

Exposition and Recognition: Preparing Subjective Logic in Hegel's *Science of Logic*

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1. Plato and dialectics

Plato's phrase '*logon didonai*' belongs to the oldest and maybe shortest descriptions concerning the essence of philosophical activity. It is regularly used by Socrates, who asks his interlocutors 'to give a reason' – i.e., to justify a claim made in a conversation about a certain subject. In many of Plato's early dialogues, this call for justification leads to an elucidation of the implicit presuppositions and premises, to the relevant part of the interlocutor's belief system which explicitly has to be brought into play in order to defend or sometimes just to understand the original claim. In most of these cases, Socrates identifies a contradiction or a misfit between possible consequences or applications of the claim made and the interlocutor's set of beliefs. Given that the interlocutor shows a rudimentary interest in maintaining what one could call a coherent personality, he is thus compelled to specify, to improve or to give up his original claim, which one might see as the strategic goal of this *elenchus*.¹ This pattern of dialogical argumentation obviously has its origin in the sophistic challenge as it was understood by Plato. But its scope is not limited to ethical or educational matters. The dialectical method, understood as a virtue of conceptual analysis and encompassing conceptual organization, is held to be the philosophical method *per se*.

One can easily point out two distinctive aspects of the Socratic *elenchus*: On the one hand, it reveals a context of beliefs which are meant to explain and support a certain claim or opinion. As this context is organized at least potentially by certain rational or intelligible structures, the Socratic dialectic moreover elucidates the corresponding conceptual framework in which this context of beliefs might or should be embedded. It clarifies the meaning and the explanatory force of concepts and convictions which have been brought into play, and by this means indicates an actual or at least a possible justification of a proposition by means of conceptual structures, i.e. by forms or ideas. The later Plato's method of *dibairesis* can be seen as a sophisticated strategy to uncover the hierarchical structure of such a conceptual framework in detail. On the other hand, *Elenchus* aims at what one might call the illocutionary force of a *contradiction*. The interlocutor cannot just repeat the original claim; rather he has to deal with the incoherence of his utterances, to give a new or improved account of the subject in question. Or he has to leave the stage in favour of a better opponent – as Cephalos does in Plato's *Republic*.

These epistemological implications of the Socratic dialectic have to be enhanced by a third aspect, by no means of lesser importance. This feature concerns the idealistic ontology according to which *forms* are the true objects of dialectical thinking. As we may extract from the *Republic* (for instance, from the simile of the sun or the divided line), forms must not be understood as instrumental tools of thinking, as if their function were to organize empirical, non-eidetic content. The forms themselves are the only true content of thinking. Dialectics in the Platonic tradition is thus more than just a sophistic strategy in oral disputes or a tool in defense of dogmatic metaphysics (as in Zeno). The Platonic dialectic provides a reflection on the very nature of *thinking in concepts*, which at the same time uncovers the structure of philosophical description of the universe, such as it is accessible to human thinking. To sum up, as the method of philosophical thinking the dialectical enterprise is characterized by (i) the exposition of a relevant system of concepts or forms relative to a certain claim, (ii) the emergence of a contradiction for any substantial claim, (iii)

the idealist ontology, according to which reality in its true sense depends on thought, i.e. concepts as forms. A theory of dialectical thinking is thus a discourse on epistemology as well as metaphysics.

There is no doubt that Hegel considered himself part of the idealist Platonic tradition of dialectical philosophy, in contrast to both the skeptical and the dogmatic use of dialectics (see also Gadamer 1961). Explicitly criticizing Kant's devaluation of dialectical thinking, he defends the ontological implications of dialectics.² One might say that Hegel's dialectic fuses the three aspects of dialectical thinking mentioned above into the unity of one single movement. We are thus to understand contradictions as necessary moments within the process of the exposition of the system of our basic ontological and logical concepts. By this means, this conceptual system reveals the very essence of the intelligible world, that is, the world in its truth.

2. Hegel and the reanimation of dialectics

Contrary to Kant and like Plato, Hegel holds that it is crucial 'to see that thought is dialectical in its very nature and that, as understanding, it must fall into contradiction, the negative of itself [...]' (GW 20, 51). In this sentence Hegel defends the view that philosophical concepts may at first glance be understood as finite determinations which establish a semantic content or meaning of a predicate opposed to its opposite. As understanding, thinking is inclined to stick to finite oppositions of predicates of for instance freedom or necessity, one or many, being or nothing. As understanding is the faculty of judging or predicating, predicates must neither contradict themselves nor may opposite predicates be predicated of the same subject. What is held to be free can thus not be necessitated; what is as one cannot be many etc. On the level of understanding, it seems to be rational to refer to the world via these fixed and exclusive concepts. But this form of rationality underestimates both the complexity of the world and of the concepts in their true semantic relatedness. As Hegel learned from Plato's *Parmenides*, the concept of the *one* cannot even be articulated if it is not thought in conjunction

with its opposite, the *many*. One might object that somebody, say, the thinking subject, deliberately contrasts the concept of the *one* with the concept of the *many*, thereby creating an opposition between them which was not there to begin with. But this is obviously wrong. The claim is that it is necessary to presuppose the concept of the 'many' any time one is about to state the concept of the 'one' and vice versa. It follows that the opposition is not secondary, but belongs to the very heart of our conceptual development. Provocatively speaking, the 'one' is the 'many', as Hegel likes to phrase this point in what he calls a 'speculative sentence'.

Accordingly, Hegel claims a logical and ontological priority of *negation* rather than plain affirmation or brute posture. Negation functions in its various forms as that which makes both concepts and entities distinct and different from each other. *Omnis determinatio est negatio* – this famous sentence by Spinoza, quoted in the first part of the *Science of Logic* (GW 21, 101; SL 113), is at the centre of Hegel's methodological and ontological convictions. In its original Spinozian sense, however, this sentence underestimates the speculative power of negation and comprehends its function only in abstraction, i.e. rather superficially and ontologically insufficiently. What has to be understood and articulated is the *self-determination* of the system of concepts as a self-revealing *process* of negation. This means that the oppositions of the discursive power of understanding (like movement and stance, form and content, being and nothingness etc.), must not be understood as immediate or external determinations. Speculative thinking or reason acknowledges and articulates the unity of these oppositions, thereby providing a proper insight into the conceptual structures at stake in their systematic relatedness.

It therefore simply does not suffice to enumerate different aspects of dialectics. Simply claiming that the exposition of a system of concepts or a framework of forms together with the emergence of a contradiction for any substantial claim are at the centre of the Socratic *elenchus* offers nothing more than just an abstract way of cataloguing dialectical items; it does not provide a real understanding of the philosophical issue. One

has to show the one as the essence of the other, to show the necessity and self-reflexivity of this relation and thereby articulate the *unity* of the oppositions at issue. Speaking in the Hegelian tongue, this means one has to comprehend truth not only as a substance, but as a subject.

In the *Science of Logic* Hegel thus explores the possibility to regain an understanding of dialectics which has gone through the modern idea of subjectivity. More specifically, Hegel is convinced that a compelling reconstruction of the *Logic* necessarily has to uncover the underlying dialectical movement in terms of subjectivity. The *Logic*, which is supposed to be both the most difficult (the most abstract) and the easiest (since its content is nothing but one's own thinking) science among the philosophical sciences, thus contains the acquisition and the recollection of thoughts within pure thinking. It aims towards what one could call the 'recognition of the concept'. This expression highlights Hegel's conviction that the philosophical exploration of the *Logic* in the sense just mentioned has to be understood in analogy to the movement of *subjectivity*. Its essence is the *freedom* of real comprehension. It thus adds a fourth aspect to the Platonic dialectic. It maintains freedom to be at the very heart of an idealistic ontology. Hegel's idealism does not regard freedom as Kantian moral freedom, nor as freedom of the will, as it often is understood in recent debates. The roots of political freedom are neither to be found in a discourse on natural rights, nor in an anthropological theory about human biological indeterminacy. Prior to these undoubtedly important dimensions is nonetheless the *metaphysical* understanding of freedom. A metaphysical account of freedom implies the idea that any entity which is considered to be free must recognize the condition of its actual existence as its own.³ Hegel's *Logic* articulates this insight, as it promotes a theory of thought which compounds subjectivity (as it had been introduced in Kant's idea of the transcendental Ego) and the concept of the *concept*. This means that one has to understand the philosophical structure of subjectivity as the structure of the concept in its speculative sense. And *vice versa*: one has to understand the concept in terms of subjectivity. This is the double meaning of the expression 'the recognition of the concept'.

The following considerations might enlighten parts of the path leading to this figure, a path which goes through the field of what I shall call Hegel's *hermeneutic idealism*.

This agenda has its textual basis not in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but in the *Science of Logic*, which Hegel took to be his major work concerning metaphysics. The overall aim of this difficult and maybe even monstrous book is to produce the fundamental concepts of all that is through an exhaustive presentation of the system of pure thought. In contrast to Hegel's *Phenomenology* (see among others Pöggeler 1993, Pinkard 1994, Siep 2000, Stern 2002), we do not yet possess a convincing commentary on⁴ or plausible reconstruction of the main line of argumentation of the *Science of Logic*.⁵ While *Phenomenology* was considered Hegel's predominant masterpiece for many years, one can observe an increasing interest in the *Logic* within the last four decades. Scholars have mainly been interested in selected parts of this work, especially its beginning,⁶ or in methodological questions, the answers to which allegedly might enlighten the function and the validity of the inherent dialectical movement (i.e. Henrich 1978a and 1978b, Quante 1996, Koch 1999). In recent years important efforts have finally been undertaken to give an account of the meaning and the philosophical actuality of the systematic ambitions of the *Science of Logic* (Burbridge 1981, Pippin 1989). Furthermore, prominent modern philosophers like John McDowell and Robert Brandom do not hesitate to refer affirmatively to Hegelian thoughts in a way that is suitable to introducing Hegel's speculative thinking to hitherto reluctant philosophical traditions. But although the *Logic* has thus become the subject of increasing, serious philosophical interest, there is still a lot of work to do in order to promote a satisfying understanding of this book and its philosophical agenda.

Having thus depicted the background for Hegelian thinking from the perspective of the Platonic dialectic, I shall now outline some considerations which outline an agenda for idealistic philosophy in a Hegelian sense and are connected to what I take to be central thoughts of the *Science of Logic*. These thoughts are expressed in the following four claims:

- a) Hegel aims at the true theory of *absolute rationality* as a philosophy of pure thought.
- b) For rationality or a theory of rationality to be absolute in the Hegelian sense, it has necessarily to be (i) *self-referential* and (ii) *self-explicatory*.
- c) Hegel considers the principle of *subjectivity* to be the appropriate *metaphysical* role model for the ambition raised in (a) and (b).
- d) Hegel considers the speculative *concept* to provide the *logical* structure of subjectivity as it is maintained in (c).

In what follows I will try to give a more or less Hegelian account of the claims made in (a) and (b). When it comes to (c) and (d), I will try to promote what can be called a *hermeneutic idealism*, which is based on a methodological concept presented as a transitory stage by Hegel at the end of the second part of his *Logic*, the concept of 'exposition' (*Auslegung*). In Hegel's line of argument this hermeneutic perspective paves the way for metaphysics in its true sense, i.e. as '*subjective logic*'. Not that Hegel ever considered this 'post-metaphysical idealism' to be a serious philosophical option for modern thinking. At the end of the day, 'recognition' – possibly the key term in Hegel's philosophy of subjectivity – is held to be superior to the concept of exposition. What I thus try to identify is just an intermezzo in Hegel's screenplay, a last orientation on the way to the *logic of subjectivity*.

3. A theory of absolute rationality

Most philosophers would apparently aim at a theory of rationality, but not a theory of *absolute* rationality. However, the systematic task of *Phenomenology of Spirit* is just to prepare the possibility of such an ambitious enterprise. With respect to the topic of this paper, a brief summary of the relevant perspective from the *Phenomenology*, as it is presented at the beginning of the *Logic*, should be sufficient to give us an idea of what is meant by *absolute* rationality.

Rationality might be understood as the ultimate resource for justification. When asked why a certain claim is held to be true, one tries to

give a sufficient reason, usually by presupposing the acceptance of the relevant discourse of justification. Depending on whether the issue at stake deals with an empirical fact, an aesthetic judgment or an ethical decision, one will rather automatically enter into different discourses of rationality and justification.⁷ Hegel thinks he has shown that all these different discourses might be appropriate with respect to certain limited problems. But since they are related to a certain area, they are not patterns of rationality *per se*. Moreover, these discourses are not just different from each other without any relatedness, as if one could choose among them according to private preferences or mere tradition. The phenomenological analysis shows the insufficiency of every discourse in its own terms, which necessitates the transition to a new, more complex stage, providing another, improved, more encompassing discourse of rationality. Hegel calls these discourses *features of the consciousness* ('*Gestalten des Bewußtseins*'); and the *Phenomenology* provides a report of the philosophical genesis of all (or at least all philosophically relevant) forms or features of consciousness in terms of a 'science of the experience of consciousness'.

Speaking in terms of literature, the process of cultivation or *Bildung* of the consciousness narrated in the *Phenomenology* results in the insight of the inaccuracy of all the oppositions and contrasts which used to be basic convictions of both the pre-philosophical common sense as well as of Hegel's philosophical predecessors. Following Hegel's narrative, we have undergone an ongoing extension of our horizons, motivated solely through dialectical experiences, i.e. through the inability to articulate or just to understand a realized feature of the consciousness by means of this feature itself. The transition to a new feature or a new perspective thus comes from within due to what one might call the first rule of Hegelian philosophy, the demand for *proper articulation*. The term 'proper articulation' designates rather modestly the aim of the phenomenological enterprise, which from a first person's perspective can be phrased as my ambition to say what I mean, i.e. to articulate my beliefs concerning what I take to be true, what I recognize as significant and normative in both theory and praxis. As I usually presuppose certain implicit episte-

mological, ontological, metaphysical or ethical standards and convictions, I quickly realize that it is not so easy to articulate properly what I really mean. The ultimate ideal of this experience of articulation would be the identity of my opinion and my expression, between the form of a thought and its content. It turns out that the unpretending ambition of proper articulation entails nothing less than a clue to Hegel's holistic expressionism. The experience of consciousness terminates in 'absolute knowledge' as its ultimate form. First at this stage is it possible to say what one means, when the unity between form and content, subject and object, the object of knowledge and the object itself, evidence and truth is finally accomplished.

The *Logic*, however, does not deal with forms or features of consciousness, but with pure concepts or thoughts which no longer contain the oppositions of consciousness. It can be conceived as a process of an all-encompassing *auto-poiesis* of the fundamental concepts of being and thinking. These concepts or categories are supposed to be logically developed out of each other, so that the conceptual universe has to be understood as a continuum of thought rather than as a system of isolated or abstract distinctions. The semantic content of these concepts, as well as inferential and normative conceptual relations and the overall standards of rationality have to be worked out in their necessary and systematic configuration. According to its author, the *Logic* thereby accomplishes a 'system of pure reason', a precise map of the logical infrastructure of the universe. In a remark not quite as humble as the above mentioned Platonic phrase concerning *logon didonai*, Hegel claims the content of the *Logic* to be 'the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind' (GW 21, 34). Thus Hegel's project aims at a theory of absolute rationality.

4. Features of the absolute: self-reflexivity and self-explication

Most philosophers would subscribe to the reflexivity of a theory of rationality. This means that a theory of rationality itself has to meet the rational standards it is about to work out. At first glance this characteristic

might look like a triviality. Hegel's dialectic, however, does not only meet its own standards; it contains many examples where the dialectical progress is gained by applying a concept or a conceptual relation to the concept or relation itself. Instead of avoiding antinomies by prohibiting self-reference, Hegel's dialectical method makes use of self-referential arguments in various forms. In many cases this requires that a concept should be a member of the class it denotes. If containing negations, self-referential propositions may lead into logical antinomies, which motivate the need for a better, more adequate conception in which the antipodes can be dissolved, conserved and raised (the three distinctive meanings of the German word '*aufheben*').⁸

However, probably few philosophers, if any, would hold that a theory of rationality should be designed in such a way that the exposition or explanation of the standards of rationality belongs to the very heart of the employed concept of rationality itself. This is nevertheless the position of Hegel. Hegel holds the view that the true concept of rationality substantiates its own actuality, insofar as it shows the necessity of its own development, i.e. its philosophical articulation and – with regards for instance to ethics or political life in general – its socio-practical employment. The philosophy of spirit develops this thought in its systematic implications in detail with regards to laws, world history, aesthetics and religion. The *Logic* deals with the metaphysical fundament of this systematic enterprise. My suggestion is to read Hegel's philosophy in general and the *Logic* in particular as the self-exposition of rationality. Hegel's idealistic theory of absolute rationality is self-explicatory in the sense that it exposes the genesis of conceptual content as an internal process within pure thinking. The movement which keeps this process going relies in nothing but the need for clarification and articulation, i.e. interpretation of primary concepts. It is important not to underestimate the metaphysical implications of this thought. It means that we strictly speaking are not allowed to think of the *Logic* as a book written by a certain individual named Hegel. Probably most books at least in philosophy have a more or less intelligible structure, which presents a subject in a

more or less natural way, so that the reader recognizes the composition of a somehow necessary connection between the chapters of the book including some progression towards a conclusion. We are inclined to praise the author for her success in doing so, and we blame her if she fails. But when it comes to Hegel's *Logic*, neither the author of the book nor its readers are considered to be agents in any substantial sense. The theory of rationality Hegel has in mind encompasses its own articulation in the various philosophical approaches provided by the history of philosophy, which together culminate in the single presentation of the system of thought as it is presented in the *Science of Logic*. As odd as it seems, the true philosophizing subject is nobody but the speculative *Logic* itself. The double-meaning in the title of the book is no coincidence. The *Logic* is both the object and the subject of this philosophical enterprise, the subject presented and presenting itself for itself – or it is what Hegel calls the *idea*.

The *Science of Logic* as the 'drama of God's presentation' consists of three parts. Part one, the *logic of being*, and part two, the *logic of essence*, are gathered together as *objective logic*. Part three, the *logic of the concept*, is also called *subjective logic* by Hegel. These three parts each represent a different way of explaining what one might call conceptual relatedness. These modes of relatedness are in themselves teleologically organized, so that the third part has to be understood as the fulfillment or the termination of the two first parts. According to Hegel, they represent fundamental paradigms in the history of philosophy, culminating with the modern philosophy of subjectivity.

Roughly speaking, the *logic of being* deals with distinctions which have to be taken in their simple relation to themselves or simplicity. Categories like 'being', 'determinate being' or 'something' pretend to be semantically self-sufficient, to denote ontological content or qualities in a straightforward way. The articulation of what is really said when 'being' is stated reveals the relatedness of 'being' to its counterpart, 'nothing', since 'being' has to be grasped as indeterminate immediacy without any distinctive qualification whatsoever (see GW 21, 68 ff; SL 82 ff). In its

emptiness and abstract formality the semantic content of 'being' has to be identified with the content of the concept which was supposed to be its opposite. However, this holds for nothingness as well, as it now can be said to *be*. One can thus observe a transition from being to nothingness and from nothingness to being. Instead of just understanding the simplicity of being and nothing else, it is necessary to recognize 'coming-to-be' and 'ceasing-to-be', '*entstehen und vergehen*', as the result of this effort. The supposed simplicity of ontological categories of this type cannot be defended, since there in fact are implicit conceptual relations at play, without which the meaning of the category in question cannot be articulated. Within the plot of the first part, considerations of this sort lead to what Hegel calls '*das Ineinander-Übergehen*', the mutual transition or transformation of a distinction to its richer or more articulated successor.

Whereas the dialectic of the *logic of being* shows the mediation of allegedly independent or unmediated categories with and into each other, there is another plot to be told in the *logic of essence*. The concepts presented here do not conceal the dependency of their counterpart. They are concepts of relation or 'reflection', as Hegel says. Categories like 'form' and 'content', 'the thing' and its 'qualities', 'inner' and 'outer' or 'the whole' and its 'parts' do in fact articulate their relatedness. They reflect each other in the sense that the whole is nothing without or beyond its parts, and vice versa. A category of this type does not have a different, but at first glance hidden, category as its counterpart, as was the case in the *logic of being*. In the *logic of essence*, this relation has been internalized and exposed, so that these concepts are closer to a proper articulation of their content. They 'reflect into each other', to use Hegel's description of the conceptual movement from one concept to the other. One might therefore say that the *logic of essence* displays the relatedness in itself as an essential part of each of its categories. In Hegel's view, the *logic of essence* articulates the stance of traditional pre-Kantian metaphysics, in that the basic approach of the philosophical systems from Plato to Spinoza and Leibniz is based on such pairs of categories (basically the distinction

between 'Sein' and 'Schein', *being* and *illusory being*, as the precondition for the concept of essence ('*Wesen*').

In contrast to this, the third part of the *Logic*, the *logic of the concept*, describes the dialectical movement as *development*.⁹ There can be no doubt that Hegel considered this part and its metaphysical function his true philosophical innovation within the *Science of Logic*. Objective logic, representing the metaphysical conceptions from the Pre-Socratics up to Spinoza, ultimately terminates in the logic of subjectivity. In the footsteps of Kant and Fichte, Hegel promotes the modern paradigm of subjectivity and freedom. But in contrast to Kant, he tries to articulate the metaphysical foundation in terms of a logic which is not bound by anthropological subjective limitations like transcendental logic.¹⁰ Thought delimits and expresses itself and is not bound by finite human thinking.

5. Between Substance and Subject: Hegel's Hermeneutic Idealism

These superficial remarks should be sufficient in order to prepare the claim I wish to defend. Given the agenda presented thus far, one can easily grasp the importance of the transition from *objective* to *subjective logic*. The specifications made in (2) and the qualifications made in (3) and (4) can be explained by a necessarily superficial reading of the last chapter of the *Logic of Essence*, entitled actuality ('*Wirklichkeit*').¹¹ In this chapter the auto-poietic process of a dialectical reconstruction of the ontological and metaphysical categories has reached the concept of the *Absolute* as the ultimate conceptual characteristic for that which is. This category describes the highest point of pre-Kantian metaphysical understanding as it was presented by Spinoza. To think the category of the Absolute means to recognize the world in its manifoldness and countless specifications as a unified One. It cannot be thought as being conditioned or related to something beyond or outside this unity. Actuality thought as the Absolute is what it is; it is in its appearance. It does not stand in relation to something else as its true essence or cause of existence. It is not the appearance of a thing in itself, nor is it the thing in itself in contrast to

its appearance. It entails all its relations in itself. In order to understand the Absolute, it should be pointed out that there is no thinkable entity which itself would not be a part or a feature, an attribute or a mode of the Absolute. The Absolute therefore cannot be thought as a concept of an *entity* or the *class* of entities, since this ontological simplicity would be inaccurate regarding the conceptual complexity which has to be expressed. Strictly speaking, the category of the Absolute denotes a metaphysical *relation* or, more precisely, a relation of totalities. This means that both elements of this relation already refer to the entirety of that which is. This line of argumentation reveals the structure of metaphysical monism as it was maintained by Spinoza.

Spinoza's metaphysics of substance defended the unity of substance in spite of the apparently undeniable Cartesian bias between thinking and matter or extension. Spinoza maintained understanding as the mode of substance according to the attribute of thinking, and the physical body as the mode of substance according to the attribute of extension. Understanding and body have to be substantially identical, as they do not limit or constrain each other. Each attribute is a feature of substance as a whole. Both are thus entire expressions of the Absolute. Ontologically speaking, there are not two distinct entities, understanding and body, but two perspectives or relations, each displaying substance in its entirety.

Before explaining why the metaphysical Absolute grasped as substance is not sufficient to satisfy the requirements for a philosophical theory in the Hegelian sense, I shall dwell a little bit on the implications of the need to unfold the category of the Absolute for the dialectical enterprise itself. The problem is this: If the Absolute should really be understood as absolute, one cannot give an adequate conceptual determination defining this category as a concept distinct from other concepts, since this would entail some sort of external relation. Not only is there the need to give an account of the semantic content of this concept, but the dialectical elaboration has to be performed in accordance with its subject, i.e. absolutely, rather than in external reflection or determination.

But if the semantic content of this category cannot be *determined*, how

are we to understand the Absolute, given that the tautological declaration – the Absolute is really absolute – does not suffice? Hegel introduces a slight shift in his methodological instrumentation. We are no longer in a discourse of determination or definition. The dialectical movement can no longer be understood as a *transition* from one category to another (as it could in the *logic of being*), nor can it be grasped as the *reflection into its other* (as it could in the *logic of essence* up to now).¹² We are now in a discourse of *Auslegung* and *Manifestation*, *exposition* and *manifestation*. As Hegel puts it:

But we have to exhibit what the absolute is; but this ‘exhibiting’ can be neither a determining nor an external reflection from which determinations of the absolute would result; on the contrary, it is the *exposition*, and in fact the *self-exposition*, of the absolute and only, and only a *display of what it is* (GW 21, 370/SL 530).¹³

For a moment we are thus in a discourse of *interpretation*, in a hermeneutic discourse, ruled by the logic of *Auslegung*. Hegel even claims this interpretative enterprise to be the self-interpretation of the Absolute. The dialectic of the Absolute displays a movement which, strictly speaking, has always already taken place. Its own interpretation must therefore be understood as a manifestation, as showing or *displaying* what it is.

I take this consideration to represent Hegel’s hermeneutic idealism. It is hermeneutic in the sense that its primary mode is that of interpretation, exposition or *Auslegung*. It is a sort of idealism in the Platonic sense, in that the mode of *Auslegung* or exposition concedes the self-sufficiency of the dialectical movement developed so far and its last result, the Absolute. This stance thus explicitly acknowledges that philosophy cannot perform its task unless it understands itself as a moment of the exposition of the Absolute. However, this insight contains important implications with regard to the categories and concepts developed thus far. From the point of view of hermeneutic idealism one can recognize the former distinctions given in the *logic of being* and the *logic of essence* as the *negative*

exposition of the Absolute (see GW 21, 371/SL 531). This means we can understand these categories as belonging to the Absolute because they necessarily lead to the Absolute, in which they ‘have returned as into their foundation’ (GW 21, 372/SL 532). Part one and two of the *Science of Logic* can thus be seen as systematically insufficient efforts towards a determination of the Absolute,¹⁴ showing what it is not.

The movement of *Auslegung* or exposition obviously presents a paradigm of semantic relations different from the paradigm of predicative determination. Like translation, *Auslegung* establishes what Hegel calls an ‘absolute relation’, since both interpretandum and interpretation have to be regarded as totalities. The dialectic between parts and whole, presented in the previous paragraph of the *Logic*, has now been doubled up. There are now two parts-whole relations embedded in the relation of the Absolute and its *Auslegung*. Moreover, the dialectical movement up to this point had made explicit those semantic and conceptual structures which could be understood as the implicit presuppositions of the relevant logical stage. But this had been done under the heading of *determination*, whereas *Auslegung* makes the movement from implicit presuppositions to explicit determinations explicitly. Now the dialectical movement no longer serves to unmask or unveil something which has not said from the start; it acknowledges the explication of the thought as belonging to the thought itself. The next step would be to grasp this movement not as necessary determination, but as free development, as the *logic of subjectivity* would argue. But this destination can only be reached via the logic of *Auslegung*, which is located between necessity and freedom or determination and development within Hegelian *Logic*.

Hegel presumably reflected on the theological origins of the concept of *Auslegung*, a notion which unmistakably declares a turning point within the logical enterprise. There cannot be a concept beyond the Absolute. All we have to do is to start once again, now in a modus of self-display or self-interpretation of the Absolute. This means that although the ontological and metaphysical analyses were not satisfying, we do not need to look for a more sophisticated set of metaphysical categories. Instead,

the work done so far has to be reinterpreted in the perspective of the self-explication of the Absolute. This shift of perspective is performed in the transition from the category of substance to the concept of subjectivity. It leads the enterprise of *objective logic* to its reorganization or recognition in *subjective logic*. Its first concept is consequently the concept of the concept. It is crucial to understand that this transition is the step from exposition to recognition. The Absolute does not only manifest itself as itself; this self-manifestation has to be *for* itself, i.e. the structure described as 'actuality' has to be aware of its own actualizing process. Self-interpretation, which is the movement of the Absolute as 'the display of what it is' according to Hegel, presupposes self-awareness, or the ability to recognize both parts of the absolute relation as referring to an identical subject. In other words, the category of exposition as manifestation and display in its speculative sense leads to the idea of an identity between interpretandum, interpreter and interpretation. This structure and its identity should be understood as the structure of subjectivity. Its crucial importance legitimates and necessitates, according to Hegel, a new paradigm in ontological thinking, *the logic of subjectivity*.¹⁵

This means, however, that the logical feature I have coined hermeneutic idealism is only a transitory episode in the actual plot of the *Science of Logic*. Appropriately, the term '*Auslegung*' can only be found in the chapter I have referred to and is absent in the rest of the book. Its successor is the concept of development (*Entwicklung*). At the end of the day, the recognition of the concept is superior to its mere interpretation. Interpretation is thus a mediating activity in more than one sense. It stands in between the objective and the subjective, making the transfer or translation from the one to the other possible. This position is actually a good place for hermeneutic philosophy. It is already a part of idealism, but not yet bound to the ideal of pure transparency built on subjective recognition. This status might be suitable to explicate the systematic finitude of hermeneutic philosophy. A philosopher with a certain predilection for philosophical hermeneutics would thus appreciate this inter-esse of the term called *Auslegung*. Its being is being-in-between. To Hegel, however,

this interregnum of the Absolute and its mere interpretation is not an option. This has to do with Hegel's philosophy of subjectivity and his conviction that subjectivity is the essential metaphysical principle.

A philosophy of the Absolute must finally try to understand the exposition of the Absolute as its own articulation, as argued above. As reasonable as this is, it reveals the insufficiency of the Absolute and the kind of dialectical movement *objective logic* has provided hitherto. This conception does not yet contain the need for its self-exposition as a need for itself. Although manifestation and exposition both are movements performed by the Absolute itself, the motivation and the origin of this performance has to be provided from the outside. Substance thus cannot be considered *causa sui*, as its own cause, as Spinoza maintained. The manifestation of the Absolute in its modes, i.e. the exposition of it in the manifold of its aspects, happens in a state of what Hegel calls 'blind necessity' (GW 21, 391; SL 552).¹⁶ It is thus not absolute, as it still bears an external cause as its point of departure. The movement of manifestation has not only to happen or to be presented, but to be known as its own happening and self-presentation. This consideration motivates the transition to the spheres of the *logic of subjectivity* or, as this part of the *Logic* only has one chapter, the *logic of the concept*.

Hegel claims subjectivity to be the metaphysical principle at work not only in the *Science of Logic*, but also in the history of Western civilisation and the history of philosophy. The cognitive impact of this claim, according to which metaphysics actually has to be built upon the desire of a principle to be known – what we have encountered in a rudimentary form as the *Auslegung* of the Absolute – is founded on Hegel's theory of the concept. However, the way in which the *logic of subjectivity* could be interpreted along the lines of a figure concerning the 'recognition of the concept' calls for further reflection.

Endnotes

- 1 See, for instance, *Republic I*, the *Meno* or the *Euthyphro*, which can be considered typical examples of the kind of *elenchus* outlined here.
- 2 See, for instance, the introductory remarks to the *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* concerning the 'three positions of the thought to objectivity', esp. §§ 48 ff., GW 20, 84 ff. – References to and quotations from Hegel's works refer to the critical edition of the *Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Meiner-Verlag Hamburg). Apart from *Wissenschaft der Logik*, all translations are my own. Quotations from *Wissenschaft der Logik* are taken from the translation of A. V. Miller, references to this edition are given behind the reference to the relevant passage from the *Akademieausgabe*.
- 3 I choose the word 'entity' in order to indicate that 'freedom', as 'subjectivity', is not limited to denoting a certain quality or essence of human individuals. The metaphysical understanding of freedom and subjectivity is neither based on nor limited to the empirical human subject. It is rather the other way round.
- 4 With regard to the 'minor logic', the version given in the *Enzyklopädie*, see Stekeler-Weithofer 1992. Stekeler-Weithofer has provided a very useful outline of a commentary which tries to gain access to the Hegelian universe by actualizing its content within the framework of recent philosophy of language. He correctly points out that philological interpretations alone cannot satisfy the need for a convincing systematic approach, which his reading of the logic along the lines of neopragmatic philosophical semantics and reflection (in large parts) persuasively provides. However, due to the focus on the minor logic, Hegel's major work *Science of Logic* and the substantial differences between the two versions of the logic (for instance, concerning the transition from 'objective logic' to 'subjective logic') are not discussed by Stekeler-Weithofer in his important contribution to a systematic understanding of Hegelian logic.
- 5 An exception is the systematic reading Theunissen 1980. Theunissen tries to defend the *Logic* against the verdict of its allegedly oppressive idealism. He reconstructs the conceptual relations presented in the three parts of the *Logic* as *indifference*, *command* and *communicative freedom*, along the lines of relations in political philosophy. According to Theunissen, the true critique against traditional metaphysics (as it is exposed in the *Logic of Being* and the *Logic of Essence*) is to be found in the foundation of (political, social, individual) freedom, which is the subject of the third part of the *Logic*, the *Logic of Concept*. – In historical perspective helpful is Burkardt 1993.
- 6 See the papers collected in Horstmann 1978 and di Giovanni 1990. Wieland 1978 (in Horstmann 1978) is especially illuminative.

7 For an elaboration of these considerations, see Habermas account of rationality in the opening chapter of his *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* in Habermas (1981).

8 Among the efforts to logically reconstruct the aspect of self-referential negation in Hegel's method, see Henrich (1978a), Koch (1999), Wandschneider (1999) (although limited to the *Logic of Being*), and Kesselring (1982).

9 See Hegel's characteristic of the three modes of dialectical movement in the three parts of the *Logic* in *Enc. § 161*, GW 20, 170.

10 For a reading that presents the *logic of the concept* in analogy to Kant's synthetic a priori, especially with regard to the ontological ambition of the Hegelian enterprise, see de Boer (2004).

11 I am referring to the third division in the *Logic of Essence*, entitled "Actuality" (GW 21, 369–410; SL 529–571), with its three chapters: 1) 'The Absolute', 2) 'Actuality' (on the dialectic of the modal categories actuality, possibility and necessity), 3) 'The Absolute Relation' (on the dialectic of substantiality, causality and reciprocity).

12 See GW 21, 380, 371. See also § 161 of the *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, GW 20, 177.

13 *Es soll aber dargestellt werden, was das Absolute ist; aber diß Darstellen kann nicht ein Bestimmen noch äussere Reflexion seyn, wodurch Bestimmungen desselben würden, sondern es ist die Auslegung und zwar die eigene Auslegung des Absoluten, und nur ein Zeigen dessen was es ist.'*

14 Accordingly, Hegel calls the conceptual determinations or categories exposed in the *Science of Logic* 'definitions of the Absolute', even 'God's metaphysical definitions' (*Enc. § 85*, GW 21, 121).

15 It is worth mentioning that in this context 'recognition' is a feature of *subjectivity*, not or not yet of mutual acknowledgement or *intersubjectivity*.

16 See also the oral explanation ('Zusatz') given by Hegel in his classes of § 147 of the *Enzyklopädie* (available in the Suhrkamp edition, vol. 8, p. 289 f.).

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