

## IOANNIS TRISOKKAS Anachronism, Antiquarianism, and *Konstellationsforschung*: A Critique of Beiser

In his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy* (2008), subtitled “The Puzzling Hegel Renaissance,”<sup>1</sup> Frederick Beiser argues that Anglophone Hegel research has been in the main deeply problematic and proceeds to offer a program of research for its rejuvenation. The *nervus probandi* of his argument is that Hegel research can only be antiquarian and, therefore, the only road it can take is the one of *Konstellationsforschung*. The present paper aims at showing that Beiser’s argument fails on internal grounds.

Beiser defines *Konstellationsforschung* as “the detailed investigation into . . . the discussions between all the thinkers in a period” (“Puzzling,” 10, emphasis mine). Given this narrow definition, an argument against the identification of *Hegelforschung* with *Konstellationsforschung* does not necessarily function as an argument against the identification of *Hegelforschung* with historical research in general. As will become apparent, however, a dimension of the forthcoming critique of Beiser does have such a consequence.

The discussion begins with a descriptive account of Beiser’s argument for the necessity of identifying *Hegelforschung* with *Konstellationsforschung*. Next, strong reasons to doubt three of the basic assumptions of the argument are examined: that the Hegelian categories do not have a realist character, that Hegel’s philosophy of nature is in conflict with natural science, and that there is a uniform culture we can call “ours.” Textual evidence from the

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1. Frederick C. Beiser, “Introduction: The Puzzling Hegel Renaissance,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), 1–14. Hereafter cited as “Puzzling.”

*Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807)<sup>2</sup> and the *Science of Logic* (1832)<sup>3</sup> is then provided in order to prove that Hegel himself would disapprove of that identification. Finally, the essay concludes by drawing some of the ramifications of the preceding discussion.

Before noting the issues Beiser has with Anglophone Hegel research, let us take a look at his explanation of the “puzzling,” as he calls it, Hegel renaissance. Whereas the great interest in Hegel’s sociopolitical philosophy can be explained via its historical association with Karl Marx’s, an interest of even greater magnitude in the other parts of Hegel’s system (logic and ontology, epistemology, philosophy of nature, philosophy of mind) is puzzling. The dominance of analytic and positivistic philosophy from the second decade of the twentieth century onward should have forced these aspects of Hegelian philosophy into oblivion, for Hegel “had become the ogre of positivism and the very model of how *not* to do philosophy” (“Puzzling,” 1). How then could the “puzzling Hegel renaissance” have happened?

The cause, Beiser contends, cannot be identified with the appearance of Charles Taylor’s *Hegel* in 1975 (2–3). Taylor’s book certainly explored Hegel’s thought comprehensively, but it insisted that it is underpinned by a metaphysical concept, the concept of the self-positing spirit. Given the antimetaphysical *milieu* dominating Anglophone academia at the time, “Taylor’s book was more likely to bury than revive Hegel” (3).

The cause of the “puzzling Hegel renaissance” must rather be located in the fact that “scholars began to ignore or underplay . . . Hegel’s . . . metaphysics” (3). There are those who believed that Hegel’s sociopolitical philosophy could be understood independently of his metaphysics (Zbigniew Pelczynski, Allen Wood, Michael Hardimon) and those who argued that Hegel’s whole system was nonmetaphysical (Klaus Hartmann, Robert Pippin, Robert Brandom). Now that “the most difficult and troubling aspect” of Hegel’s philosophy has been removed, “secular and

2. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* [Phenomenology of spirit], in *Hegel’s Werke in zwanzig Bände*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel, vol. 3 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986). Hereafter cited as *PhdG*. All translations are from *Hegel’s Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005). Hereafter cited as *YY*.

3. G. W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik I–II* [Science of logic I–2], in Moldenhauer and Michel, *Werke*, vol. 5–6. Hereafter cited as *WdLI* and *WdLII*. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999). Hereafter cited as *SL*. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are from Miller’s edition.

positivistic” Anglophone academia has found itself able to communicate with Hegel (4–5). The nonmetaphysical interpretations, then, “worked so well because they have made Hegel conform to the image of what *we* think a philosopher should be” (5, emphasis mine).

Beiser finds these interpretations “interesting” and “illuminating,” but also “unconvincing” (5). They are unconvincing because the metaphysical dimension of Hegel’s thought “has proven stubbornly irreducible.” “The Hegel renaissance was,” then, “a mistake,” for it brought to light not the real Hegel, but a fake one, the one that “reflects *our* own contemporary interests and values” (5).

Beiser justifies his claim that the metaphysical dimension of Hegel’s thought “has proven stubbornly irreducible” in two ways. First, he refers us to the lectures on the philosophy of religion, in which Hegel asserts that God is the alpha and omega of his philosophy.<sup>4</sup> Although Beiser admits that “Hegel’s God is not the theistic God of orthodox Christianity, and still less the deistic God of the eighteenth-century philosophers, he considers it indisputable that this God “still answers to the general concept of the infinite or absolute” (5). His problem with the nonmetaphysical interpretations of Hegel is that they cannot explain away an element that, Beiser believes, is fully metaphysical, namely the infinite or absolute. This is how he puts it:

We cannot explain away the Hegelian absolute in terms of the completeness of a system of categories, the subject of the Kantian unity of apperception, or the structure of mutual recognition involved in norms. For all these interpretations give us only one half of the Hegelian equation: the manner in which we *think* about the universe; they do not give us the other half: the universe itself. The Hegelian absolute was always meant to be the universe as a whole, the identity of subject and object, not only how we think about the world but [also] the world itself. (5–6, emphasis in original)

Second, Beiser refers to Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie*, the “very heart of his system,” as being “an embarrassment” for the nonmetaphysical interpretations. This is so because

in his *Naturphilosophie*, Hegel speculates about the nature of the living and material universe, and he employs an a priori methodology very unlike the method of observation and experiment of contemporary natural science. Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie* is explicitly and emphatically a

4. G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion* [Lectures on the philosophy of religion], in Moldenhauer and Michel, *Werke*, 16:28, 32–33, 94.

metaphysics. It is implausible to interpret it as only a system of categories, for Hegel is patently and explicitly attempting to tell us about nature itself, not only how we should think about it or the normative structure for discourse about it. . . . Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* . . . is far removed from any contemporary conception of what philosophy should be. (6)

The diagnosis that there are irreducible metaphysical elements in Hegel's philosophy creates the dilemma between *antiquarianism* and *anachronism* (6–7). If Hegel scholars want to be historically accurate, they have to present Hegel as a full-blooded metaphysician, but this presentation will be of no interest and have no relevance to “our own philosophical culture,” “which mistrusts metaphysics” (antiquarianism) (6). But if Hegel scholars choose to interpret Hegel nonmetaphysically, their interpretation will be “more a construction of our contemporary interests than the real historical [Hegel]” (anachronism) (6–7).

Beiser identifies three possible ways of resolving the dilemma. He rejects the first two and endorses the third. The first way is that Hegel research may be conducted in a culture that is religious and nonpositivistic (7). In this culture, the presentation of the real Hegel, the full-blooded metaphysician, will be of great interest and relevance to its members. Genuine Hegel research will be undertaken, and the result will not be antiquarian. The problem is that this culture, Beiser opines, is not “ours”—it is a culture that is long gone. So, in actuality, the dilemma cannot be resolved in this first way.

The second possible way of resolving the dilemma is that Hegel scholars may distinguish between the “letter” and the “spirit” of Hegel's text and claim that their nonmetaphysical interpretation is representative of its “spirit,” albeit not of its “letter” (7). Their interpretation brings forth what Hegel “really meant to say,” not what he actually said. Nonmetaphysical interpretations could thus no longer be called anachronistic, for the “real” Hegel would not be at odds with “our” culture. The problem with this suggestion, Beiser argues, is that it “engages in a form of self-deception” and “conflates the factual with the normative, what Hegel really did say with what we think he *ought to have said* if he were reasonable like us” (7–8). If the text's letter is brushed away, the only reliable measure for the truthfulness of any interpretation vanishes. In actuality, then, our dilemma cannot be resolved in the second way either.

The third possible way of resolving the dilemma, the one Beiser welcomes, is the way of *Konstellationsforschung*. Hegel

research, our author argues, should avoid self-deception at any cost; it must stick to the text's letter and illuminate it by placing it in its historical context. This activity should take the form of *Konstellationsforschung*: what must be examined in detail is Hegel's intellectual interaction with all his contemporary thinkers (major and minor) (10). Arguments and counterarguments ought to be put forth and studied within the historical context of their emergence. As soon as this interaction has been reconstructed, it will become possible to see Hegel's philosophy in its “precise historical and philosophical context” and thereby “understand its point and meaning through its specific place in a discussion” (10). How does this suggestion, however, resolve the dilemma of Hegel scholarship? Given that Hegel is a full-blooded metaphysician, does it not establish antiquarianism?

Beiser admits that *Konstellationsforschung* brings with it the risk of antiquarianism (8). Nevertheless, antiquarianism loses its threatening character if we refuse to accept that the outcome of research is philosophically valuable only if it corresponds to “our” contemporary interests, to “our” culture. By illuminating Hegel's philosophical confrontation with his contemporaries, we get both the real Hegel and a detailed understanding of a debate that is valuable in itself and should be appreciated for its own sake. The following passage is quite enlightening on this matter:

There is a strong case to be made for bracketing our own contemporary philosophical interests and examining Hegel in his historical context. In this case, we reconstruct Hegel's position as a contribution to a past conversation. We will fully understand the point and meaning of Hegel's philosophy only when we see it in discussion with the position of others. If we ignore its precise place in the past conversation, we run the risk of confusing Hegel's position with those of others or we fail to see his precise intentions. This approach has the advantage of being closer to the real historical Hegel, and it has real philosophical content insofar as it sees Hegel's position in a philosophical discussion. While there is no a priori guarantee that closer historical study will bring results answering to our contemporary interests, it does have a possible greater benefit: that we widen our philosophical horizons and discover issues that are interesting for their own sake even if they answer to no contemporary concern. (9)

So, if Anglophone Hegel research “is to make any progress in the near future,” Beiser concludes, it needs to immerse itself in *Konstellationsforschung* (9). *Konstellationsforschung* will disclose the real Hegel, and its falling into antiquarianism will not be philosophically threatening because its outcome need not be relevant to “our” culture in order to have philosophical value and be

philosophically interesting. In this way, it will be shown that the “puzzling” Hegel renaissance need not be a mistake after all (9). I find this conclusion deeply worrying and the argument that has led to it ill-judged. I will now proceed to voice my concerns.

A major premise in Beiser’s argument is his claim that the non-metaphysical interpretations of Hegel are problematic because the metaphysical dimension of his thought “has proven stubbornly irreducible.” Beiser’s first justification of this claim refers us to the indisputable presence of such a “metaphysical” concept as the absolute in Hegel’s system: nonmetaphysical interpretations cannot explain away this concept. Beiser, however, admits that the Hegelian absolute is to be identified neither with “the theistic God of orthodox Christianity” nor with “the deistic God of the eighteenth-century philosophers.” How is it then that this concept is “metaphysical”? According to Beiser, it is “metaphysical” because it has *realist* connotations: it refers to “the universe *itself*,” not simply to “the manner in which we *think* about the universe.”

One’s worry stems from a particular nonmetaphysical interpretation Beiser directs his argument against: the interpretation that “explains away the Hegelian absolute in terms of the completeness of a system of categories.” He contends that such a move is mistaken because a system of categories exemplifies only “the manner in which we think about the universe.” But this judgment is suspect. There is a version of the interpretation in question that understands Hegel’s system of categories in realist terms: they are not only the determinations of thought, but also the determinations of being itself. In fact, this interpretation seems to be the one that has gotten things right, at least insofar as the *Science of Logic* is concerned.<sup>5</sup> The evidence for it is so overwhelming that any attempt to deny it seems destined to fail.<sup>6</sup>

5. Note that for this stage of Beiser’s argument to be refuted it suffices to show that the logical categories are not only determinations of thought but also determinations of being. Whether or not there are parts of Hegel’s philosophical system in which the logical categories come to be particularized in contingently discovered empirical ways is something that is irrelevant to this stage of Beiser’s argument. All that matters at this juncture is that there is an interpretation that supports the view that the logical categories are determinations of being itself.

6. Regarding the overwhelming evidence, see Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic: From Being to Infinity* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue UP, 2006), 115–43. Note, nevertheless, that the problem is created for Beiser not so much because his own interpretation of the status of the Hegelian logical categories is false, but rather because there exists another interpretation that is opposite to his and can be at least equally well

So, if Beiser’s claim is that the interpretation explaining away the Hegelian absolute in terms of the completeness of a system of categories is mistaken only because it does not have realist connotations, then his claim does not hold when applied to that version of the interpretation that understands Hegel’s system of logical categories in realist terms. It may be pointed out that the objection may be valid but incapable of undermining Beiser’s overall argument. In fact, it may be suggested that it strengthens rather than weakens that argument, as it strengthens the view that Hegel is a “metaphysician” and therefore strengthens Beiser’s point that nonmetaphysical interpretations of Hegel cannot possibly work.

It is not my intention to deny this point. Nevertheless, it should be noted that if the above is correct, Beiser’s “worrying” claim that “Hegel is a metaphysician” means nothing more than that “Hegel is a realist” with respect to the categories. This equalization creates a problem for Beiser’s *other* point that any historically accurate interpretation of Hegel must be “antiquarian” because “our” culture does not concern itself with metaphysics. It cannot be denied that the realm of contemporary philosophy (including metaphysics) is full of realist theories or that an important part of “our” culture is directed toward realism (in the sense that it, at least, sets it as its goal). It would really be absurd to claim that “we” are not at all interested in realism: even if a serious-minded philosopher declared that a realist theory of a priori categories is an impossibility, she would still be interested in hearing what a proponent of such a theory had to say (otherwise she would not be a serious-minded philosopher but a dogmatist). It follows that the realist interpretation of Hegel’s system of categories is not “antiquarian.”

But perhaps what Beiser wants to emphasize is not so much that there is a gap between Hegel’s realism and “our” culture as that there is a gap between Hegel’s *method* of producing the realist system of a priori categories and “our” culture’s belief about how a realist corpus of knowledge should be produced. He puts the emphasis on this aspect of the problem when he refers to Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie*, which, as he correctly points out, has a realist character. Whereas, according to Beiser himself, Hegel generates

supported by the letter of the text. In other words, the issue here is not about the truth or falsity of the proposed interpretations, but the fact that these interpretations stand in a relation of equipollence to one another.

his *Naturphilosophie* by employing an a priori methodology, in “our” culture such a methodology has fallen into disrepute. Indeed, Beiser continues, Hegel’s method is quite the opposite of (or, in his words, “very unlike”) the method of empirical observation and experiment used in contemporary natural science. Exactly because of this difference in methodology, Beiser concludes, “Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie* . . . is far removed from any contemporary conception of what philosophy should be.”

There is a strong interpretation in Hegel scholarship that straightforwardly denies that Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie* employs an a priori methodology.<sup>7</sup> For those who hold this interpretation, the function of Hegel’s philosophy of nature is solely to fill in the pure categories of the *Science of Logic* with empirical content received from natural science. It is exactly for this reason that, they believe, there is no pure “logic of nature” that is distinct from the pure logic of the *Science of Logic*. This interpretation is external to Beiser’s argument, as the crucial premise that provides the basis of the latter—to wit, that Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie* generates a realist content purely a priori—is absent from it. In order to adjudicate between the two approaches one needs to conduct a full-scale examination of Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie*, a daunting task that is well beyond the scope of the present paper.<sup>8</sup>

I will follow a much simpler strategy in order to undermine Beiser’s conclusion—a strategy that is internal, not external, to it and based on a hypothesis. It will be shown that even if one accepts that Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie* employs an a priori methodology, it still does not follow from this that it conflicts with natural science. This strategy does not prove the truth of the hypothesis because it still needs to be confronted with the aforementioned strong interpretation, but it suffices to undermine Beiser’s conclusion.

7. See Michael Peiry, “Hegelianism and the Natural Sciences: Some Current Developments and Interpretations,” *Hegel-Studien* 36 (2001): 199–237; Kenneth R. Westphal, “Philosophizing about Nature: Hegel’s Philosophical Project,” in Beiser, *Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, 281–310, 295–97, 307–8; Brigitte Falkenburg, “How to Save the Phenomena: Meaning and Reference in Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature,” in *Hegel and the Philosophy of Nature*, ed. Stephen Houlgate (Albany: State U of New York P, 1998), 97–136, 130–31; Thomas R. Webb, “The Problem of Empirical Knowledge in Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature,” *Hegel-Studien* 15 (1980): 171–86, 184; and John W. Burbidge, “Chemism and Chemistry,” *The Owl of Minerva* 34.1 (2002): 3–17.

8. This problem is discussed in detail in a forthcoming paper of mine entitled “Two Interpretations of Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature.”

To begin with, recent research undertaken by Hegel scholars who, like Beiser, accept the basic premise that Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie* employs an a priori methodology, reaches the altogether different conclusion that Hegel’s methodology in his *Naturphilosophie* does not conflict with the methodology of natural science.<sup>9</sup> For these authors, Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie* concerns itself with the systematic exposition of those determinations of nature that are logically necessary.<sup>10</sup> The logical necessity of a logical determination of nature is defined in terms of its immanent derivation from the minimal logical determination of nature: the sheer externality or otherness of *space* (*Enc. II*, §254).<sup>11</sup> The totality of the logical determinations of nature—to wit, logical determinations considered in the mode of externality or otherness<sup>12</sup>—comprises

9. I have chosen Stephen Houlgate as the representative of this “school” of interpretation. See Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth and History*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 106–80. Hereafter cited as *Introduction*. See also Stephen Houlgate, “Logic and Nature in Hegel’s Philosophy: A Response to John W. Burbidge,” *The Owl of Minerva* 34.1 (2002): 107–25. Another representative of this “school” of interpretation is Edward C. Halper. See his “The Logic of Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature: Nature, Space and Time,” in Houlgate, *Hegel and the Philosophy of Nature*, 29–49; and “Hegel’s Criticism of Newton,” in Beiser, *Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, 311–43.

10. This premise is quite often being justified by reference to G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature: Part Two of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830), trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1970), 2 (first Zusatz) (“The Philosophy of Nature . . . is itself physics, but rational physics”) and §246 remark (“the foundation [of the Philosophy of Nature] must be the necessity of the Notion”). Hereafter cited as *Enc. II*, followed by either page or section number.

11. It is important to note here that, for the interpretation under discussion, the very beginning of Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie*, namely space, is a logical determination; as Houlgate puts it, “the Idea mutates logically into the externality of space” (*Introduction*, 110, emphasis mine). In contrast, for the interpretation that denies that Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie* employs an a priori methodology, space is an empirical (sensibilist) determination. For Houlgate, there is a “distinctive logic of nature,” which is immanent and follows logically from the concept of space. As he puts it, “the philosophy of nature [does] not . . . simply try to fit the phenomena of nature into patterns of pure reason taken over directly from the *Logic* (as some commentators have suggested), but will endeavour to unfold what is made necessary by the externality of space in particular” (*Introduction*, 110). See also Houlgate, “Logic and Nature,” 107: “Hegel develops [in his Philosophy of Nature] an a priori account of the logical determinations immanent in and peculiar to nature—determinations that incorporate (but are not reducible to) the determinations set out in the *Logic*.”

12. For the interpretation we are discussing, nature “is not something quite separate from reason”—it is rather “absolute reason itself existing in a form that is other than that of explicitly self-determining rationality” (*Introduction*, 109, emphasis mine). The difference between the logical categories of the *Science of Logic* and the logical categories of the *Naturphilosophie* is that whereas the former are determined in the mode of self-determination



what one may call "the logic of nature": it includes space, time, place, motion, matter, light, mass, inertia, weight, bodies, elements, the planetary system in general, plant and animal life, and the logical interrelations of all these determinations.<sup>13</sup> This logic of nature is, according to the interpretation under discussion, the sole subject matter of Hegel's *Naturphilosophie*.

The logic of nature does not have a temporal structure: the determination preceding another in the order of derivation precedes it only logically, not temporally—even though parts of logical inference can manifest themselves in temporal order. Hegel is not interested in explaining how the natural phenomena have emerged in time. Nor is he interested in giving us natural explanations of natural phenomena. For example, he is interested neither in producing a natural explanation of the chemical processes that generated (or generate) organic life, nor in producing a natural explanation of the cosmological processes that generated the planets, nor indeed in explaining why there are over sixty species of parrot (*WdLII*, 375; *SL*, 682).<sup>14</sup> Hegel only aspires to explicate nature's logical structure, namely that structure that makes certain (*Enc. II*, §270 Zusatz; §268 Zusatz) natural phenomena logically necessary (although perhaps not all empirically present in a temporal moment of our empirical world) (§249). All he wants to achieve is "to show that, amidst the vast array of contingencies it contains, nature is none the less *to a degree* rational."<sup>15</sup>

(which is the one that dominates the logical sphere of pure reason), the latter develop in the mode of externality or otherness (which is the one that dominates the logical sphere of nature). See G. W. F. Hegel, *Naturphilosophie I: Die Vorlesung von 1819/20*, ed. Manfred Gies (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1980), 6.

13. See, for example, *Introduction*, 165: "Hegel's concept of life is a priori. It is arrived at by considering what is logically implicit in chemical processes, not by trying to fit an empirical description that fits everything we happen to call 'life'. It thus provides a rational criterion by which to judge whether an object is, indeed, alive or not."

14. Yet, it should be noted, Hegel is receptive to the discoveries of natural science in these matters. The philosophy of nature does not lead him to deny the possibility of the empirical discovery of, for example, Darwinian evolution. On the contrary, it is not excluded that the purely logical progression in the philosophy of nature from particles, through chemical processes logically presupposing particles, to life logically presupposing chemical processes could be discovered to be empirically temporal. (I am grateful to Clark Butler for drawing my attention to this point.)

15. *Introduction*, 113. So, the objection against a priori methodology in *Naturphilosophie* that "nature is simply too intricate and surprising to determine without empirical investigation" (Halper, "Hegel's Criticism of Newton," 311) does not hold. For the interpretation under discussion, Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* does *not* aim at the disclosure of nature's "intricate" and "surprising" constitution.

Natural science, as a matter of fact, does not concern itself with logical necessity and logical explanation—only with natural laws and natural explanation. The latter emerge from and are validated by reference to empirical experience and experiment—the former, for the interpretation we are expounding, emerge purely a priori from the immanent unfolding of the concept of the sheer externality of space. Thus, natural science is not in competition with Hegel's *Naturphilosophie*—the latter does not aim at producing an explanation that will *replace* the explanation given by natural science. Stephen Houlgate puts it well: "Philosophy and science are . . . not in competition with one another but have quite different aims: philosophy restricts itself to showing the rational necessity of phenomena—the fact that they accord with the demands of reason—while science explores the details of how and why such phenomena actually arise in nature."<sup>16</sup>

Even if it were suggested—*per impossibile*—that natural science could undertake the task of explicating the logic of nature, one would not be allowed to derive from this that Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* is outdated. For in this case natural science would have to employ an a priori methodology—as the emergence of logical necessity from empirical data and experimentation is a contradiction in terms—and, therefore, a comparison with Hegel's methodology would become an imperative. But then it would have to be seriously discussed (not in the ill-informed Popperian manner)<sup>17</sup> whether the hypothetical a priori methodology of natural science is preferable to Hegel's. In reality, though, the project of natural science is different from the project of explicating the logic of nature. Hegel's logical philosophy of nature, insofar as it is an immanent project, must withstand only its own faulty internal development and logical enrichment.

The natural scientist may raise the question why the project of explicating the logic of nature should at all be undertaken—or whether there actually exists a logic of nature. Both of these questions, however, have a legitimate response within the domain of the interpretation we are expounding. Firstly, the project of explicating the logic of nature should be undertaken because the question of whether or not nature is rational is a fundamental philosophical question or because at least some contemporary philosophers find this question fundamental. There are two main

16. *Introduction*, 112.

17. See Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. 2: *The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx, and the Aftermath* (London: Routledge, 1966), 2:27–28.

reasons why philosophers find the question of reason in nature an important one. One is that answering it would enrich our knowledge of nature by disclosing a certain dimension of it: in the same way that natural scientists find pleasure in, and add to our corpus of, knowledge by discovering the natural characteristics of nature,<sup>18</sup> so philosophers find pleasure in and add to our corpus of knowledge by discovering nature's logical characteristics. A second reason is that ever since Plato's *Timaeus* (c. 360 BCE)<sup>19</sup> philosophers have sought to acquire the kind of knowledge of nature that is incorrigible, knowledge as absolute certainty. For this to be accomplished the object of knowledge cannot be that facet of nature that is epistemically accessible only or partially through experience,<sup>20</sup> since—as Plato makes clear in the aforementioned dialogue—experience necessarily, at one time or another, will come to generate error. If it is true that the logic of nature can be accessed via an a priori methodology, there is a good chance, given that the method followed is the appropriate one, that Plato's programmatic aims could be fulfilled, and we humans could claim to have “real,” undefeated knowledge of nature.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, the question whether there actually exists a logic of nature can be answered, the interpretation under discussion holds, only by undertaking the a priori project of *Naturphilosophie*. If the project is carried out successfully, the answer must be in the affirmative; only if the project fails is the natural scientist entitled to doubt the existence of a logic of nature.

The supporters of that interpretation of Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* which, like Beiser's, begins from the belief that it follows an a priori methodology, admit that an important strand in it, besides the immanent derivation of the logical determinations of nature from the concept of the sheer externality of space, is the attempt to show that these determinations are manifested in our empirical

18. Richard P. Feynman, *The Pleasure of Finding Things Out: The Best Short Works of Richard P. Feynman* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 1999); Sander Bais, *In Praise of Science: Curiosity, Understanding, and Progress* (Cambridge: MIT P, 2010), 21–25.

19. Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 17–18 (29b–c).

20. See *Enc. II*, §246 remark: “This is not an appeal to experience in regard to the necessity of the content.”

21. Compare *Enc. II*, §247 Zusatz: “Philosophy is timeless comprehension, of time too and of all things generally in their eternal mode.” See also G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesung über Naturphilosophie: Berlin 1823/24*, ed. Gilles Marmasse (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000), 96.

realm in a way that agrees with empirical phenomena as understood by natural science (for example, magnetism, electricity, crystalline bodies, the human body, our solar system) (*Enc. II*, §246 remark and Zusatz).<sup>22</sup> In fact, natural science provides *Naturphilosophie* with concepts and structures that arise in the context of empirical observation and experiment. The interpretation under discussion, however, is quick to note that this by no means undermines the a priori character of the method of *Naturphilosophie*, because if the content received from natural science is to be incorporated in the logic of nature, it must be “reworked” and “reconstituted” in such a way that it derives necessarily (to wit, a priori) from a previously derived logical determination (§246 Zusatz).<sup>23</sup> It is this logical derivation alone that can justify the presence of a conceptual content received from natural science in the logic of nature. For the interpretation currently expounded, then, natural science has a “heuristic” value for *Naturphilosophie*, not a grounding or justificatory value.<sup>24</sup> It helps the *Naturphilosoph* conceive of new possible logical determinations of nature (hence Hegel's admirably broad and deep knowledge of the natural science of his day), but it does not decide the incorporation of these in the logic of nature.

What follows from the above is that even if one shares with Beiser the controversial belief that Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* employs an a priori methodology, there can be an interpretation that withstands Beiser's conclusion that the methodology of Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* opposes the methodology of natural science. A more correct statement would be that they are

22. For the interpretation under discussion, however, the examination of the relation between “the logic of nature” and the empirical realm is important not only because the empirical realm, as part of nature, has to exhibit an agreement with that logic, but also because it has to exhibit disagreement as well. Hegel, that is, aspires to show not only that nature is to a degree rational, but also that it is to a degree irrational, that in its domain one finds “indifferent contingency and indeterminable irregularity” (*Enc. II*, §250).

23. Compare Halper, “Hegel's Criticism of Newton,” 312: “Results from the empirical sciences must surely have suggested to Hegel conceptual paths to explore, but that does not make his derivations a posteriori any more than measurements of the sides of right angles would render a proof of the Pythagorean theorem a posteriori.”

24. Thus, a statement such as the following by Westphal would appear to the proponents of the interpretation under discussion to be off track: “It is crucial to recognize that Hegel's central account of concepts, of *Begriffe* as internally complex, systematically integrated and instantiated conceptual structures, owes its foundation, both for its meaning and for its justification to the Newtonian theory of universal gravitation” (“Philosophizing about Nature,” 293).

complementary of one another. Whereas the method of natural science is employed in order to disclose the natural causes and effects of natural phenomena, the method of *Naturphilosophie* is employed in order to unveil the logical structure of a number of those phenomena. Of course, as has been pointed out at the beginning of this section, although the argument that leads to this statement suffices to overthrow Beiser's position, its truth remains undecided until it is confronted with that interpretation that denies that Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* employs an a priori methodology.

One may argue that Beiser's conclusion that "Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* . . . is far removed from any contemporary conception of what philosophy should be" can still be effected if "our" culture simply believes (wrongly) that Hegel's methodology opposes the methodology of natural science. However, this would be a nonsensical thesis to pursue; to be sure, there are enough reasonable people in "our" culture who, when they receive an explanation about how matters are, can see that the two enterprises have completely different and perfectly compatible tasks.

In any way one views it, then, Beiser's conclusion is unjustified. Research into Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* is not necessarily "antiquarian," as Beiser believes. Those who have great interest in investigating the logical structure of nature through Hegel's *Naturphilosophie*, and yet also have great faith in the methodology of natural science, will not find themselves forced to abandon the one in order to keep the other.

The only way for Beiser's argument to survive is if we assume that "our" culture and "contemporary" philosophy have no interest in the explication of the logical structure of being and the logical structure of nature. This brings me to my third concern, which has to do with Beiser's connection between "antiquarianism" and "our culture." He believes that any genuine Hegel research—that is, any research disclosing the "real" Hegel—is necessarily "antiquarian" because its result would be foreign to the interests of "our" culture and "contemporary" philosophy. I find this conception of "our" culture and of "contemporary" philosophy one-dimensional and artificial, having very little to do with actuality.

To my mind, there are no such uniform elements as "our" culture and "contemporary" philosophy, especially in the manner Beiser understands them. There are clusters of people (laymen and philosophers) who are deeply religious and who, therefore,

would see nothing "antiquarian" in that kind of Hegel research which explicates this philosopher in religious terms. There are also clusters of people who find that the explication of the logical structure of being and of nature is one of the most important philosophical enterprises. It seems to me that Beiser, rather unjustifiably, identifies a part of our culture (the positivistic, "nonmetaphysical" part) with the whole of it.<sup>25</sup>

It may be objected that surely it is undeniable that Beiser's view of "our" culture and "contemporary" philosophy is in fact hegemonic. One would not want to dispute this claim. It seems, though, that the idea of a "hegemonic view" cannot be made to work in favor of Beiser's argument, for such a view is promoted and finally established by small groups of people, those who happen to control the media and political, educational, and corporate institutions.<sup>26</sup> The hegemonic view is not a statistical result, and it by no means can be safely stated that it represents the view of the majority and even less that it represents the truth. That view simply dominates a domain because it is promoted by those who have the power in that domain. Hegemony has an ideological, not an epistemic basis.

Take, for example, the view that "Hegel is a charlatan." This is a view that was considered hegemonic in Anglophone academic philosophy from the third decade of the twentieth century until very recently.<sup>27</sup> Its establishment as "hegemonic" was due to the beliefs and actions of a handful of people (led by Bernard Russell), who passed it on to their students and the latter to their students and so on. Can we justifiably say that the majority of twentieth-century Anglophone academic philosophers genuinely

25. Based on recent work on the history and concept of analytic philosophy, it must be pointed out that even Beiser's thesis that analytic philosophy is positivistic and "antimetaphysical" does not have universal validity; see Richard Campbell, "The Covert Metaphysics of the Clash between 'Analytic' and 'Continental' Philosophy," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 9.2 (2001): 341–59; and Stephen Buckle, "Analytic Philosophy and Continental Philosophy: The Campbell Thesis Revisited," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 12.1 (2004): 111–50.

26. This is the classic conception of the idea of "hegemony." See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1973), 53, 104–6, 210, 245–46, 261–64.

27. See Rüdiger Bubner, "Überlegungen zur Situation der Hegelforschung," *Hegel-Studien* 36 (2001): 43–60, 51: "Dank der Lehrwirkung Wittgensteins war Hegel endgültig zum toten Hund in England geworden. Ich persönlich erinnere mich jedenfalls an Gelegenheiten in den sechziger Jahren, wobei im Gespräch allein die Nennung des Namens Hegel als Verletzung simpler Anstandsregeln inkriminiert wurde."



held the view that "Hegel is a charlatan"? I think we will all agree that we do not have the means to support a positive answer to this question.

But even if it is assumed there is a legitimate way to determine that Beiser's view is hegemonic in the sense that it represents the view of the majority of contemporary philosophers or the majority of the members of our culture, it still does not follow that the project of explicating the logical structure of being and the logical structure of nature (or, indeed, the project of understanding Hegel in religious terms) is "antiquarian" or "outdated." As long as a portion of contemporary philosophers or a portion of the members of our culture find such a project a worthwhile task, it would seem rather impertinent (and even dogmatic) to characterize their efforts as "outdated" and claim they have only a "historical" value.<sup>28</sup>

Beiser's argument has now been shown to be quite problematic: genuine Hegel research is not necessarily "antiquarian." Consequently, it is not necessary that the future of this research lies on the path of *Konstellationsforschung*, on the path of philosophizing historically. This outcome is strengthened by a consideration of Hegel's own view about how people should study his writings. Contra Beiser, Hegel is categorical that *Konstellationsforschung* would obscure rather than illuminate the understanding of his philosophy. It seems our author has committed the same mistake of which he has accused the proponents of the nonmetaphysical interpretations of Hegel: he has ignored the *letter* of the text. The forthcoming discussion substantiates this claim.

In the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (hereafter referred to simply as "the preface"), while reflecting on the philosophical value of his own preface, Hegel gives us a relentless critique of *Konstellationsforschung*. He begins by saying that

28. Imagine a philosopher working sleepless on a project of this kind for years because she believes that her inquiries will contribute to the betterment of our philosophical understanding of the world; then one day someone comes along and tells her that the only value her inquiries have is a "historical" one, that they do not really contribute anything to "our" contemporary philosophical situation. I think the reader will agree that this behavior is unacceptable and lacks any justified support whatsoever. It is like one's maintaining that a philosopher should abandon her research on Hegel because the hegemonic view in contemporary philosophy is that "Hegel is a charlatan" or one's claiming that a scientist should abandon her effort to prove that the earth is round because the hegemonic view in contemporary science is that "the earth is flat."

in a preface it is customary to explain the goal which the author has set for himself, the circumstances of his writing, and the way he thinks his work relates to other, earlier or contemporary efforts at treating the same object. But in a philosophical text this custom seems to be not only superfluous, but, by the nature of things, inadequate and contrary to its purpose. . . . Roughly, one would give a *historical account* of the work's standpoint and tendency, its general content and results—a conjunction of assertions and assurances made here and there about what is true; but this cannot be the valid way of exhibiting philosophical truth. (*PhdG*, 3:1; *YY*, 63–64, emphasis mine)

In this passage Hegel criticizes—indirectly but undoubtedly—*Konstellationsforschung*'s very essence: the "historical account" of how a philosophical work "relates to other contemporary efforts at treating the same object." He explicitly says that this way of writing about a philosophical text is "superfluous," "inadequate," "invalid," and "contrary to its purpose." The "purpose" that Hegel talks about is the exhibition of philosophical truth. What follows from the passage, by applying simple rules of logic, is that if the purpose of *Hegelforschung* is the exhibition of philosophical truth, *Hegelforschung* cannot take the form of *Konstellationsforschung*. A few lines farther he repeats this critique: "In philosophy . . . this [historical account] would give rise to . . . a way of discourse which philosophy itself shows to be incapable of attaining the truth" (3:11–12; 64–65).

One may argue that such a criticism misses the fact that *Hegelforschung*, in general, and *Konstellationsforschung*, in particular, do not aim at the exhibition of philosophical truth, but rather at the illumination of Hegel's work. A distinction should be made between "doing scholarly research" and "doing philosophy": the first aspires to elucidate a philosopher's work, the second seeks to exhibit philosophical truth. Thus, nothing prevents *Hegelforschung* from having the form of *Konstellationsforschung*.

There are several passages that seem to express Hegel's disagreement with the above line of thought. They bring forth two reasons why it must be rejected. The first is that *Konstellationsforschung* not only is incapable of exhibiting philosophical truth, but also obstructs this exhibition. Here is how he puts it: "To state how a philosophical work relates to other treatments of the same object introduces a foreign interest, obscuring that which is important in the knowledge of truth" (3:12; 65, translation mine). There are two ways in which the obstruction of the exhibition of philosophical truth takes place. On the one hand, *Konstellationsforschung* has the undesirable function to engulf the reader on the surface of things and prevent her from delving into

the depths of the subject matter. Historical, name-laden details, embellishment with unnecessary complications and the emphasis on the various “arguments” and “counterarguments” are elements that define *Konstellationsforschung*<sup>29</sup> but that do not allow the reader to focus on the one single thing she should focus on: the concept or the subject matter under discussion. Here is what Hegel writes in the following crucial passage:

The demand for such [historical] explanations and the satisfaction of this demand easily count [nowadays] as the essential thing. Where could the inner side of a philosophical text be better expressed than in its goals and results? And how would these be known more precisely, if not through their difference from whatever else the period has produced in the same domain? But . . . we must count [this activity] among the devices which bypass the matter itself, and combine its actual neglect with the semblance of serious exertion. . . . Such labor concerning goals and results, the distinction between one system and another, and their respective judgments is . . . much easier work than it seems. For this activity, instead of concerning itself with the matter itself, is always hovering outside it, instead of residing in the matter and forgetting itself in it, such knowing always resorts to another, and remains with itself rather than being with the matter and giving itself to it. (3:12–13; 68–70, emphasis mine)

The questions are as if stated word-by-word by Beiser and the other supporters of *Konstellationsforschung*: “Where could the inner side of a philosophical text be better expressed than in its goals and results? And how would these be known more precisely, if not through their difference from whatever else the period has produced in the same domain?” Note, however, that the remainder of the passage exercises harsh criticism on these ideas (to wit, on the very idea of *Konstellationsforschung*): “This activity, instead of concerning itself with the matter itself, is always hovering outside it.”

On the other hand, *Konstellationsforschung* has the undesirable function to burden the discussion of Hegel’s philosophical work with so many presuppositions and external thoughts that a presuppositionless study of it becomes impossible. Yet Hegel is adamant that the student must enter his philosophy in a presuppositionless mode. Therefore, research on Hegel’s work in terms of *Konstellationsforschung* and the study of this work in Hegel’s own terms are incompatible. If the purpose of *Hegelforschung* is to help

29. See especially the structure of Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987); and *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781–1801* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002).

the student study Hegel according to the latter’s wishes, then *Hegelforschung* cannot possibly have the form of *Konstellationsforschung*.

There are many passages in the preface and in the introductory essays of the *Science of Logic* that support this interpretation. In the preface, Hegel tells us that the study of his philosophy “is hampered . . . by the unreasoning conceit of ready-made [historical] truths, whose owner feels no need to go back to [and examine], but uses them as the ground and believes he can assert and use them for judging and condemning” (3:62; 189). He also tells us that “in the immanent rhythm of the concept, one must get rid of one’s own occurring ideas, and abstain from interfering in it with an arbitrary act or wisdom acquired elsewhere,” and he insists that this act of abstaining from interfering in it with wisdom acquired elsewhere is an essential requirement “for paying attention to the concept” (3:56; 176).

In the *Science of Logic* things are even clearer as to Hegel’s opinion of *Konstellationsforschung*. He tells us that “the peculiar restlessness and distraction of our modern [historical] consciousness compel us to take . . . account of the more readily suggested reflections and opinions” and that this consciousness exercises a kind of intellectual violence against those “who would attend *only* to the matter in hand,” allowing them “no place in modern [philosophical] dialogue” (*WdL*, 5:31; *SL*, 40–41, emphasis mine). But this attitude, he adds, would have been immediately abandoned if one made “the simple reflection” that philosophizing historically “contain[s] categories which . . . themselves need to be criticized first before they are employed” (5:31; 40–41). Historical consciousness (or historical knowledge [*historische Kenntnis*]; 5:42; 49) brings to the “system of science,” “argumentation about what should be admitted or excluded and within what limits and to what extent” (5:18, 43; 29, 49). The problem with this is that “argumentation is open to *the most manifold and various opinions*, on which a decision can finally be determined only arbitrarily. In this [historical] method . . . no mention is made of the need to demonstrate the *necessity* of its *subject matter* and therefore of the science itself” (5:42–43; 48–49, emphasis mine).

What Hegel is claiming in these quotations is that placing the study of any philosophical text in a historical framework, in a *Konstellation* of ideas, brings with it an insurmountable amount of presuppositions and external thoughts, which distort the reader’s attention to the subject matter, to philosophical truth itself. These presuppositions and external thoughts are “the wisdom acquired

elsewhere," "the more readily suggested reflections and opinions," thoughts that "contain categories which themselves need to be criticized before they are employed." It seems, then, that, for Hegel, the very nature of *Konstellationsforschung* makes it inappropriate for the study and understanding of his philosophy.

The second reason why *Hegelforschung* as *Konstellationsforschung* must be rejected is that its purported function, the illumination of Hegel's philosophical work, is superfluous (as Hegel himself points out in the passage cited on page 103 of this essay). The attempted illumination of a philosophical text is not an end in itself: one attempts to illuminate it for the purpose of facilitating a better understanding of it. But if we abstain from examining how a Hegelian text relates to other contemporary philosophical texts and comparing it to them, and do nothing else but presuppositionlessly follow the immanent development of the subject matter (the concept under discussion), then this act will give us an absolutely clear and complete understanding of the text in question. Consequently, even if we ignore its function to obstruct the exhibition of philosophical truth, *Konstellationsforschung* is still unsuitable for Hegel research because it is superfluous.

That this is indeed Hegel's view of the matter is once again confirmed by a large number of passages in the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*. In the preface we are told that "the important thing in the study of Science is that we should take upon ourselves the exertion of the concept," and that of historical thinking, namely of the thinking of *Konstellationsforschung*, "is required the effort to renounce that freedom [from the immanent content], and instead of acting as the arbitrary moving principle of the content, to submerge its freedom in it, let the content move itself by itself by its own nature . . . and to contemplate that movement" (*PhdG*, 3:56; *YY*, 176, emphasis mine). He also tells us that the movement of the logical categories "composes absolutely the nature of the scientific character" (3:37; 133, translation mine)—and he adds, in a fervent critique against *Konstellationsforschung*, that

the preparation of Science ceases to be a contingent philosophizing which hangs on to these or other objects, thoughts, or relations of the imperfect consciousness as they arise by accident, or which seeks to ground the true in arguments turning here and there, or drawing inferences and consequences from [pre]determined thoughts [as all these take place in historical thinking (that is, *Konstellationsforschung*)]. (3:37–38; 133–34)

In the *Science of Logic* Hegel repeatedly tells us that the only way to understand his philosophy is by simply following the movement of the logical categories. He writes that philosophy "can be only the nature of the content itself which spontaneously develops itself in a scientific method of knowing" (*WdLJ*, 5:16; *SL*, 27, emphasis mine), that "it is this self-construing method alone which enables philosophy to be an objective, demonstrated science" (5:17; 28, emphasis mine). Whatever the exact significance and content of this self-construing method, one thing is crystal-clear, that it cannot square with the idea and method of *Konstellationsforschung*. Indeed, Hegel does not tire of emphasizing that the method he is talking about directly conflicts with the essential characteristics of *Konstellationsforschung*. He writes that "philosophy, if it would be science, cannot . . . employ arguments based on grounds adduced by external reflection" (5:16; 27) (as it happens in *Konstellationsforschung*); that the immanent exposition of the logical categories "would demand that at no stage of the development should any thought-determination or reflection occur that does not immediately emerge at this stage and that has not entered this stage from the one preceding it" (5:30–31; 40); that the impatience of historical thinking is overcome "solely by going further, by study[ing] and by carrying out to its conclusion the entire [immanent] development" (5:33; 42, emphasis mine); that in philosophy one should "begin with the subject matter itself, without preliminary reflections" (5:35; 43); that "all that is needed to ensure that the beginning remains immanent in its scientific development is to . . . [rid] oneself of all other reflections and opinions whatever [and] simply . . . take up, what is there before us" (5:68; 69); and that "to enter into philosophy, therefore, calls for no other preparations, no further reflections or points of connection [than to simply follow the immanent development of the subject matter]" (5:72; 72).

It has been shown that in Hegel's view the study of his philosophy should not take the form of *Konstellationsforschung*. Yet it may be objected that all our efforts have been in vain, as the sheer fact that Hegel believes that *Hegelforschung* should not take the form of *Konstellationsforschung* does not entail he is right. He tells us that *Konstellationsforschung* hinders the exposition of philosophical truth, that it engulfs our inquiry in a mist of presuppositions, that it prevents us from delving into the depths of the subject matter, and that, given the complete understanding gained solely by the ahistorical study of his philosophy, it is a

superfluous enterprise; these claims, however, are not self-evident. They require that a case be made for them.

One would not want to deny this point. Evidently, much systematic work is needed for these premises to be established, a work that requires much more space than is here available. Nevertheless, the objection does not quite hold if it applies solely to the context of the preceding discussion. As has been shown, the premises in question represent the "letter" of Hegel's text and, given his own argumentation against the nonmetaphysical interpretations of Hegel, Beiser should not deviate so obviously from it in interpreting him. Beiser criticized the proponents of these interpretations for ignoring the letter of the text and thinking that they "know Hegel's philosophy better" than Hegel himself knows it. But, given that the above reading of the text's letter is correct, would Beiser's support of *Konstellationsforschung* (as the proper form of *Hegelforschung*) not be guilty of exactly the same error? Undoubtedly. Thus, Beiser's support of *Konstellationsforschung* would mean opening a back door for the nonmetaphysical interpretations of Hegel, so we would have to conclude that *his* argument against them has been in vain.

The evidence against Beiser's conclusion that the future of *Hegelforschung* lies on the path of *Konstellationsforschung* is overwhelming. Beiser tells us that "we will fully understand the point and meaning of Hegel's philosophy only when we see it in discussion with the position of others"; in contrast, Hegel tells us that we will fully understand the point and meaning of his philosophy only when we set aside what his contemporaries think and simply follow the development of the various parts of his philosophy.

I claim to have shown that Beiser's argument for the thesis that the future of *Hegelforschung* lies on the path of *Konstellationsforschung* is quite problematic. Two major points have been made in support of this claim. Firstly, genuine *Hegelforschung* is not necessarily "antiquarian," as Beiser thinks (call this "point 1"). Secondly, Hegel himself is categorical that *Konstellationsforschung* obstructs the understanding (and truth) of his philosophy and that this understanding (and truth) can be achieved *solely* by focusing on the development of the subject matter *within* his philosophical system (call this "point 2").

With regard to point 2, two instances of truth should be distinguished, none of which entails the other: (a) the truth of point 2 itself and (b) the truth of Hegel's claim in point 2. As

concerns the truth of point 2 itself, it is my contention that I have provided strong evidence for it—as I have done for the truth of point 1. But nothing has been said for or against the truth of Hegel's claim in point 2. If one vouches for this truth, one is obliged to accept that the future of *Hegelforschung* lies on the path of reconstructing and, wherever possible, advancing the immanent development of the Hegelian categories. What the Hegel scholar should do in this case is elucidate and maybe advance the dialectical moves of the categories, their content and logical interrelations in the Hegel corpus by staying strictly within the framework provided by this corpus. Contrary to received opinion, the scholar should avoid comparison of Hegel's work with the work of other contemporary philosophers, and the analysis or examination of the text should be pursued in a largely ahistorical context. Such an approach to the study of Hegel has not been completely foreign to Hegel research.<sup>30</sup>

It has now become clear that the truth of Hegel's claim in point 2 undermines not only the identification of *Hegelforschung* with *Konstellationsforschung* but also the identification of *Hegelforschung* with historical research in general. The reason for this is that Hegel's passionate attack against *Konstellationsforschung* befalls not only the value of referring to an epochal *Konstellationsforschung* thinkers but also the value of referring externally to any philosopher whomever. Indeed, Hegel's absolutely internal criterion of understanding and truth leaves no room for "comparative" and "genealogical" research that is done from a standpoint that is external to Hegel's system of philosophy.<sup>31</sup>

It should be emphatically noted, however, that the truth of Hegel's claim in point 2 does not annihilate the possibility that *Konstellationsforschung* or historical research in general can still have a presence in *Hegelforschung*—a possibility that is permitted by the truth of point 1. Bringing Hegel's philosophy (including his

30. See, for example, John W. Burbidge, *On Hegel's Logic: Fragments of a Commentary* (New Jersey: Humanities P, 1981) and *The Logic of Hegel's "Logic"* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview P, 2006); Richard Dien Winfield, *From Concept to Objectivity: Thinking through Hegel's Subjective Logic* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006); Friedrike Schück, *Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik—metaphysische Letztbegründung oder Theorie logischer Formen?* (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1994); and Werner Salomon, *Urteil und Selbstverhältnis: Kommentierende Untersuchung zur Lehre vom Urteil in Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1982).

31. Within the system a historical figure, for example Parmenides, is studied merely as a ready-at-hand example of the standpoint of reducing ontological reality to mere, indeterminate being, not for any deeper scholarly discoveries about the historical Parmenides. (I am grateful to Clark Butler for this observation.)

dialectical method) into dialogue with the philosophies of his contemporaries or any other philosophies may help us find a solution to externally posed philosophical problems (such as the problem of Pyrrhonian skepticism or the mind-body problem) or see why these philosophies are one-sided.<sup>32</sup> The truth of Hegel's claim in point 2 does, nonetheless, logically exclude the possibility that this presence can benefit our understanding of Hegel's philosophy or help us determine its truth-value.

Moreover, the truth of Hegel's claim in point 2 does *not* commit Hegel to a denial of the claim that his philosophy (or parts of his philosophy) is (are) the result of historical processes or of previous developments in the history of philosophy.<sup>33</sup> It also does *not* commit him to the claim that his philosophy will not give rise to other philosophies or that other philosophies will not attempt to incorporate or overcome his philosophy. But if Hegel's claim in point 2 is true, he is committed to the claim that the understanding (and truth) of his philosophy is not benefitted by a consideration of either consequent or antecedent philosophies.

Note, in addition, that the truth of Hegel's claim in point 2 does not commit him to a denial of the view that his philosophy has raised all previous philosophy to a "higher form." But it is not entailed from this that Hegel's philosophy will be raised to a "higher form" by some other philosophy. This possibility is excluded by the truth of Hegel's claim in point 2. This truth, nevertheless, does not exclude the possibility that Hegel's philosophy will be raised to a "higher form" than the one he himself produced from within itself. This is, in fact, a basic function of *Hegel's* *philosophy*: to examine the corpus of the forms of consciousness and the logical categories in Hegel's system and make apparent any possible enrichment of it with new subforms of consciousness or logical categories by staying solely within that system.

Hegel is not a fallibilist with respect to either the forms of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* or the logical categories in the other parts of his philosophy, but he does leave open the possibility

32. In general, the truth of Hegel's claim in point 2 does *not* entail that Hegel is opposed to an attempt to "re-conceive the [dialectical] method more generally as a method for purposes beyond the reconstruction of Hegel's system of philosophy" to an inquiry that "ask[s] whether his method is available to us in obtaining results going beyond his own." Clark Butler, *The Dialectical Method: A Treatise Hegel Never Wrote* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2012), 241n2, 11.

33. So Hegel would not have a problem with, for example, Butler's insightful attempt to show that the Hegelian dialectical method, as based on dialectical logic, has sources in ancient Greek thought. See Butler, *The Dialectical Method*, 9, 19–62.

that the existing corpus can arrive at a richer content from within itself.<sup>34</sup> But even if he were a fallibilist, this would not by itself undermine the truth of Hegel's claim in point 2. That *Konstelationsforschung* plays no role in either the understanding or the determination of the truth-value of Hegel's philosophy is perfectly compatible with Hegel being a fallibilist, since the (hypothetical) discovery and correction of errors within the system could be resolved with resources taken solely from within the system.<sup>35</sup>

34. The claim that Hegel is a fallibilist with respect to the forms of consciousness has been made by Kenneth Westphal; see Westphal, *Hegel's Epistemological Realism* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), 110; and Westphal, *Hegel's Epistemology: A Philosophical Introduction to the "Phenomenology of Spirit"* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 45–47, 49–50, 54, 81. A detailed argument against Westphal's claim can be found in Ioannis Trisokkas, *Pyrrhonian Scepticism and Hegel's Theory of Judgement: A Treatise on the Possibility of Scientific Inquiry* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 71–92. Hegel is not a fallibilist with respect to the forms of consciousness because the truth of the system of logical categories would then be perennially conditioned upon the phenomenology of consciousness, which is something that Hegel denies. He is also not a fallibilist with respect to the logical categories because all the categories and localized groups of categories that have emerged immanently from pure indeterminate being are perennially true, even if only partially. The only concept of falsity that is operative in the system of Hegel's logical philosophy is partiality; see Trisokkas, *Pyrrhonian Scepticism*, 318–30, for a full justification of this claim.

35. This is a point that Westphal fails to notice. He writes:

Central to Hegel's account of "determinate negation" is his thesis that a theory of knowledge (like any other philosophical theory) can only be justified through a thorough, strictly internal critique of alternative theories of knowledge. However, the alternative theories of knowledge form no closed series. Since Hegel published the *Phenomenology* in 1807, a wide range of new theories of knowledge have been developed, along with new variants of older theories of knowledge. All of these must be carefully considered in order to reassess and so far as possible preserve, improve, or if need be diminish the justification of an epistemology, whether Hegel's or any other. (*Hegel's Epistemology*, 46–47)

Westphal makes two mistakes here. First, a form of consciousness (a "theory of knowledge," in Westphal's parlance) can, for Hegel, only be justified through an internal critique of itself, not through a critique of alternative forms of knowledge. Second, he switches the subject matter from forms of consciousness to Hegel's own epistemology—and he thinks he is able to do this precisely because he believes that this epistemology is a form of consciousness. Hegel's own epistemology, however, is not a form of consciousness, but rather the logical standpoint. The only relational proof that is present in the *Phenomenology* is the one that involves the relation between the standpoint of consciousness and the logical standpoint. Hegel justifies the starting point, and only this, of the logical perspective by showing how the standpoint of consciousness leads itself to destruction by self-examining all possible basic forms of itself. The standpoint of consciousness collapses when its concept cannot produce any more basic forms of itself for examination—this happens when the concept is exhausted, to wit, when there is no more basic content structured in terms of consciousness to be revealed. This is exactly what happens in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Westphal's project, then, to justify Hegel's epistemology by showing that there are internal problems in such external epistemologies as Bernard Russell's and



analytic<sup>39</sup> philosophy, one has a clearer and improved understanding of Hegel's philosophy. If there is nothing more to this dispute, if it is only a conflict of feelings, there is no way to decide which one is right. But, to be sure, for this to be decided, philosophical research of a different kind than the one pursued in the present paper is required.

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Now, as noted earlier, Hegel's claim in point 2 may be false. In this case, *Konstellationsforschung* or historical research in general may have the ability to improve our understanding of Hegel's philosophy and even contribute to the determination of its truth-value—a possibility that is permitted by the truth of point 1. For example, one may argue that by using the tools of analytic philosophy and current logic one can remove many obscurities arising from Hegel's difficult prose and shed light on his various arguments. Such a claim, though, is a far cry from Beiser's contention that *Hegelforschung* should be identified with *Konstellationsforschung*. Whereas the claim in question allows for a variety of research methods and approaches in the study of Hegel, even ahistorical ones, Beiser's contention leads to an authoritarian, almost tyrannical, exclusion of ahistorical, purely logical methods and approaches from the domain of *Hegelforschung*.

It all, then, comes down to whether Hegel's claim in point 2 is true or false. Is there a way for us to decide this on the collective level of "the community of *Hegelforscher*"? I do not believe there is, as, to my mind, the only criterion here available is a psychological one. One claims that when one reads Hegel's *Science of Logic* or his *Phenomenology of Spirit* carefully and without involving the ideas of any other philosopher, one has the feeling that one has a perfect understanding of it—and that as soon as one conditions this understanding upon a *Konstellation* of ideas, be this the *Konstellation* of the ideas of Kant's and Hegel's contemporaries or the *Konstellation* of twentieth-century analytic philosophy, it gets confused and unclear. But another one may have the complete opposite feeling, to wit, that by placing Hegel's philosophy in the framework of Kantian<sup>36</sup> or post-Kantian<sup>37</sup> or post-Hegelian<sup>38</sup> or

Frederick Dretske's does not find support in Hegel's own thought.

36. Examples of Hegel scholars who believe that examination of Hegel's philosophy in the framework of Kant's philosophy is beneficial for our understanding of the former are many: see, for example, Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989); Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Dialectic: The Explanation of Possibility* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1988); and Robert Stern, *Hegel, Kant and the Structure of the Object* (London: Routledge, 1990).

37. See Beiser, *German Idealism*; Dieter Henrich, *Konstellationen: Probleme und Debatten am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie (1789–1795)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991); Dieter Henrich, *Grundlegung aus dem Ich: Untersuchungen zur Vorgeschichte des Idealismus, Tübingen-Jena (1790–1794)* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004); and Paul Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005).

38. See Karin de Boer, *Thinking in the Light of Time: Heidegger's Encounter with Hegel*

(New York: State U of New York P, 2000); Ian Fraser, *Hegel and Marx: The Concept of Need* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1998); and Jan Mieszkowski, "Derrida, Hegel, and the Language of Finitude," *Postmodern Culture* 15.3 (2005): 16–37.

39. See Robert Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002), 178–209; Butler, *The Dialectical Method*, 81–115; and Westphal, *Hegel's Epistemology*.

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