logic*."² In what follows, I hope to remove such misunderstandings of this claim as continue to thwart an adequate interpretation of Hegel's philosophy at large.³

In our days, Marxist readings of Hegel are generally thought to have become obsolete. Recent debates on Hegel rather concerned the metaphysical or non-

¹Karl Popper, assuming that Hegel discarded the law of non-contradiction ("What is Dialectic?", *Mind* 49 [1940]: 403–26, at 418) considers it "dangerously misleading" to say that "contradictions are not avoidable" (411). For him, Hegel's philosophy "represents the worst of all . . . absurd and incredible philosophic theories" (420).

²R. Pippin, "Hegel's Metaphysics and the Problem of Contradiction" ["Hegel's Metaphysics"], *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 16 (1978): 301–12, at 309.

³Most criticisms of Hegel's claim concerning the contradictory nature of things followed in the wake of Trendelenburg's *Logische Untersuchungen* (1840). For overviews of the debates on this issue, see R.-P. Horstmann, "Schwierigkeiten und Voraussetzungen der dialektischen Philosophie Hegels," in *Seminar: Dialektik in der Philosophie Hegels* [Seminar], ed. R.-P. Horstmann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978), 9–30; S.-J. Kang, *Reflexion und Widerspruch. Eine Entwicklungsgeschichtliche und systematische Untersuchung des Hegelschen Begriffs des Widerspruchs* [Reflexion und Widerspruch], Hegel-Studien, Beiheft 41 (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1999), 11–17.

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metaphysical nature of the *Science of Logic*.⁴ For some reason, these debates largely ignored the issue of contradiction, thus leaving the traditional assessments of Hegel's concept of contradiction to their own devices.⁵ The present article intends to fill this gap by reconsidering Hegel's account of the concept of contradiction in the *Science of Logic*. Its second part—the *Doctrine of Essence*—contains a detailed examination of the concepts constitutive of classical logical laws, including the principle of non-contradiction. I hold that Hegel by no means denies the validity of this principle insofar as the natural sciences are concerned. I will contend, however, that the text also contains remarks on contradiction that do not pertain to the formal requirements of valid propositions at all. As I hope to show, these latter remarks concern the principle of Hegel's method, a method intended to comprehend modes of thought—rather than “things”—as elements of a dynamic totality.

Only at the end of the *Logic* does Hegel discuss the nature of his method in a systematic way. Since his preliminary remarks on the role of contradiction in this method occur within a chapter devoted to traditional logic, it is difficult to grasp the crucial difference between, on the one hand, Hegel's account of the classical principle of non-contradiction and, on the other, his references to the principle of speculative science as such. In order to remove the obscurity of Hegel's text it

⁴Influential non-metaphysical readings of Hegel's *Logic* include K. Hartmann, “Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View,” in *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. A. MacIntyre (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 104–12; R. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); P. Stekeler-Weithofer, *Hegels analytische Philosophie. Die Wissenschaft der Logik als kritische Theorie der Bedeutung* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1992). By contrast, Houlgate maintains that Hegel's *Logic*, notwithstanding its indebtedness to Kant, is concerned with the innermost nature of being as such. See S. Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic: From Being to Infinity [The Opening of Hegel's Logic]* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2006), 124. For a recent evaluation of this debate, see J. Kreines, “Hegel's Metaphysics: Changing the Debate,” *Philosophy Compass* 1 (2006): 466–80. Whereas, according to Kreines, non-metaphysical readings take Hegel to be merely concerned with concepts or conceptual schemes, the metaphysical reading he endorses affirms that Hegel's philosophy includes an account of “what truly exists” (468; cf. 471, 472). Kreines rightly notes that Kantian readings tend to underestimate Hegel's philosophical ambitions (468). I take the view, however, that Hegel aims to achieve not so much purely rational knowledge of reality (convincingly precluded by Kant) as comprehensive knowledge of such conceptual determinations as have been developed throughout the history of human thought (a mode of knowledge not precluded by Kant's criticism of metaphysics). On this view, Hegel's reconstruction of these determinations is not necessarily at odds with the task traditionally attributed to ontology.

⁵For an exception in this respect, see B. Longuenesse, *Hegel's Critique of Metaphysics [Hegel's Critique]*, trans. N.J. Simek (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), albeit that the book was originally published in French as early as 1981. Longuenesse's interesting interpretation—which I only read after finishing the present article—roughly covers the same ground as mine. Longuenesse equally aims “to dispel persistent misunderstandings concerning Hegel's notion of contradiction” (41). She similarly does this, moreover, by focusing on the determinations of reflection exposed in the *Doctrine of Essence* and on Hegel's transformation of Kant. As will become clear below, however, my approach differs from hers, first, with regard to the exact way in which Hegel moves beyond Kant and, second, with regard to the “subject” of Hegel's abstruse remarks on contradiction. Whereas she takes these remarks to be concerned with objects such as they are constituted in thought (42), I take them to be concerned with the pure concepts which Hegel—in line with Kant—considers to be *presupposed* in all knowledge of objects.

will be necessary, therefore, to disentangle the various layers that together make up the *Doctrine of Essence*.⁶

Although I do not wish to suggest that Hegel's *Science of Logic* can be reduced to the premises of Kant's critical philosophy, I take the view that Hegel's achievement can only be measured by considering the extent to which he moved beyond these very premises. Accordingly, the first layer I will examine consists in Hegel's largely implicit appropriation of Kant's account of the so-called concepts of reflection in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (sections 2 to 4). As we will see, the larger context of Hegel's discussion of the concept of contradiction roughly corresponds to the section of the *Critique* entitled "On the Amphiboly of the Concepts of Reflection."⁷

⁶Colletti summarizes the classical Marxist view of Hegel's "cardinal principle" by saying that "one can maintain with axiomatic certainty . . . that within every object in the universe there must be inner contradiction." Just as many other commentators, both Marxist and non-Marxist, Colletti proposes to qualify Hegel's remarks concerning the contradictory nature of things. See L. Colletti, "Marxism and the Dialectic," *New Left Review* 93 (1975): 3–29, at 26. Implicitly or explicitly, these commentators share Trendelenburg's view that Hegel unduly "ontologized" the notion of contradiction. In their opinion, things are characterized by the opposition or conflict between contrary forces rather than by (logical) contradictions. See, for example, P. F. Linke, "Über Fragen der Logik," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 1 (1953): 354–58; W. Becker, *Hegels Begriff der Dialektik und das Prinzip des Idealismus [Begriff der Dialektik]* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1969), 58–59; G. Patzig, "Widerspruch," in *Handbuch philosophischer Grundbegriffe*, vol. 6, ed. H. Krings (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1974), 1698–1702; S. Sayers, "On the Marxist Dialectic," in R. Norman and S. Sayers, *Hegel, Marx and Dialectic: A Debate* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1980), 14. Düsing rejects Hegel's alleged denial of the law of non-contradiction. See K. Düsing, *Das Problem der Subjektivität in Hegels Logik [Das Problem der Subjektivität]* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1976), 317. Cf. also M. Wolff, *Der Begriff des Widerspruchs. Eine Studie zur Dialektik Kants und Hegels [Der Begriff des Widerspruchs]* (Königstein: Hain, 1981), 169. Wolff accepts what he calls Hegel's objectification of the contradiction. In a similar vein, Kang, *Reflexion und Widerspruch*, 207–08, argues that the *Logic* provides a logical foundation for the claim that all things are characterized by the conflict between real forces. In "Hegel's Metaphysics," Pippin seeks to clarify the claim that everything is inherently contradictory by suggesting that for Hegel claims about the essence of something can only take the form of $s = p$ if 'p' is identical to 's' (310). I do not quite see, however, how his recourse to modern logic—concerned with propositions about things—should help to dissolve the obscurity of Hegel's claim, which, in my view, is neither concerned with things nor with propositions. Other accounts of Hegel's dialectics simply ignore the problem of contradiction. Cf. D. Henrich, "Hegels Logik der Reflexion," in *Hegel im Kontext* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 95–156; T. Pinkard, "The Logic of Hegel's *Logic*" ["Hegel's *Logic*"], *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 17 (1979): 417–35.

⁷I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft [KrV]*, ed. R. Schmidt (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1971); translated as *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. P. Guyer and A. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), B316–49. (Citations, in the usual fashion, refer to pages in the 'A' and 'B' editions.) Longuenesse (*Hegel's Critique*, 46–48) also points out the relevance of this section for Hegel's treatment of the determinations of reflection. While highlighting Kant's explicit criticism of Leibniz in this section, she does not dwell on the parallel between the critique of metaphysics Kant puts forward in this section and Hegel's critique of metaphysics in the *Doctrine of Essence*. Apart from Longuenesse, Belaval is one of the very few commentators to have interpreted Hegel's *Doctrine of Essence* against the backdrop of Leibniz and Kant. Focusing on "On the Amphiboly of the Concepts of Reflection," Belaval, however, does not discuss Hegel's concept of contradiction. See Y. Belaval, "La doctrine de l'essence chez Hegel et chez Leibniz" ["La doctrine de l'essence"], in Y. Belaval, *Études leibniziennes. De Leibniz à Hegel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980). Whereas Wolff, in *Der Begriff des Widerspruchs*, does consider the concept of contradiction presented in the *Doctrine of Essence* in relation to Kant, he ignores the way in which Hegel here draws on Kant's discussion of the concepts of reflection in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This is also true of Düsing, *Das Problem der Subjektivität*, 221; and Kang, *Reflexion und Widerspruch*, 142–43. Unlike these commentators, I interpret Hegel's *Doctrine of Essence* as a whole in light of Kant's discussion of the concepts of reflection. Insofar as Hegel's notion of contradiction is concerned, by contrast, I argue that it cannot be adequately understood by taking one's bearings from the classical principle of non-contradiction accepted by Kant.

Although this section, in my view, greatly clarifies the general thrust of the *Doctrine of Essence*, it does not suffice to dissolve the prevailing embarrassment concerning Hegel's remarks on the concept of contradiction. This task further requires an examination of the way in which the *Logic*—in the wake of Kant's *Critique*—criticizes pure reason such as it has informed the actual history of scientific and philosophical thought. Hegel's criticism of the concepts that emerged during this history, I will argue, always sets out from the limited understanding of these concepts achieved in the history of philosophy itself. This layer of the *Doctrine of Essence* emerges most clearly in Hegel's account of the classical logical laws derived from the concepts "identity" and "opposition," an account which I discuss in sections 5 and 6. Since this account provides the context of Hegel's remarks on contradiction, I will draw on it to closely examine these remarks themselves (sections 7 and 8). Sections 9 and 10, finally, point out how the methodical principle that Hegel considers to derive from the concept of contradiction actually informs his speculative logic, in particular his analysis of the determinations of reflection themselves.

The present article takes its bearings from the view that Hegel's *Logic* consists in a philosophical reconstruction of the pure concepts brought about in the history of scientific and philosophical thought.⁸ Whereas this history provides the *Logic* with its "material," Hegel abstracts from the actual history of thought in order to comprehend the totality of its necessary moments. On this account, the Remarks that complement the main text of the *Logic* do not deal with a different content than the main text, but treat the same content from a more concrete angle. Since I consider the Remarks to provide important clues for interpreting Hegel's extremely abstract treatment of pure concepts in the main text, this article broaches Hegel's discussion of the concepts identity, opposition, and contradiction primarily through the former. This focus on the historical dimension presupposed by the main text will allow me, I hope, not only to develop a consistent interpretation of Hegel's conception of contradiction, but also, in the final sections, to shed new light on the method that informs the *Science of Logic* as a whole.⁹

⁸In dealing with the determinations of thought which, instinctively and unconsciously, pervade our spirit as such . . . the science of logic will also be a reconstruction of those [determinations of thought] which are singled out by reflection and are fixed by it as subjective forms" (G. W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik I [LJ]*; translated as *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller [Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1997], 30). Unless indicated otherwise I refer to Hegel's *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, ed. E. Moldauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969–72). I have occasionally modified the translations. Throughout, cited page numbers refer to the German text and English translation, respectively. For an elaboration of this view, see my "The Dissolving Force of the Concept: Hegel's Ontological Logic," *The Review of Metaphysics* 57 (2004): 787–822, and *On Hegel: The Sway of the Negative [On Hegel]* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). The present article as a whole draws on the account of Hegel's *Logic* presented in this book, in particular insofar as Hegel's conception of negativity is concerned.

⁹Given the systematic focus of this essay, I will not be able to address the development of Hegel's thoughts on contradiction from the early Jena writings onward. See Düsing, *Das Problem der Subjektivität*; Kang, *Reflexion und Widerspruch*.

2. KANT'S ACCOUNT OF THE CONCEPTS OF REFLECTION

In order to trace the Kantian strand of Hegel's *Doctrine of Essence*, a brief examination of Kant's account of transcendental reflection is in place.¹⁰ In the chapter of the *Critique* entitled "On the Amphiboly of the Concepts of Reflection," Kant opposes both Leibniz and the adherents of the "Leibnizian-Wolffian doctrine" by arguing that they purported to achieve knowledge of things by means of logical reflection alone.¹¹ Criticizing this metaphysics for its failure to distinguish adequately the domains of science and speculation, the chapter devoted to the concepts of reflection forms the hinge between the *Transcendental Analytic* and the *Transcendental Dialectic*.

For Kant, reflection always proceeds by comparing the content of various representations (A262/B318). This comparison underlies the very generation of empirical concepts, the subsumption of a given object under a concept, as well as the combination of concepts in a judgment. According to Kant, I can only determine the content of my representation as, for instance, a rose, by comparing it to the content of the concept "rose" and by singling out what they have in common (A137/B176). Although this comparison relies on the concept of sameness (*Einerleikeit*), it does not yet require logical reflection. We do reflect logically, by contrast, when comparing the content of various concepts to *one another* in order to form judgments (A261–62/B317–18; cf. A279/B335). In order to state that all roses are plants, I must first have singled out the characteristics which the concept "rose" and the concept "plant" have *in common*. The statement that some roses are red, conversely, requires that I consider the object thought under the concepts "rose" and "red" in view of its *distinction* from other objects thought under the concept "rose" (A261–62/B317–18). Apart from sameness and distinctness, Kant discusses three further pairs of concepts of reflection, including agreement and conflict.¹² Even though these concepts of reflection do not suffice to turn empiri-

¹⁰For a more detailed treatment of this issue, see my "Pure Reason's Enlightenment: Transcendental Reflection in Kant's first *Critique*," *Kant Yearbook* 2 (2010): 53–73.

¹¹*KrV*B330, cf. B326. I will abstract from the question as to whether Kant's criticism of Leibniz is pertinent. According to Malter, it is more to the point with regard to Wolff's metaphysics. See R. Malter, "Logische und transzendente Reflexion. Zu Kants Bestimmung des philosophiegeschichtlichen Ortes der Kritik der reinen Vernunft" ["Logische und transzendente Reflexion"], *Revue internationale de philosophie* 136–37 (1981): 284–301, at 297. The pertinence of Kant's criticism of Leibniz is equally questioned by G. H. Parkinson, "Kant as a Critic of Leibniz: The Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection," *Revue internationale de philosophie* 136–137 (1981): 302–14.

¹²The concepts of reflection treated in the *Critique of Pure Reason* are: sameness and distinctness (*Einerleikeit und Verschiedenheit*), agreement and conflict (*Einstimmung und Widerstreit*), the inner and the outer (*das Innere und das Äussere*), and matter and form (*Materie und Form*). Kant distinguishes between conflict (*Widerstreit*) and contradiction (*Widerspruch*) and generally uses the term 'conflict' to describe the antinomies of reason. A proposition such as "the circle is square" is said to contradict itself (cf. *KrV* B189–93). His discussion of the concept of conflict—considered as a concept of reflection—is very sketchy. Drawing on his early treatise, *Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitude into Philosophy* (1763), he notes that two equal powers that move into opposite directions are in conflict and, as such, annul the effects of one another. Such real oppositions can occur only within the realm of phenomena (*KrVA*265/B320–21; cf. A273/B329, A282/B338). If the understanding, on the other hand, assigns

cal representations into objective judgments, any scientific knowledge necessarily relies on them.

Kant holds that Leibniz misused this logical reflection for the purpose of achieving *a priori* knowledge of things as such (A273/B329). In his view, Leibniz committed a “subreption” (A268/B324) by tacitly moving from the domain of empirical knowledge (where logical reflection is appropriate) to the domain of ontology (where it does not suffice). Thus, Leibniz relied on the concept of sameness to assert that things are identical if all of their intrinsic determinations are identical. According to Kant, this claim only makes sense insofar as things are treated as mere *noumena*. Leibniz went wrong, in his eyes, by claiming the validity of the principle of indiscernibility for the domain of the natural sciences as well.¹³ Yet these sciences are concerned not so much with the intrinsic determinations of things as with objects that differ from one another at least with regard to their spatial position. These objects are defined by relational rather than intrinsic determinations (A265/B321). While the Leibnizians entangled themselves in vain speculations concerning, for instance, the nature of monads (cf. A274/B330) and the divisibility of substances (cf. A434–43/B462–471), Kant maintains—throughout the first *Critique*—that philosophy should turn its inquiries to *a priori* principles that govern scientific knowledge rather than metaphysics.

According to Kant, Leibniz’ philosophy can be traced back to its failure adequately to distinguish between *phenomena* and *noumena*. The mode of reflection to which Kant assigns this task—transcendental reflection—is as pure as logical reflection, yet considers given representations in view of the cognitive faculties to which they belong, namely, either sensibility or the understanding.¹⁴ Just as logical reflection precedes the formation of empirical judgments, transcendental reflection

various positive predicates (“realities”) to the same subject, then these predicates do not conflict logically (*KrV*A264–65/B320, A272/B328): something can be both red, round, and small. This obvious principle only becomes problematic, in Kant’s view, if employed with regard to God or the world at large, as Leibniz did when he maintained that all real entities are necessarily in agreement with one another (*KrV*A282–83/B338–39; cf. A280/B336). In sum, Kant uses the term ‘contradiction’ with regard to single propositions and the term ‘conflict’ with regard to both physics (contrary powers) and metaphysics (contrary propositions). He accordingly distinguishes between analytic, real, and dialectical oppositions (cf. *KrV*A273/B329, A504/B532). See on this Wolff, *Der Begriff des Widerspruchs*, 41–77. As far as Hegel is concerned, it should be noted that the chapter of the *Encyclopedia* devoted to the determinations of reflection does not deal with the concept of contradiction, but is confined to the concepts of identity, difference, and ground. The *Science of Logic*, by contrast, treats the concept of ground in a separate chapter.

¹³Leibniz, Kant notes, extended “his principle of indiscernables, which holds merely of concepts of things in general, to the objects of the senses . . . and thereby believed himself to have made no little advance in the cognition of nature” (*KrV*A271–72/B327–28; cf. A42–44/B59–62, A60–61/B85, A281/B337).

¹⁴*KrV*A262/B318. See Malter, “Logische und transzendente Reflexion,” for a clarifying discussion of the role of transcendental reflection in Kant’s criticism of Wolff and the history of philosophy at large. For a detailed examination of Kant’s account of the concepts of reflection and the historical context from which it emerged, see B. Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge: Sensibility and Discursivity in the Transcendental Analytic of the Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. C. T. Wolfe (Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 107–66. In line with the aim of the book as a whole, her analysis focuses on the relation between the logical forms of judgment and the concepts of reflection. Longuenesse is primarily interested, moreover, in the role of logical reflection in the formation of *empirical* concepts and judgments (11, 115, 131), and devotes almost no attention to transcendental reflection (cf. 114).

tion should precede the philosophical investigation into the *a priori* principles of all knowledge.

Kant notably illustrates the function of this transcendental reflection by pointing out how Leibniz failed to perform what he calls the "duty" of philosophy (A263/B319). I take him to mean that Leibniz considered things as such by means of concepts of reflection that actually pertain to *noumena* alone. Leibniz, that is, conceived of these things in terms of the *sameness* and *agreement* of the characteristics thought under their concepts, and he regarded these characteristics as *intrinsic* to the things themselves. Lastly, he considered these things—considered as the *matter* of thought—to precede their spatio-temporal form (A271–76/B327–32). Whereas Leibniz thus disregarded the opposites of each of these four concepts of reflection (A270/B326), Kant suggests that these opposites constitute precisely the very characteristics of the sphere of *phenomena*. These potential objects of scientific knowledge are characterized by spatial *distinctness*, *conflicting forces*, and *extrinsic* determinations. Moreover, their spatio-temporal *form* precedes their sensible matter. Taken together, the four pairs of concepts of reflection allow transcendental reflection adequately to distinguish the characteristics of the sphere of *phenomena* from those of the sphere of *noumena* and, hence, to limit the domain of scientific knowledge to the former. It is only within this sphere that understanding and sensibility can generate valid synthetic *a priori* principles, laws of nature, and empirical judgments.

Yet Kant's solution to the problem created by dogmatic metaphysics gave rise to a new problem. Within two decades, philosophers realized that Kant's clear-cut opposition between the realms of sensibility and thought precluded a thorough comprehension of the dynamic proper to life, spirit, and thought as such.¹⁵ Hegel's *Doctrine of Essence* is intended, in my view, to expose the limit of any philosophy—including Kant's—that holds on to a strict division between appearances and reality as it is in itself.¹⁶ In the second chapter of the *Doctrine of Essence*, Hegel implicitly sets out from Kant's discussion of the concepts of reflection to achieve this aim.

¹⁵Speculative science should not appeal to subordinate spheres of philosophy, Hegel maintains, "for its determinations . . . are unfitted for higher spheres and for the whole. The latter occurs whenever categories of the finite are applied to the infinite; the current determinations of force, substantiality, cause and effect, and so on, are likewise merely symbols for expressing, for example, vital or spiritual relationships, that is, they are untrue determinations . . . with respect to speculative relations as such" (*LI* 386/325).

¹⁶The *Science of Logic*, in particular the *Doctrine of Essence*, thus elaborates the task that Hegel had set himself as early as in the *Differenzschrift*: "As culture developed, oppositions that used to have significance as spirit and matter, soul and body, faith and intellect, freedom and necessity, etc. . . . took the shape of the opposition between reason and sensibility, intelligence and nature. . . . The sole interest of reason consists in resolving such rigidified oppositions" (G. W. F. Hegel, "Differenz des Fichteschen und Schellingschen Systems der Philosophie," in *Jenaer Schrifte 1801–1807*, translated as *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*, trans. H. S. Harris and W. Cerf [Albany: SUNY Press, 1977], 21/90; cf. 27–28/96, 115/174). In *Faith and Knowledge* Hegel praises Kant's account of the antinomies of reason because he conceived of thesis and antithesis at least "as absolutely heterogeneous. . . . And indeed, in comparison with the defective and unsubstantial connection of freedom and necessity, of the intelligible and the sensible world, their completely pure separation has the merit of [permitting] the pure positing of their absolute identity. Yet this is not what Kant had in view when he separated them so purely" (G. W. F. Hegel, "Glauben und Wissen oder Reflexionsphilosophie der Subjektivität in der Vollständigkeit ihrer Formen als Kantische, Jacobische und Fichtesche Philosophie" [FK], in *Jenaer Schrifte 1801–1807*, translated as *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. W. Cerf and H. S. Harris [Albany: SUNY Press, 1977], 320/84). Contrary to these early texts, The *Doctrine of Essence* focuses on the basic conceptual paradigm that underlies such oppositions as that between spirit and matter.

3. HEGEL'S DOCTRINE OF ESSENCE

Hegel's speculative logic differs from Kant's transcendental logic by almost completely disregarding the role of pure concepts in the formation of empirical knowledge. This abstraction allows Hegel to concentrate on the content of these concepts themselves and, hence, to bring out the limits of the conceptual paradigms they define.¹⁷ Yet this is not to say that Hegel departs from Kant's transcendental philosophy in all respects. When he presents the *Science of Logic* as "the system of pure reason" (*LI* 43/49), he clearly recalls Kant's view that such a system should be elaborated on the basis of his critique of pure reason.¹⁸ To be sure, Hegel's *Logic* moves beyond Kant's critical philosophy in that it no longer treats the basic elements of this system—pure concepts—from a subjective point of view.¹⁹ And whereas Kant's first *Critique* largely abstracts from the historical development of pure reason, the *Logic* reconstructs the totality of pure concepts that have evolved in the history of scientific and philosophical thought.²⁰

However, a truly philosophical comprehension of these concepts calls for a method that takes the form of a strict deduction, for it must proceed independently of any external considerations.²¹ Thus, even though pure concepts such as being, substance, or identity have actually been put forward by individual philosophers, Hegel abstracts from this historical dimension in order to comprehend their totality. In line with Kant, he therefore assigns the production of pure concepts not so much to individual human beings as to pure thought (cf. A55/B79). Unlike Kant, Hegel treats pure thought as the *a priori* source of the concepts that have informed the history of the sciences and of philosophy itself. Accordingly, he refers to its principle as the concept as such (*LI* 30/39).

¹⁷"[The determinations of reflection] must be considered in themselves, that is, we have to consider what their own reflection is" (*LII* 70/436; cf. 37/410; *LI* 30/39, 61/64).

¹⁸KrVA11/B25; cf. Axxi/Bxxxvi, Bxxii–xxiii, B869, B860.

¹⁹"[M]ore precisely, this objectifying act, freed from the opposition of consciousness, can be considered as thought as such. But this act should no longer be called consciousness; consciousness contains within itself the opposition of the ego and the object, an opposition which is not present in that original act" (*LI* 60/62–63). Cf.: "Although critical philosophy had already turned metaphysics into logic, it . . . attached an essentially subjective meaning to the logical determinations. . . . But the liberation from the opposition of consciousness . . . demands that the [determinations of thought] be considered . . . as that which is logical and the product of pure reason" (*LI* 45/51).

²⁰"The same development of thought which is exposed in the history of philosophy is exposed in philosophy itself, but in the latter this development is liberated from historical externality and occurs purely in the element of thought" (G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse I* [*Enc I*], translated as *Hegel's Logic*, trans. W. Wallace [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975], §14; cf. *LI* 30/39–40, *LI* 43/49). Cf. also G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie I* [*LHP I*], translated as *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, trans. E. S. Haldane and H. Simson (Lincoln-London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 49/30.

²¹The *Logic* proceeds by means of "a continuous, pure course in which nothing extraneous is introduced" (*LI* 49/54; cf. 17/28, 55/59, 68–69/70; *LII* 252/582). Many commentators have highlighted the immanence of Hegel's speculative method. See for example D. Henrich, "Anfang und Methode der Logik," in *Hegel im Kontext* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), 73–94, and Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic*. I take the view, however, that this emphasis tends to downplay the fact that the concepts which are subjected to this method are not invented by Hegel, but have actually emerged in the history of scientific and philosophical thought. This point is stressed by Pinkard, "Hegel's Logic," 418–21, 431, and H. F. Fulda, "Unzulängliche Bemerkungen zur Dialektik," in *Seminar*, ed. R.-P. Horstmann, 33–69, at 39–40. However, Pinkard and Fulda no less concentrate on the immanent development of the *Logic*.

Hegel also assigns the activity of "reflection" to pure thought. He uses this term, as we will see, to characterize the possible ways of determining the concept in terms of essence. At the beginning of the *Doctrine of Essence*, Hegel briefly discusses these possible determinations of essence, which he takes to have informed the most basic paradigms of scientific and philosophical thought. The most abstract determination of the relation between essence and its counterpart is that between the essential and the unessential (*LII* 18/394). The relation between essence and the realm of immediately given beings can also be determined—and has been determined so—as semblance (*Schein*). This latter determination of essence underlies, Hegel notes, both skepticism and the modern idealism of Leibniz, Kant, and Fichte (*LII* 20–21/397).

Yet the dualism implied by this determination of essence cannot, in the long run, prevail. According to Hegel, the sphere of semblance is not foreign to that of essence, but results from essence's own effort to establish itself as essence (*LII* 22/398). This might be clarified by means of the following example. The good as such only emerges as the essence of any moral act by distinguishing itself from the acts through which it appears. These acts, in turn, only emerge as moral acts in light of the good as such. Seen in this way, essence and semblance presuppose rather than exclude one another. For Hegel, the term 'essence' does not designate a self-identical substrate, but pertains to the movement in which it distinguishes itself from its contrary and reflects itself in the latter. That is why Hegel maintains that "essence in this its self-movement is reflection" (*LII* 24/399).

This reflection has allowed thought to grasp, for instance, a particular act as moral act, and, conversely, to grasp the good as such as the essence of such acts. If one isolates these contrary conceptual determinations from this movement, nothing remains. For the good itself is nothing apart from its appearance in actual deeds, and, seen from a moral point of view, these deeds are nothing apart from their finite reflection of the good as such. This is what Hegel means, it seems to me, when he notes that the reflecting movement enacted by essence "is the movement from nothing to nothing and so back to itself" (*LII* 24/400). Thus, essence and semblance owe their meaning exclusively to the reflection in which essence establishes itself as essence. Just as the good is reflected in moral acts, the essence of a rose is reflected in the actual rose that I see, touch, and smell. This presupposes, according to Hegel, that the pure concepts of essence and semblance *themselves* are also reflected into one another. I cannot define the essence of something, that is, without presupposing the conceptual unity of essence and semblance.

However, the actual history of philosophy testifies precisely to the *incapacity* of thought to comprehend essence and semblance—or essence and appearance—in terms of this "pure absolute reflection."²² Insofar as pure thought has produced

²²*LII* 25/400. Cf.: "[I]t is this reflection which, in one and the same activity, distinguishes the two sides of equality and inequality, hence contains both in one activity, letting the one appear and reflect in the other" (*LII* 55/423). According to Hegel, the determination of essence in terms of "appearance" testifies to the mutual dependence of essence and its contrary to a larger extent than its determination in terms of "semblance" (cf. *LII* 125/479–80). In what follows, I will disregard the difference between semblance and appearance and, if the *Doctrine of Essence* as a whole is concerned, refer to the distinction between essence and appearance only.

conceptual oppositions such as that between infinity and finitude, identity and difference, or form and matter, it is, on Hegel's account, dominated by the understanding.²³ Since pure understanding is, in this case, not engaged in *determining* objects, Hegel refers to it as a mode of reflection, more precisely as "external reflection" or even "self-alienated reflection."²⁴ Dependent on the mode of reasoning characteristic of common sense, this form of philosophical reflection fails to grasp the unity of contrary determinations. Insofar as the conceptual oppositions it produces can be traced back to finite ways of determining essence as such, they are treated in the *Doctrine of Essence*. The *Encyclopedia* characterizes this part of the *Logic* as follows:

This (most difficult) part of the *Logic* mainly contains the categories of metaphysics and of the sciences as such,—as the products of reflective understanding, which *at once* assumes the *independence* of the distinctions and affirms their relativity. (*Enc I*, §114, rem.)

External reflection is a mode of pure thought that defines essence in terms of its opposition to the inessential, semblance, or appearance, that is, in terms of two ontological spheres that exclude one another. This is what Hegel calls their reflection into themselves (*LII* 34/407). The *Logic* considers the "sphere of reflection" (*LII* 46/417) that results from this mode of thought as the conceptual paradigm which has dominated the history of both the sciences and philosophy from Plato onward. On the one hand, this paradigm allowed thought to rise above the sphere of empirical knowledge so as to define the essence of beings. On the other hand, it prevented thought from grasping the unity of the two realms it thus distinguished. On this account, Kant's transcendental distinction between that which is given in sense perception (appearances) and that which can merely be thought (things in themselves) constitutes a particular instantiation of this paradigm. As such, it testifies no less to the sway of external reflection than Platonism or Leibnizianism.²⁵

²³Unlike texts such as the *Differenzschrift*, the *Logic* tends to avoid references to Kant's distinction between subjective modes of thought such as understanding and reason. However, the *Logic*, no less than the earlier texts, presupposes this crucial difference (cf. *LI* 16–17/27–28, 140/130, 160/145; *LII* 285–88/610–12).

²⁴Hegel considers this mode of thought notably to define modern philosophy: "But *reflective* understanding took possession of philosophy." This mode of thought "holds on to its separations" (*LI* 38/45; cf. *LII* 39/412, 50/420, 55/424). I take the view that the *Doctrine of Being* treats pure concepts that are employed to determine objects rather than to reflect on these objects in light of the distinction between essence and appearance. The distinction between the *Doctrine of Being* and the *Doctrine of Essence* thus corresponds to Kant's distinction between a determining and a reflective faculty of judgment. If philosophy assigns an isolated determination of reflection such as "identity" to things in an immediate way, Hegel notes, it mistakes this determination for a quality, that is, for a determination that belongs to the sphere of being (*LII* 37/410).

²⁵"[T]he world that is reflected into itself, the world such as it is in itself, opposes itself to the world of appearances. Yet being such as it appears and essential being are, as such, related to one another" (*LII* 125/479–80). Kant argues, of course, that the concepts of the understanding can only be applied to contents given in sense perception. Accordingly, philosophy should refrain from determining such contents as can merely be thought, that is, from determining reality as it is in itself. Although Kant thus restricts the understanding to the sphere of *phenomena*, his distinction between the twofold way in which the *contents* of thought can be given at all corresponds to the classical, Platonic distinction between appearance and essence. I completely agree with Malter, "Logische und transzendente Reflexion," who, without referring to Hegel, claims that Kant's "Amphiboly of the Concepts of Reflection" contains a comprehensive critique of the history of philosophy as a whole (286–87). It is for this reason that Hegel, in my view, could use this chapter as the foil of his *Doctrine of Essence*.

I have argued above that Kant considers transcendental reflection not only to disentangle the realms of *phenomena* and *noumena*, but also to limit the domain of scientific knowledge to the former realm. Now it is the aim of the *Doctrine of Essence* to expose the limits of the conceptual paradigm defined by this very opposition. However, Hegel does not develop his internal criticism of external reflection by straightforwardly opposing his own insights to those achieved by dogmatic metaphysics and Kant's critical philosophy. His strategy rather consists in setting out from the purported truth achieved by external reflection itself so as to make it aware of the untenability of its initial position.²⁶ Thus, Hegel seeks to demonstrate that what external reflection takes to be the true content of a particular principle is at odds with its true, speculative content. That is why Hegel, in my view, dwells on the determinations of reflection as conceived by both traditional formal logic and the metaphysics that relied on this logic.²⁷ The next section considers Hegel's implicit discussion with Kant on this subject.

4. HEGEL'S CONCEPTION OF THE DETERMINATIONS OF REFLECTION

The second chapter of the *Doctrine of Essence* is titled "The Essentialities or Determinations of Reflection." Its three main sections investigate the concepts of identity, difference, and contradiction. Interestingly, Hegel refers to Kant's corresponding treatment of the concepts of reflection only once, in the introductory section of the *Doctrine of the Concept*. He there characterizes the sphere of the concepts of reflection as "a sphere lying between intuition and understanding or between being and the concept" (*LII* 257/586). Since the three parts of the *Logic* are devoted to the spheres of being, essence, and the concept, Hegel apparently considers Kant's account of the concepts of reflection to be concerned with the sphere of essence.

Although Hegel does not explicitly refer to the corresponding section of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he clearly takes his bearings from Kant's suggestion that transcendental reflection establishes the very distinction between *phenomena* and

²⁶This aspect of Hegel's method is explained much more clearly in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. With regard to sense-certainty, Hegel here notes that "we do not have to reflect on [the object] and consider what it might truly be, but all we have to do is to examine the way in which sense-certainty relates to this object" (G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* [*Phen*], ed. H.-F. Wessels and H. Clairmont [Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1988], translated as *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977], 70–71/59). Therefore "we must enter the same point . . . [as sense-certainty], let the truth be shown to us, that is, let ourselves be transformed into the very 'I' that knows [its object] with certainty" (*Phen* 74/63). This identification allows Hegel to push each particular mode of thought toward acknowledging its insufficient grasp of its proper principle. I take the view that this aspect of the speculative method no less governs the *Logic*, though in a less perspicuous way. The Introduction to the *Logic* mentions the *Phenomenology* as an example of the "true method of speculative science" (*LI* 49/53–54). As I see it, the *Logic* treats the conceptual determinations produced by pure thought in the same way as the *Phenomenology* treats particular modes of consciousness.

²⁷For a clear account of Hegel's discussion of common logic in the *Science of Logic*, see R. Hanna, "From an Ontological Point of View: Hegel's Critique of the Common Logic" ["Ontological Point of View"], *Review of Metaphysics* 40 (1986): 305–38. I agree with Hanna's view that Hegel accepts the role of this logic in the natural sciences, but seeks to demonstrate that it is not suited for the purposes of philosophy (cf. esp. 308–09, 327).

noumena.²⁸ However, Hegel does not differentiate between the ways in which Leibniz and Kant opposed these two realms, nor does he mention their contrary motives for doing so. Moreover, he does not eschew the concept of essence to characterize the products of transcendental reflection taken in a broad sense.²⁹ He points out, accordingly, that the *Doctrine of Essence* elaborates the system of determinations of reflection and, as such, constitutes a “mediating sphere” between the *Doctrine of Being* and the *Doctrine of the Concept*. This sphere, he notes, consists in

the concept *qua* system of determinations of reflection, that is, a sphere of being insofar as being is turning into the in-itself of the concept, such that, in this way, the concept . . . remains at once fettered by immediate being as something external to it.³⁰

This remark suggests that the *Doctrine of Essence* as a whole is devoted to the determinations of reflection. Actually, however, only the second chapter contains this term in its title. Clearly, this chapter treats the most formal determinations of reflection, that is, the concepts that constitute the content of classical logical principles. As I see it, the *Doctrine of Essence* conceives of these formal concepts as just one kind of pure concepts produced by the reflective understanding, which, as such, creates the very paradigm based on the distinction between essence and appearance.

Insofar as concepts are conceived by this mode of reflection, we have seen, they tend to exclude their contrary. Rather than presenting themselves as mutually dependent, they purport to be indifferent to one another and “stubbornly oppose

²⁸Hegel, I would contend, replaces the Kantian notion of “concepts of reflection” with his notion of “determinations of reflection” because he does not regard “identity” such as it is traditionally conceived as a concept proper. Insofar as it is opposed to “difference,” “identity” is merely a one-sided determination of a concept that itself embraces its contrary determinations. The Preface to the second edition of the *Science of Logic* refers indiscriminately to “forms of thought” (LI 19/19–20), “determinations of thought” (22/33, 28/38, 30/39), “categories” (27/37), and “concepts” (28/38). It should be noted that Hegel at one point attributes “the examination of the determinations of thought in and for themselves” to Kant (LII 559–60/833). Although Kant’s account of the concepts of reflection falls within the part of the *Critique* that is devoted to the faculty of judgment (*Urteilkraft*), Kant does not explicitly conceive of transcendental reflection as a particular mode of this faculty. This may be related to the fact that the first *Critique* does not yet explicitly distinguish between a determining and a reflective faculty of judgment, a distinction that only occurs in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. See I. Kant, *Kritik der Urteilkraft*, ed. K. Vorländer (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1990), Introduction §4, §69, translated as *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. P. Guyer and E. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), xxv–xxviii, 311–13. The first chapter of the *Doctrine of Essence* refers to Kant’s introduction of this distinction in the third *Critique* (LII 30/404), but Hegel does not come back to it in his actual discussion of the determinations of reflection.

²⁹Thus, Hegel characterizes the concepts of contradiction and ground as determinations of essence (LII 75/440, 69/435). He refers to the preceding determinations of reflection (including identity, difference, and opposition) as “determinations of essence that are contradictory in themselves” (LII 68/434).

³⁰LI 58/61. The chapter of the *Doctrine of Essence* devoted to the determinations of reflection only discusses the first two pairs of Kant’s concepts of reflection, that is, the most formal ones, though not in the same way as Kant. Hegel considers the other two pairs in later chapters of the *Doctrine of Essence*. On this, see Belaval, “La doctrine de l’essence.” Starting out from Kant’s criticism of Leibniz, Belaval points out certain similarities between Hegel and Leibniz. However, his interesting study does not relate Kant’s distinction between sensibility and understanding to the ontological distinction between essence and appearance at stake in Hegel’s *Doctrine of Essence* as a whole.

their movement" (*LII* 31/405). This also holds true for identity and difference. In line with external reflection itself, Hegel introduces the concept of identity as a way of determining the essence of something that completely abstracts from the relation between identity and difference. Seen in this way, identity does not testify to the movement of reflection at stake in the *Doctrine of Essence* as a whole. However, Hegel considers even the concept of identity to result from reflection. Since it does not explicitly oppose its counterpart, he notes that identity results from *immediate* reflection (*LII* 39/411). Contrary to determinations of reflection such as difference or opposition, this most abstract determination of reflection does not *explicitly* testify to the role of external reflection. This distinction between implicit and explicit reflection allows Hegel to treat all determinations of reflection as particular determinations of essence, that is, as conceptual pairs that presuppose and instantiate the reflecting of essence and semblance into one another.

Hegel notes that these determinations of reflection used to occur in the form of isolated principles or propositions (*Sätze*).³¹ In various Remarks he discusses the classical principles of identity, non-contradiction, and the excluded middle.³² He does this, however, to extricate their conceptual content from their propositional form. In his view, pure concepts such as identity, difference, and opposition should not be treated as predicates to be attributed to "all things" (*LII* 37/410). In fact, they should not be considered as predicates at all, but rather as forms of pure thought which, as such, deserve close examination.³³ In order to clarify this I first turn to the Remarks in which Hegel discusses the principles of traditional logic.

5. THE CONCEPT OF IDENTITY

Hegel suggests in the first Remark that external reflection treats "identity" and "difference" as more or less independent concepts (*LII* 39/412). It is justified in doing so, I would like to add, insofar as these concepts are used with regard to empirical representations. If I regard a rose from the perspective of identity, I focus

³¹*LII* 36/409. Hegel maintains already in the *Phenomenology* that the classical, formal laws of thought adopted by observing reason do not constitute the true principles of philosophical thought. He sees it as the task of "speculative philosophy," as yet to be developed, to show that these laws do not hold absolutely (*Phen* 202/181). This task is actually achieved in the *Logic*. Since Hegel, in agreement with German custom, uses the term 'Satz' rather than 'Gesetz' to refer to the principles of classical logic, I will use the term 'principle' instead of 'law' in this context.

³²According to Hegel's rather minimal description, the principle of identity ($A = A$) states that everything is equal to itself (*LII* 41/413). The principle of non-contradiction declares that A cannot simultaneously be A and not- A (*LII* 45/416). The principle of the excluded middle maintains that something is either A or not- A (*LII* 73/438). Hegel seems to hold that 'A' can refer to subjects (a rose cannot simultaneously be a rose and not a rose) as well as to predicates that are attributed to subjects (something cannot be simultaneously red and not-red; something is either red or not-red). Hegel does not refer to Aristotle's inaugurating treatment of the classical logical principles. For an overview of the various meanings ascribed to the classical law of contradiction, see Wolff, *Der Begriff des Widerspruchs*, 13–36.

³³Cf. *LI* 93/90–91. It might be argued that Hegel treats pure concepts as subjects rather than predicates. Ultimately, however, he conceives of these "subjects" as particular determinations of the concept as such (*LI* 30/39). Since the concept, in its turn, is the absolute principle of pure thought, it can be considered to constitute the subject of both the actual history of thought and the *Science of Logic*. It is only posited as such, however, in the *Doctrine of the Concept* (cf. *LII* 245/577).

on that which the content of my empirical representation has in common with other roses or with the content of the concept “rose.” If I regard the same rose from the perspective of difference, on the other hand, I focus on those elements that it does not have in common with other roses or with the concept of a rose.³⁴ The implicit use of such concepts as identity and difference in empirical judgments is therefore not problematic. This is not to say, however, that such concepts are suited to define the basic principles of thought as such.

The second Remark elaborates on the principle of identity, to which Hegel refers as $A = A$. According to Hegel, this principle does not lead anywhere (*LII* 41/413), for it merely allows thought to state that each thing is what it is. Those who maintain the absolute truth of this principle do not see, in his view, that they thereby reduce the concept of identity to an abstract, one-sided determination (*LII* 41–42/413–14). Yet the logical principle that allows empirical thought to compare its various representations contains more, Hegel claims, than it actually states:

Thus, the form of the proposition in which identity is expressed contains more than simple, abstract identity; it contains this pure movement of reflection in which the other appears only as semblance. (*LII* 44/415)

Hegel here seems to suggest that the very form of the proposition entails that a subject is connected to a predicate that differs from the subject itself.³⁵ This is not the case in a proposition which states that a rose is a rose. Whereas such a proposition, on the one hand, refers thought to possible predicates that might be attributed to a rose, on the other hand, it suggests that none of them has any significance. Hegel seems to hold, moreover, that the principle of identity relies on a particular conception of the essential as such: it presupposes that the essence of something is opposed to its transient determinations. However, external reflection itself is not aware of the difference between essence and appearance on which the principle of identity relies.

This also obtains of the classical principle of non-contradiction—or *Satz vom Widerspruch*—which Hegel equally treats under the heading of the concept of identity. The somewhat rudimentary version of the principle of non-contradiction he puts forward states that A cannot simultaneously be A and not- A .³⁶ This principle differs from the principle of identity merely by its negative form (*LII* 45/416). Just as the principle of identity, the principle of non-contradiction presupposes that the identity of something, that is, its essence, is nothing but the unity of its

³⁴External reflection, Hegel notes, “relates what is diverse to sameness [*Gleichheit*] and distinctness [*Ungleichheit*]. This relation, which is a *comparing*, is external to these determinations themselves” (*LII* 50/420). As we have seen, Kant likewise described the traditional, logical use of the concepts of reflection as a comparing (*KrV* A262/B317–18). He also held the view that the *transcendental* use of such concepts is a matter of reflection rather than mere comparison (*KrV* A262/B318–19). Hegel would maintain against Kant, however, that transcendental reflection remains dependent upon the premises of external reflection broadly conceived in that it does not grasp the unity of contrary determinations.

³⁵See Hanna, “Ontological Point of View,” 330–31.

³⁶Kant considers the principle of non-contradiction to state that “no predicate pertains to a thing that contradicts it” (*KrV* A151/B190). In Hegel’s definition, by contrast, ‘ A ’ seems to pertain to subjects and predicates alike.

contrary determinations.³⁷ Both principles, Hegel notes, “contain more than is meant by them,” that is, they contain absolute difference (*LII* 45/416). In line with Kant, but without mentioning him, Hegel seems to hold that both classical principles contain a concept of identity that can be employed to distinguish the essence of something—that which remains self-identical—from its actual, transient appearance. Yet whereas Kant’s transcendental distinction between *noumena* and *phenomena* reaffirms the classical ontological distinction between essence and appearance, Hegel argues, as we will see, that the true essence of something consists in the *unity* of essence and appearance. As long as philosophy continues to oppose essence and appearance, it will not be able to comprehend living beings, modes of human culture, or modes of thought as exhibiting the effort to actualize their essence from within, that is, to overcome the opposition between the inner and the outer.

For Hegel, the principles of identity and non-contradiction presuppose the concept of difference. Since neither principle actually expresses the unity of identity and difference, however, he maintains that they are unsuited for philosophy. Insofar as they do not allow philosophy to comprehend self-consciousness, for instance, as the unity of pure self-consciousness and empirical consciousness, they are “unfitted for higher spheres and for the whole.”³⁸ As I see it, Hegel’s account of the principles of identity and non-contradiction is implicitly guided by the question as to whether these principles adequately define the very relation between essence and appearance, that is, whether philosophy itself should take its bearings from them. Clearly, the answer to this question is “no.” As we will see, the formal principles derived from the concept of difference do not fare any better in this respect.

6. THE CONCEPT OF OPPOSITION

In his account of the concept of difference Hegel distinguishes between distinctness (*Verschiedenheit*) and opposition (*Gegensatz*).³⁹ When I consider arbitrary differences

³⁷Unlike the principle of identity, Hegel maintains, the principle of non-contradiction posits *A* and not-*A* as contrary determinations which pertain to one and the same thing, namely, *A* itself. He suggests that this self-identical ‘*A*’ underlies its possible determinations (*A* and not-*A*) and, as such, already exhibits a less abstract mode of identity than the principle of identity: “In this principle, therefore, identity is expressed—as negation of the negation” (*LII* 45/416). Thus, the principle of non-contradiction implicitly refers to the speculative conception of identity that it cannot actually affirm, namely, the conception of identity as that which posits and resolves the opposition of its contrary determinations. In this case, thought is no longer concerned with the external distinction between various things, but with the way in which something distinguishes itself from *itself* (*LII* 46/417).

³⁸*LI* 386/325. “What emerges from this consideration is, therefore . . . that the law of identity or of contradiction, which is supposed to express merely abstract identity . . . as a truth, is not a law of thought [*Denkgesetz*] but rather the opposite of it” (*LII* 45/416).

³⁹I will not follow Miller’s translation of ‘*Verschiedenheit*’ as ‘diversity’ (*LII* 47/418). The term ‘*verschieden*’ can mean both “various” and “different.” I hold that the latter meaning is more accurate in this context, because this section of the *Logic* is no longer concerned with merely quantitative differences. Since the term ‘difference’ is already used to render ‘*Unterschied*’, I will render ‘*Verschiedenheit*’ as ‘distinctness’. The mode of reflection that relies on the concept of distinctness allows thought to determine in which respects things are like and unlike one another (*LII* 49/419). This comparison is concerned with indifferent or arbitrary differences (*LII* 55/424). Kant also uses the concept “*Verschiedenheit*” (translated as ‘difference’) in this sense (*KrV* A262/B317).

between various roses, I do so on the basis of the concept of distinctness. When I reflect on such non-arbitrary differences as that between light and darkness or virtue and vice, by contrast, I necessarily presuppose the concept of opposition (cf. *LII* 71–72/437). In what follows I will only consider Hegel's treatment of the concept of opposition.

Hegel notably considers the way in which this concept operates in the realms of arithmetic and empirical knowledge.⁴⁰ Within both realms, the contrary moments of the concept of opposition emerge as the positive and the negative. External reflection, Hegel notes, assumes that "something is in itself positive, outside the relation to the negative; and [that] something is in itself negative, outside the relation to the positive."⁴¹ As Hegel points out, it is by dint of this opposition that empirical thought tends to conceive of light as positive in itself and of darkness as negative in itself. He suggests that this perspective prevents thought from comprehending light as the result of its struggle against darkness and darkness as the result of its struggle against light.⁴²

Within arithmetic, by contrast, the positive and the negative are not always assigned to fixed contents in this way. Without realizing the true bearing of its insight, external reflection here holds, for instance, that the same amount of money can be determined as possession or debt, but that the amount of money *itself* is neither positive nor negative.⁴³ In this case, external reflection implicitly affirms

⁴⁰Actually, arithmetic is treated in the section on the concept of opposition (*LII* 60–64/427–31) and empirical knowledge in the section on the concept of contradiction (*LII* 70–73/435–38). However, both sections are concerned with determinations of the relation between the positive and the negative.

⁴¹*LII* 59/427; cf. 70/436.

⁴²Hegel criticizes the view that light is merely positive and darkness merely negative (*LII* 71–72/437) if only because it does not allow thought to comprehend color as the result of their interaction. Just as virtue is nothing positive in itself, but results from its struggle against its contrary, light, he seems to hold, is nothing but the effort to overcome the moment of darkness it contains within itself (*LII* 72/427).

⁴³*LII* 61/428. Hegel also refers to the example of an hour's journey to the east and the same distance traveled back to the west; neither direction is in itself positive or negative, but they do cancel out one another (*LII* 61/428). The Remark devoted to arithmetic discusses various ways in which the positive and the negative can be treated within this discipline. The more these opposed moments are conceived as dependent upon their contrary, the more they are understood in accordance with the speculative comprehension of the concept of opposition, that is, as a unity of interdependent moments (*LII* 57/425). Viewed from this perspective, the apparent independence of the positive and the negative—their mutual indifference—constitutes a subordinate moment of the speculative concept of opposition, a moment which external reflection tends to mistake for the whole: "in accordance with this moment of external reflection the positive and the negative are indifferent to that first identity in which they are only moments" (*LII* 57–58/426). See Belaval, "La doctrine de l'essence," 282; Wolff, *Der Begriff des Widerspruchs*, 67–68, 73–75, 81; Longuenesse, *Hegel's Critique*, 61–63. As these authors point out, some of the examples Hegel uses in this section already occur in Kant's treatise, *Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitude into Philosophy* (1763). Kant here introduces a concept of the negative that is completely relational: something, whether it is a mechanical force or a conceptual determination, is not positive or negative in itself, but owes its positivity or negativity exclusively to its relation to its counterpart. This view of real oppositions allows Kant—turning against Leibniz—to understand how two contrary forces can be equally real and nevertheless annul one another. As mentioned above, this conception recurs, though very briefly, in Kant's treatment of the concept of conflict qua concept of reflection in the first *Critique* (*KrV* A264–65/B320–21). Even though Hegel may well have been familiar with Kant's ideas on this subject, I do not agree with Wolff, who interprets Hegel's concept of contradiction primarily against the background of Kant's understanding of conflicts between equally real elements.

that the positive and the negative constitute contrary determinations—that is, contrary moments—of a single conceptual perspective. However, external reflection achieves this insight only with regard to a most abstract form of thought. It is not in the position to raise this insight into the principle of philosophical thought itself. Had it done so, it would have been obliged to conceive of the very relation between *noumenon* and *phenomenon* as grounded in a unity that posits and resolves the opposition between its contrary moments. If philosophy is to achieve insight into this dynamic, according to Hegel, it will have to take its bearings from the concept of contradiction.

7. THE CONCEPT OF CONTRADICTION

Hegel introduces the concept of contradiction by reconsidering the concept of opposition from a speculative point of view. This means that he now completely disregards the role of oppositions in arithmetic and empirical science. The contrary determinations of the concept of opposition present themselves, we have seen, as the positive and the negative. Unlike the concept of identity, the concept of opposition affirms that its contrary determinations owe their meaning to one another.⁴⁴ When I consider the content of the concept of the positive, that is, I will immediately behold its relation to the negative. Or, as Hegel puts it, the concept of the positive contains the negative within itself, and the same is true of the concept of the negative. In this respect, each moment can be considered to constitute the unity of its contrary determinations.

Yet external reflection, we have seen, tends to disregard the mutual dependence of the positive and the negative. Due to the force of external reflection, even the positive and the negative tend to present themselves as independent concepts: the positive posits itself as that which is *not* the negative and *vice versa*. In this respect, both contrary determinations attempt to affirm their *independence* of their counterpart, thus excluding the latter from themselves:

As this whole, each is mediated with itself *by its other* and *contains* it. But further, it is mediated with itself *by the non-being of its other*; thus it is a unity existing on its own and *excluding* the other from itself. (*LII* 64–65/431)

Thus, whereas, on the one hand, both contrary moments presuppose their mutual dependence, on the other hand, they tend to posit their independence. By doing so they reduce themselves to abstract, one-sided moments.⁴⁵ This double bind, so to speak, is characteristic of the concept of opposition. As such, it also defines the conceptual oppositions that are treated in the *Doctrine of Essence* as a whole. Now Hegel introduces the concept of contradiction by claiming that the positive and the negative which present themselves as independent concepts exhibit the concept of contradiction:

⁴⁴Even external reflection realizes that the positive “only has meaning” in its relation to the negative, in other words, “that the negative itself is contained in the concept [of the positive]” (*LII* 71/436).

⁴⁵“*They destroy themselves* in that they determine themselves as self-identical, but in doing so rather determine themselves as the negative, that is, as something that is identical to itself only by being related to something else” (*LII* 67/433).

Insofar as the independent determination of reflection, which owes its independence to the contrary it contains within itself, at once excludes this contrary, it excludes . . . its proper independence from itself. For this independence consists in containing the contrary determination within itself. . . . It is thus the contradiction.⁴⁶

Seen from a speculative point of view, any one-sided concept turns out to be contradictory, for it can only affirm its *independence* of its counterpart by affirming its *dependence* on the latter, thus exhibiting the self-exclusion that characterizes logical contradictions as well. Inconspicuously abandoning his reflections on the concept of opposition, Hegel here suggests that *any* determination of reflection contains a contradiction. This allows him to make the transition to the concept of contradiction itself. In order to clarify the passage just quoted I will use the relation between the positive and the negative, to which Hegel returns in the next paragraph, as an example.

On the one hand, we have seen, the positive consists in the unity of its contrary moments, for it has no meaning whatsoever apart from the negative. On the other hand, it tends to posit itself as independent of its contrary. Put more concretely, this means that the way in which the positive has actually emerged in the history of thought—as an independent concept—is at odds with what it is in itself, namely, the unity of its contrary moments. If we regard the positive and the negative from the perspective of external reflection, we merely see an opposition between fixed concepts. Seen from a speculative point of view, by contrast, *the positive turns out to suffer from the contradiction between what it is in itself* (the unity of its contrary moments) *and what it has actually become* (a determination opposed to its contrary), and the same is true of the negative. By no means does Hegel claim, I would contend, that the positive and the negative—or any other opposites—contradict *one another*.⁴⁷ Hegel would certainly agree that mutually exclusive concepts give rise to a contradiction if they are simultaneously attributed to the same thing. But the *Logic* is not concerned with the attribution of concepts to things. Hegel's point is rather that both the positive and the negative, *qua* concepts, contradict *themselves*. For insofar as they actually posit themselves as independent of their contrary, they contradict their ultimate principle, that is, their unity or mutual dependence. This is, in my view, also the gist of the following passage:

The contrary determinations [*Entgegengesetzten*] contain the contradiction insofar as they are, in the same respect, negatively related to one another . . . and are indifferent to one another. (*LII* 77/441)

Whereas contrary conceptual determinations such as the positive and the negative *essentially* presuppose one another, they *actually* tend to oppose one another, thus contradicting themselves. Since such oppositions result from the external reflection that has dominated the history of philosophy, this (implicit) self-contradiction only inhabits pure concepts insofar as they have actually be conceived by, say, Plato,

⁴⁶*LII* 65/431; cf. *Enc I*, §120.

⁴⁷However, because the concept of the negative actually states that it is nothing without its contrary, it exhibits this internal contradiction much more clearly than the concept of the positive (*LII* 66/432).

Leibniz, or Kant.⁴⁸ Hegel would argue, however, that these philosophers relied on a conceptual paradigm the nature of which cannot be adequately grasped by focusing on their actual work. Because he seeks to comprehend the pure concepts that emerged from this paradigm, throughout the *Logic* he largely abstracts from the way individual philosophers contributed to the constitution of self-contradictory pure concepts.

As we have seen, Hegel conceives of the concept of opposition, which contains the positive and the negative as its contrary moments, as a particular determination of reflection. As such, it presupposes a particular conception of the very relation between essence and appearance. Just as the positive and the negative, essence and appearance constitute a unity, but they tend to present themselves as independent of their contrary. Hence the emergence of ontological dualisms, including Kant's epistemological opposition between *noumena* and *phenomena*. For Hegel, by contrast, the true essence of the concept *essence* itself consists in the unity of essence and appearance:

It is of the greatest importance to understand and retain this nature of the reflective determinations, namely, that their truth consists only in their relation to one another, that therefore each in its very concept contains the other.⁴⁹

However, the history of thought testifies to the incapacity of philosophy to affirm the unity of contrary conceptual determinations. The *Doctrine of Essence* is precisely concerned with those determinations of pure thought that remain, at least to some extent, opposed to one another.⁵⁰ By opposing such contrary determinations as the positive and the negative, external reflection "alienates" both moments from their essential unity, that is, from the concept as such which constitutes their ultimate principle. Hegel's speculative logic annuls this alienation, as it were, by exposing the contradiction between, on the one hand, their essential unity and, on the other hand, their prevailing opposition.

Thus, the concept of contradiction plays a twofold part in the *Doctrine of Essence*.⁵¹ On the one hand, Hegel treats this concept as a particular determination of reflection that has emerged in the history of thought and, as such, belongs to

⁴⁸Thus, Hegel refers to Leibniz's concept of monad as a "defective reflection" because it implies that a monad is at once determined and indifferent to any determination whatsoever (*LII* 413/714).

⁴⁹*LII* 73/438; cf. *LI* 131/122.

⁵⁰"[T]he world as it is in itself posits itself over against . . . the world of appearances. But that which appears and that which is essential are nothing outside of their relation. . . . That which appears manifests the essential, and the essential is insofar as it appears.—The relation is the still imperfect union of reflection-into-otherness and reflection-into-self" (*LII* 125/480).

⁵¹Actually, this also obtains of the concept of opposition and its contrary moments (cf. *LII* 562/835). Since Hegel does not dwell on the role of these concepts in his own account of the determinations of reflection, I will focus on the concept of contradiction. I would like to note that Hegel's remarks on the concept of contradiction pertain to a different level than Kant's treatment of the concept "conflict" *qua* concept of reflection. From Hegel's point of view, the very opposition between contrary concepts such as "agreement" and "conflict" (an opposition Kant took for granted) testifies to a contradiction that Kant ignores, namely, the contradiction between the unity of these contrary conceptual determinations and their actual opposition. This latter meaning of the concept of contradiction is relevant to speculative philosophy alone.

the content of the *Doctrine of Essence*. On the other hand, he employs the concept of contradiction to resolve the very opposition between essence and appearance, laying bare their “common root.” This is, of course, the step which Kant did not take—and could not have taken—when he, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, established the opposition between sensibility and thought, when he treated the various conceptual oppositions produced by transcendental reflection, and when he criticized the antinomies produced by pure reason. Clearly, Hegel considers the method that might resolve such conceptual oppositions to involve the concept of contradiction. His actual remarks on this concept, however, have given rise to quite a few misunderstandings. Before turning to the role of the concept of contradiction in Hegel’s own method, I will first examine these remarks themselves.

8. THE PRINCIPLE OF SELF-CONTRADICTION

Hegel begins his remarks on the concept of contradiction by going along with the language of dogmatic metaphysics, which he considers to have applied the principles of traditional logic to things as such. This view clearly corresponds to Kant’s criticism of Leibniz. In line with this metaphysics, Hegel presents the concept of contradiction in the form of a proposition. Even more than the other determinations of reflection, he notes,

the determination into which they pass as into their truth, namely, contradiction, should be given the form of a principle; it should be said “that all things are in themselves contradictory,” and this in the sense that this principle, unlike the others, expresses rather . . . the essence of things. (*LII* 74/439)

To my knowledge, no commentators who quote this remarkable passage have paid attention to the quotation marks, the conditional form of the sentence that introduces it, or the larger context of Hegel’s account.⁵² In my view, Hegel here ironically couches his conception of contradiction in the metaphysical language he is intending to overcome.⁵³ As we will see, Hegel indeed considers the concept of contradiction to give rise to a particular philosophical principle. Yet this principle has nothing to do with the classical principle of non-contradiction, which was already discussed in the section devoted to the concept of identity. Unlike this classical principle, it is neither concerned with the relation between subject and predicate, nor with that between things and their properties. In order to mark the difference between the classical principle of non-contradiction and Hegel’s speculative principle of contradiction, I will refer to the latter as the principle of self-contradiction.

⁵²This is also the case with Miller’s translation of the *Science of Logic*. None of the commentaries I have consulted questions the status of Hegel’s wording in this passage. Even though the edition of the *Gesammelte Werke* does not actually use quotation marks, the whole sentence (*so sollte . . . gesagt werden*;) makes it perfectly clear that the phrase functions as a quotation.

⁵³This is in agreement with the method of speculative science in general (see section 9). The subtle irony of the passage at hand is typical of a number of similarly infamous remarks. Thus, Hegel refers to the content of the *Logic* as follows: “It can therefore be said that this content is the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite spirit” (*LI* 44/50; cf. 79/78).

Unlike the principle of non-contradiction, the principle of self-contradiction does not concern a formal condition of the validity of judgments, but, as Hegel puts it, rather expresses the *essence* of things. This means, I would like to suggest, that it is concerned with the same ontological sphere as Kant's transcendental concepts of reflection, that is, with the very relation between essence and appearance. Even the term 'thing' is therefore misleading here. As we have seen, Hegel dismisses not only the propositional form in which the determinations of reflection are traditionally rendered, but also the subject—all things—to which they are traditionally assigned. Since these classical principles "adopt being, or everything, as their subject, they resuscitate being" (*LII* 37–38/410), which renders them "unfitted for higher spheres and for the whole."⁵⁴

Thus, Hegel by no means wishes to reject the logical rules constitutive of empirical judgments. On his view, the understanding is perfectly justified in avoiding contradictions as long as it is involved in the production of empirical knowledge.⁵⁵ If thought engages in purely philosophical reflection, by contrast, the classical principle of non-contradiction turns out to be completely inadequate. For only the speculative principle of self-contradiction allows thought to comprehend a particular content, whatever its nature, as a process, more precisely, as the attempt to resolve the contradiction between its essential principle and its actual determination:

The contradiction . . . is the root of all movement and vitality; it is only insofar as something contains a contradiction within itself that it moves, has an urge and activity. (*LII* 75/439)

⁵⁴*LII* 386/325; cf. *LII* 561–62/834. These passages refute the wide-spread criticism of Hegel's alleged "ontologization" of the principle of contradiction mentioned above—at least insofar as "ontology" is regarded as a set of claims about reality as such. I agree with Forster's claim that Hegel "avoids affirming contradictions of reality, because [he] does not use or recognize the validity of the concept of reality" (M. Forster, "Hegel's Dialectical Method," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. F. C. Beiser [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993], 143–44).

⁵⁵See Düsing, *Das Problem der Subjektivität*, 97, and Longuenesse, *Hegel's Critique*, 43. When Hegel denounces representational thought for its "horror" of the contradiction, the context—a discussion of the ontological proof of the existence of God—makes it clear that his criticism is exclusively directed against former metaphysics (*LII* 78/442). In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel points out that even the most basic form of empirical knowledge, perception, involves contradictions (*Phen* 83/70, 85/72, 87/75). Insofar as consciousness relates to its object as to an individual thing with properties, it is unknowingly torn between contradictory claims. Thus, consciousness attempts to define its object at once as self-identical "one" and as an aggregate of many properties, it conceives of these properties themselves as belonging exclusively to the thing it perceives and as general ideas, it considers this thing to be independent of other things and as part of a whole, and to be both dependent on and independent from itself *qua* observer. By making these implicit contradictions explicit, Hegel demonstrates that this primitive relation of consciousness to its object cannot be sustained and, hence, must be resolved (*Phen* 89/76). The pursuit of empirical knowledge is by no means impeded, I hold, by the implicit contradictions on which this knowledge is based. The "steady everyday life and activity of perceptual consciousness," Hegel notes, "resists" comprehending the unity of such determinations as the one and the many or universality and singularity (*Phen* 91/78–79). Hegel's exposition of the contradictory assumptions of perceptual consciousness exclusively serves the methodological purpose of moving from one mode of thought to the next. Thus, the fact that the mode of consciousness Hegel calls "perception" relies, as much as any finite mode of thought, on contradictory ontological assumptions, does not imply that empirical knowledge should therefore not avoid such logical contradictions as may occur at the level of explicit judgments concerning particular states of affairs.

In order to clarify the speculative meaning of the principle of self-contradiction, Hegel then offers various examples drawn from the realm of common experience. According to the second example, a living being is at once its inner principle and the negation of this principle. Since an acorn is at once an acorn and a potential oak tree, it can be regarded as suffering from the contradiction between its essence and its actual determination and, hence, as impelled to resolve its self-contradiction (*LII* 76/440). Yet it is completely irrelevant, first, to regard “acorn” and “oak tree” as mutually exclusive predicates and, second, to ask whether or not they can simultaneously be attributed to the same thing. This example is echoed in the following passage from the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*:

The germ does not manifest anything. It has the urge to develop; it cannot bear to be merely in itself. Its urge consists in the contradiction that it is merely in itself and should not be so. The urge pushes [the germ] into existence. Much is brought forth; but everything that is brought forth is already contained in the germ, albeit not developed, but enveloped and ideal. (*LHP I*, 40–41/22)

Yet Hegel would not have gone such lengths merely to provide biology with the means to comprehend its objects in a non-mechanistic way. The *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* rather refer to the example of the germ to elucidate the distinction between “being in itself” and “being for itself,” a distinction without which a speculative comprehension of history—and, for that matter, of any development—would be impossible.⁵⁶ Thus, Hegel holds that world history from its very beginning contains the principle of freedom, but in such a way that the actual, one-sided determinations of this principle, achieved by the subsequent cultural epochs, contradict the very essence of freedom until the epoch of modernity has been reached.⁵⁷ The same distinction governs the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and, in various ways, Hegel’s *oeuvre* as a whole. It is only against this background, it seems to me, that the following remark begins to make sense:

Speculative thought consists solely in holding on to the contradiction, and thus to itself. Unlike representational thought, it does not let itself be dominated by the contradiction, it does not allow the latter to dissolve its determinations into other ones or into nothing. (*LII* 76/440–41)

If the principle of contradiction is conceived in this way, it can no longer be articulated in the form of a proposition that assigns a predicate to “all things.” For even though Hegel sometimes illustrates his method by referring to forms of movement and development proper to *things*, his philosophy is pre-eminently concerned with modes of *thought*, whether they appear in the form of consciousness, science,

⁵⁶*LHP I*, 39/20–21; cf. *LI* 131/122. See S. S. Hahn, *Contradiction in Motion: Hegel’s Organic Concept of Life and Value* (Ithaca, NY-London: Cornell University Press, 2007), for an account of Hegel’s conception of contradiction in light of Goethe’s organic view of nature. Her approach differs from mine in that she takes the contradiction Hegel attributes to organic forms of nature as the paradigm case of what I have called the principle of self-contradiction.

⁵⁷Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte Band I: Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, ed. J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1955), translated as *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. Introduction: Reason in History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 63–64/54–55; cf. *LII* 555/829.

spirit, or pure concepts.⁵⁸ Even when Hegel refers to the contradiction inherent in things, however, he always has in mind the asymmetrical contradiction between that which something is in itself (the unity of its essence and appearance) and its actual, one-sided determination (its appearance). Once again, this approach—proper to speculative science—has nothing to do with the classical principle of non-contradiction, that is, with the impossibility of attributing, at the same time and in the same respect, contrary predicates to a single subject or thing.

By raising the principle of self-contradiction into the basic principle of his method, in sum, Hegel can comprehend any particular mode of thought as torn apart by the contradiction between, on the one hand, the unity of its contrary determinations which it is in itself, and, on the other, the one-sided content to which it has been reduced within the actual history of thought.⁵⁹ Once Hegel has done this, he merely has to observe—as he explains most clearly in the *Phenomenology*—how such a mode of thought, suffering from this its internal contradiction, attempts to incorporate the moment it had so far excluded from itself.⁶⁰ By thus treating pure concepts—and, by the same token, any mode of thought—as if they were living beings, Hegel has brought about a philosophical revolution the importance of which, in my opinion, equals the one initiated by Kant.

9. CONTRADICTION AS NEGATIVITY

As we have seen, Hegel regards the contradiction as “the root of all movement” (*LII* 74–75/439). Now, both the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* use similar terms to characterize the concept of negativity. The *Logic* defines negativity as the “indwelling pulsation of self-movement and vitality” (*LII* 78/442), and even states that “the contradiction is the negative in its essential determination, the principle of all self-movement.”⁶¹ Hegel likewise considers Kant's account of the antinomies to reveal the force of this negativity. And this despite the fact that Kant himself merely used the antinomies to argue, in a skeptical vein, that thesis and antithesis necessarily annul one another. If, by contrast, this result is

⁵⁸With regard to the first point, Longuenesse, *Hegel's Critique*, 70, also stresses that Hegel's notion of contradiction is not to be identified with the concrete examples he offers, examples taken from the domain of representational thought. With regard to the second point, Hegel, according to Longuenesse, conceives of all objects insofar as they are constituted by thought as exhibiting “the contradiction of unity and multiplicity, of complete determination and unpredictable contingency” (42; cf. 67, 81). Whereas this characterization seems to concern objects of scientific knowledge, I hold that Hegel's remarks on contradiction rather pertain to the pure concepts that, on his view, underlie any such objects.

⁵⁹Toward the end of the *Logic*, Hegel describes its very beginning—the concept of being—in equally organic terms as his later lectures describe the germ that is pushed from within to develop. Since the method of philosophy is “the immanent form” of the contents at stake, “the immediateness of the beginning must be deficient in itself and must be endowed with the urge to carry itself further” (*LII* 555/829).

⁶⁰*Phen* 65/54; cf. *LI* 72/73; *Enc I*, §23. Interestingly, Kant equally characterizes the method he employs with regard to the antinomies as a mere *observation* of the conflict between contrary claims; this skeptical method is not intended to take sides with one claim or the other (*KrVA*423/B451).

⁶¹*LII* 76/440. Hegel also refers to the pure concept—that is, absolute negativity such as it occurs within the realm of pure thought—as the “simple life-pulse” of pure thought (*LI* 27/37) and “the inner self-movement of the content of the logic” (*LI* 49/53; cf. *Phen* 26/19).

grasped in its positive aspect, [it] is nothing else but the inner negativity that constitutes the self-moving soul of these determinations, and the principle of all natural and spiritual life.⁶²

Since Kant ignored the positive result of his criticism of speculative reason, his philosophy, Hegel suggests, “let itself be dominated by the contradiction,” thus allowing the latter “to dissolve its determinations into other ones or into nothing.”⁶³ This criticism notwithstanding, Hegel clearly valued the general idea behind Kant’s account of the antinomies.⁶⁴ For Kant had at least traced back the various conflicts between thesis and antithesis to philosophy’s incapacity adequately to distinguish between *phenomena* and *noumena*, an incapacity he considered to inhere in reason as such.⁶⁵ However, this in itself does not explain why Hegel should consider the metaphysical conflicts exposed by Kant to exhibit the “self-moving soul” of pure concepts. Given the limits of this article a few remarks must suffice to answer this question.

As we have seen, the *Logic* extricates pure concepts from propositions which attribute them to substrates such as “all things” or “the world at large” so as to focus on the content of these concepts themselves. Once Hegel has taken this step, he can comprehend contrary determinations such as indivisibility and divisibility—or any other pair of contrary pure concepts—as complementary moments of a single conceptual perspective.⁶⁶ Their unity can only be established, however, if each of these contrary determinations proves to be one-sided, that is, proves to be incapable of determining the whole (in the case of the antinomies, the world at large).⁶⁷ According to Hegel, Kant rightly, if unintentionally, demonstrated that such contrary determinations as indivisibility and divisibility, applied to the world at large, yield conflicts that dogmatic metaphysics could not resolve. Unlike Kant, Hegel sometimes refers to such conflicts as contradictions.⁶⁸ Yet I believe that in this case he does not use the term in its proper, speculative sense. According to the speculative meaning of the principle of contradiction, a conceptual determi-

⁶²*LI* 52/56; cf. *LII* 67/433, 563/835. Cf.: “Thus all the oppositions that are assumed as fixed, as for example finite and infinite, individual and universal . . . are in and for themselves a transition; the synthesis and the subject in which they appear is the product of their concept’s own reflection. . . . it is the concept . . . that keeps them steadily in view, moves them as their soul and brings out their dialectic” (*LII* 560/833).

⁶³*LII* 76/440–41; cf. 67/433, 558/832; *LI* 49/54.

⁶⁴Cf. *LI* 52/56, 216/190; *LII* 558–60/831–33. The *Logic* discusses the first two antinomies at length (*LI* 216–27/190–99, 271–76/234–38). Antinomies, Hegel here argues, do not result from the inappropriate application of pure concepts, but belong to these concepts themselves: “the determinations of thought must not be taken in their application to . . . the general idea of the world . . . [but] must be considered purely on their own account, since they alone constitute the essence and the ground of the antinomies” (*LI* 217/191).

⁶⁵Cf. *KrV* B449–50; *FK* 320/84.

⁶⁶“But profounder insight into the antinomical . . . nature of reason reveals that *any* concept consists in a unity of contrary moments” (*LI* 217/191; cf. *LII* 79/442; *Enc I*, §48, §89, rem.; *LHP III*, 356/448).

⁶⁷For Hegel, the true resolution of the antinomies consists in the insight that “two opposed, one-sided determinations which belong necessarily to one and the same *concept* cannot be valid each on its own” (*LI* 218/191–92; my emphasis).

⁶⁸Cf. *LI* 39/46; *LII* 38/411, 217/191, 558/832.

nation such as indivisibility only *contradicts* its ultimate principle—the concept as such—insofar as it *opposes* its contrary, that is, insofar as it does not establish the unity of indivisibility and divisibility.

Throughout the *Doctrine of Essence*, Hegel seeks to exhibit the unity of contrary determinations by highlighting their mutual dependence. Yet the term ‘unity’ involves more than the fact that concepts such as “indivisibility” and “divisibility” presuppose one another. The term ‘unity’, as used by Hegel, always refers to an *asymmetrical* form of mutual dependence. What this means is explained relatively clearly in the discussion of the concepts “infinity” and “finitude” in the *Doctrine of Being*, pure concepts that are used in the domains of mathematics and metaphysics alike.⁶⁹ Put briefly, Hegel here states that each of these pure concepts contradicts their inner unity, but that only the concept of infinity constitutes the true principle of its contrary determinations. As such, it establishes the unity of infinity and finitude by incorporating the concept of finitude. The concept of finitude, in its turn, establishes this very unity by reducing itself to a moment of the concept of infinity.⁷⁰ Insofar as the concept of finitude resists this incorporation—and the history of metaphysics testifies to this resistance—the one-sided concepts “infinity” and “finitude” remain opposed to one another. For Hegel, however, this apparent opposition hides the in-depth contradiction between that which the concept of infinity truly is (the unity of its contrary determinations) and its actual appearance (infinity as opposed to finitude). Unlike the conflicts between the contrary metaphysical propositions exhibited by the antinomies, the conflicts exhibited in the *Logic* pertain to the *asymmetrical* contradiction between a one-sided conceptual determination and its true principle. Unlike symmetrical conflicts, this asymmetrical self-contradiction does not resolve into nothing, but necessarily yields the unity of contrary conceptual determinations implicit in each of them.

Kant, it might be argued, employed the classical distinction between essence and appearance to separate the realm of *noumena* from the realm of *phenomena*. This allowed him to block the route toward purely rational knowledge of things in themselves. Hegel, for his part, applies the distinction between essence and appearance neither to the various faculties of the subject nor to the world at large, but employs it to comprehend *the totality of pure concepts themselves*. On his view, a concept such as finitude *appears* to be opposed to its contrary, but is *essentially*

⁶⁹Insofar as metaphysics used the concepts “infinity” and “finitude” to achieve *a priori* knowledge of the world as such, for example, it produced the contrary claims denounced by Kant’s first antinomy (*KrV* A426/B454–61). Contrary to Kant, Hegel seeks to resolve the clash between these claims by arguing that both of them presuppose a conception of infinity too abstract to be suited for philosophical purposes.

⁷⁰ “[T]he unity of the infinite, which each of these moments itself is, is *differently determined in each of them*. To that which is determined as infinite belongs the finitude that is distinguished from it; whereas the infinite is this unity in itself, the finite is merely the determinateness or limit belonging to it” (*LI* 159/145; my emphasis). The *Doctrine of Essence* maintains that the concept of infinity “is the contradiction such as it manifests itself in the sphere of being” (*LI* 75/440). Even though this sphere also contains determinations that reflect one another—such as infinity and finitude (*LI* 131/122)—they pertain to qualitative and quantitative ways of determining given objects. Hegel elsewhere considers the concepts of infinity and finitude to underlie Kant’s first antinomy (*LI* 109/103). See on this my *On Hegel*, ch. 4.

a mere determination of the concept of infinity. Thus, Hegel regards each pure concept as the effort to overcome the internal contradiction between what it is in itself (the unity of its contrary determinations which it, *qua* concept, contains within itself) and the way it has actually appeared in the history of thought (as a one-sided determination implicitly or explicitly opposed to its contrary). As long as pure concepts such as “infinity” and “finitude” are conceived as excluding their contrary, thought finds itself entangled “in the irreconciled, unresolved, absolute contradiction.”⁷¹ It is precisely in the *Logic*—and in the *Logic* alone—that such one-sided concepts are impelled to resolve this inner contradiction. It is this perspective, I would like to suggest, that allows Hegel to reconstruct the totality of pure concepts that have emerged in the history of science and philosophy.

According to Hegel, the classical principle of non-contradiction and Kant’s philosophical notion of conflict merely allow philosophy to expose the mutual annulment of contrary claims. In his view, only the speculative principle of self-contradiction allows philosophy truly to resolve such conflicts as divide any mode of thought against itself.⁷² The principle of self-contradiction does this, I have argued, by exposing the asymmetrical contradiction between the unity that a concept is in itself and its actual negation of this unity. Whereas, in other words, the external mode of reflection which has prevailed in the history of thought has “negated” only the initial unity of contrary conceptual determinations, the *Logic* allows pure concepts to negate this first negation as well. This latter negativity, Hegel notes toward the end of the *Logic*, constitutes

the innermost source of all activity, of all animate and spiritual movement, the dialectical soul that everything true possesses and through which alone it is true. . . . [T]he negative of the negative . . . is this resolution [*Aufhebung*] of the contradiction. (*LII* 563/835–36)

While discussing the classical concept of contradiction, Hegel, we have seen, takes the opportunity to allude to its role in speculative science itself, thus anticipating his discussion of the speculative method at the end of the *Logic*.⁷³ Although the concept of contradiction such as it has surfaced in the history of thought “contains” the speculative meaning Hegel attributes to it, its common usage does not

⁷¹*LI* 152–53/139–40.

⁷²Cf. *LHP III*, 359/451.

⁷³See Düsing, *Das Problem der Subjektivität*, 319. Düsing argues that the determinations of reflection (identity, opposition, contradiction, and ground) treated in the *Doctrine of Essence* run parallel to the “phases” of Hegel’s own method. In his view, the final chapter of the *Logic* relies on these determinations to prove the necessary nature of this method. It seems to me, however, that Düsing plays down the multi-layered nature of the *Doctrine of Essence*. Thus, the abstract concept of identity Hegel discusses in the context of the *Doctrine of Essence* cannot be identified with the concept of unity that allows him to highlight the unity of contrary conceptual determinations. As I see it, all concepts treated in the *Logic* contain the concept as such—that is, the unity of contrary determinations—as their ultimate principle and, hence, express particular aspects of this principle. Since Hegel’s method exclusively relies on this very principle, the justification of the speculative method by no means depends on the concepts actually treated in the *Doctrine of Essence*. See also Henrich, “Hegels Logik der Reflexion,” 150–53. Like Düsing, Henrich maintains that Hegel’s account of the determinations of reflection is intended to make explicit the method already at work in the *Doctrine of Being*.

explicitly expose this meaning. For this reason, Hegel more frequently uses the concept of negativity to refer to the principle of speculative science.

Insofar as the concept of contradiction has been conceived as a particular mode of the concept of opposition, as traditionally has been done, it remains opposed to the concept of identity (*LII* 38/411). In this form it does not allow thought to grasp the unity of contrary determinations, but merely to annul contradictory claims about empirical objects or the world at large. That is why the *Doctrine of Essence* treats the concept of contradiction on a par with the other finite determinations of reflection. Because the content that the concept of contradiction has actually posited is at odds with the concept as such, it cannot but give way—within the element of pure thought created by the *Logic*—to a less one-sided determination of the relation between essence and appearance, that is, to the concept of ground (*LII* 69–70/435).

Now if Hegel's elusive remarks on the principle of self-contradiction pertain to his own method, then it should be possible to trace the role of this principle in Hegel's account of the determinations of reflection themselves.⁷⁴ The next and last step of this essay therefore consists in a brief reflection on the method Hegel employs in this text.

10. THE PRINCIPLE OF SELF-CONTRADICTION IN HEGEL'S METHOD

For reasons discussed below, it is quite difficult to identify the principle of self-contradiction in Hegel's actual treatment of the determinations of reflection. Since the role of this principle emerges relatively clearly in his account of the concepts of identity and distinctness, I will focus on this section. External reflection itself, Hegel here notes, admits that "the principle of identity merely expresses a one-sided determination" (*LII* 41–42/414). This insight implies, he holds, that the *truth* of this determination consists in the unity of identity and distinctness (*LII* 42/414). For when external reflection grants that the principle of identity is one-sided, it implicitly assumes the unity of identity and distinctness as the criterion of its criticism. Yet instead of actually positing this unity, external reflection maintains that identity and distinctness are absolutely distinct. It thus gets entangled in "conflicting claims" (*LII* 42/414). External reflection itself is not aware of the contradiction between the content it ultimately presupposes and the content it has actually posited—this contradiction has not become "for it":

⁷⁴Evidently, I will not be able to consider other parts of Hegel's work in light of the principle of self-contradiction presented in this article. However, the following passages from the *Doctrine of the Concept* and the *Phenomenology* confirm that this principle is not so much concerned with opposite predicates that are simultaneously assigned to the same subject as with the contradiction between what something essentially is and the way it actually appears: "The chemical object . . . is thus the contradiction of its positedness and its immanent individual concept" (*LII* 431/728); "Self-consciousness discovers . . . the contradiction between, on the one hand, its knowledge of the ethical nature of its own action and, on the other, that which is ethical in and for itself, thus finding its own downfall" (*Phen* 291–92/266; cf. 360–61/333).

Although the content of representational thought [*das Vorstellen*] is in each case the contradiction, it does not become aware of the latter; it remains external reflection.⁷⁵

The ultimate content of external reflection is constituted by the determinations of reflection as a whole, that is, by the ways in which thought has traditionally defined the relation between essence and appearance. In order to expose the contradiction which these determinations contain within themselves, Hegel, I argued above, often abstracts from the perspective of external reflection and, moreover, from its predominance in the history of thought. Thus, he maintains, albeit rather obliquely, that the “determinations of essence” are “contradictory in themselves” (*LII* 68/434). This means that the concept of identity, such as it has emerged in the history of thought, for instance, simultaneously presupposes the unity of identity and difference and actually excludes its contrary from itself.⁷⁶ Once the concept of identity—and, for that matter, any pure concept—is regarded from a speculative point of view, it is pushed from within to resolve its self-contradiction, and this until a concept emerges that is no longer at odds with the principle of speculative thought as such.

However, Hegel’s actual treatment of the determinations of reflection hardly refers to their effort at resolving inner contradictions. As I see it, there are at least three reasons for Hegel’s reticence in this respect. First, the context of the *Doctrine of Essence* does not yet allow him to elaborate on his speculative method in any systematic way. When he, at the end of the *Logic*, actually does address his method, he confines himself to a very abstract description. Hegel here repeats, however, that speculative thought essentially consists in “thinking the contradiction” (*LII* 563/835). Contradictions emerge, he notes, wherever contrary determinations are brought together “in one relation” and, as such, have actually become present for thought (*LII* 562/835). The dialectical treatment of a determination opposed to its contrary then consists in “positing the unity that is contained in it” (*LII* 562/835), thus “resolving” its contradiction.⁷⁷ Although these passages confirm my reading of the chapter devoted to the determinations of reflection, they are much too general to shed light on Hegel’s actual, multi-layered account of particular concepts.⁷⁸

Hegel’s understanding of the concept of contradiction is also difficult to grasp, second, because he sometimes uses the term ‘contradiction’ in a rather loose sense. As was noted above, he does not hesitate to refer to conflicts between contrary, yet equally valid claims—including Kant’s antinomies of pure reason—as

⁷⁵*LII* 77/441; cf. 562/835.

⁷⁶According to Hegel, a concept such as “limit,” discussed in the *Doctrine of Being*, exhibits the same contradiction: on the one hand, this concept presupposes the unity of “something” and “other,” on the other hand, it posits these moments as existing independently of one another (*LI* 136/126). See on this P. Guyer, “Hegel, Leibniz und der Widerspruch im Endlichen,” in *Seminar*, ed. R.-P. Horstmann, 230–60, at 255.

⁷⁷*LII* 563/835; cf. *LI* 49/54.

⁷⁸This is also emphasized by Henrich, “Hegels Logik der Reflexion,” 100–05.

contradictions.⁷⁹ Such references obscure the fact that his speculative principle of self-contradiction is exclusively concerned with the asymmetrical conflict between the content a concept contains and the limited content it has actually posited.

Finally, throughout the *Logic*, Hegel often adopts a mode of reasoning reminiscent of ancient skepticism. This element of his method aims to show that a particular position presupposes its contrary and, if pushed to its limits, is overturned into the latter. As I see it, Hegel employs this classical way of exhibiting contradictions in order to fight external reflection by means of its proper weapons. It is completely in agreement with the method outlined in the *Phenomenology* that Hegel should speak the language of the mode of thought he aims to criticize. This negative element of speculative dialectics, the arguments of which are often far from convincing, is clearly intended to annul the initial dogmas of external reflection.⁸⁰ Although this element may be a first, primitive way of highlighting the mutual dependence of conceptual determinations, it seems to me that it tends to conceal the proper, positive thrust of Hegel's method.⁸¹ This positive thrust, I have argued, consists in letting a concept resolve the contradiction between what it is in itself and the way it has actually manifested itself. Throughout the *Logic*, this element of Hegel's method largely occurs behind the back, so to speak, of the finite modes of pure thought addressed in this work.

II. CONCLUSION

I have argued that Hegel's *Logic* reconstructs the totality of pure concepts that have emerged in the history of thought by interpreting each of these concepts as contradicting the unity of its contrary determinations, a unity they contain within themselves. I have wished to demonstrate that Hegel's principle of self-

⁷⁹Thus, Hegel maintains at the beginning of his treatment of the determinations of reflection that the various principles of traditional logic contradict *one another* (LII 38/411; cf. *Enc I*, §119, rem.). In a Kantian vein, he here suggests that each principle claims absolute truth and nevertheless is opposed to a contrary principle. Hegel notes in the *Logic* that the determinations of the understanding are in conflict *with themselves* (LI 39/46), but equally that the finite and the infinite are in conflict *with one another* (LI 40/47). However, in the latter passage, he once again goes along with Kant's approach to conflicts, albeit to criticize it.

⁸⁰In some cases it is even hard to decide whether Hegel expects the reader to take seriously this skeptical—or quasi-skeptical—line of reasoning. Thus, he argues that the understanding, when stating that the concept of identity is *different* from the concept of difference, implicitly admits that the very nature of the concept of identity consists in “being different” and, hence, that it contains its contrary (LII 41/413). Hegel here collapses the distinction between such concepts as are treated as contents and such concepts as are used—in this case by the understanding—to reflect on them. See Becker, *Begriff der Dialektik*, 25–34; Düsing, *Das Problem der Subjektivität*, 219. Both authors take their—justified—criticism of these and similar passages to compromise the core of Hegel's dialectic.

⁸¹From his 1802 treatise on skepticism onward, Hegel repeatedly refers to the role of skepticism in his speculative method. The *Encyclopedia* notes that true philosophy contains skepticism as its dialectical moment (*Enc I*, §81, add. 2; cf. §81, rem.; *Phen* 61/50; LII 558–59/831–32). This moment is concerned with the overturning of a finite determination into its contrary (*Enc I*, §81). As such, it constitutes the negative moment of the process in which the opposition between contrary determinations is posited and resolved. The *Encyclopedia* uses the term ‘dialectical’ for the negative moment of this resolution alone and refers to its positive outcome as the ‘speculative’ moment of logic (*Enc I*, §§79, 81–82). The *Logic*, on the other hand, identifies this speculative moment with the positive meaning of dialectics itself (LI 52/56; cf. LII 557–60/830–33).

contradiction, unlike its classical counterpart, is exclusively concerned with the *asymmetrical* conflict between the true content of a pure concept (the unity of its contrary determinations) and its actual appearance (the abstract determination it has posited as its true principle). Precisely because this contradiction is asymmetrical, its resolution does not consist in the annulment of its contrary moments, but in a concept that has actually posited the unity it always already contained. It is to this asymmetry, I would contend, that Hegel's dialectical method owes its tremendous force. As I noted above, the actual text of the *Logic* often conceals the principle of self-contradiction behind a tangle of dialectical arguments. Although these arguments may seem an easy target, I hold that their refutation does not infringe upon the principle of self-contradiction itself which, cunningly, awaits us at the end without so much as a single scar.⁸²

⁸²Cf. *Phen* 440/407. I would like to thank Robert Stern, Diogo Ferrer, and my colleagues in Groningen for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this essay. Thanks are also due to the anonymous referees of this journal for their criticisms of an earlier draft.