

Ful-filling the Copula, Determining Nature: The Grammatical Ontology of Hegel's Metaphysics

(abstract)

Both continental and analytic traditions have tended to associate Hegel's idealism with metaphysics and therefore as divorced from and even pernicious to reality. Hence, contemporary Hegel studies have tended to concentrate on discrete elements of his philosophy while attempting to avoid its metaphysical dimensions and their systematic pretensions. I seek to show that rather than dwelling in abstraction, Hegel's metaphysics, as presented in his *Logics*, recount the thought determinations through which being comes to be grounded and thus, scientifically knowable as nature. Such categorical determining is essentially linguistic, taking place through the grammatical forms of judgment (*Urteil*) and their outcome in the syllogism. The centrality of these grammatical forms reveals the anthropological goal of Hegel's metaphysics, where the fully determined copula of judgment presents itself as the object of natural science, *for us*.

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Until their recent Anglo-American rehabilitation or reinvention, metaphysics, perhaps since Kant, have tended to be either philosophically avoided or rejected wholesale. The word itself has been taken as virtually synonymous with ideology and unscientific religiosity. Systematic metaphysical coherence has even been portrayed as harboring incipient totalitarianism. Epistemologically and politically, metaphysics have been reproached for their pernicious disregard for something called "reality".

In both the continental and analytic traditions, Hegel's philosophy has been seen as embodying all that is wrong with metaphysical endeavors. From Feuerbach to Foucault, from Great Britain to North America and beyond, the prejudice against metaphysics and the attendant yearning to sink philosophical teeth into something "real" have consequently colored Hegel's reception. Even today, if the German Idealist is no longer anathema, it is largely because most of those working on him have managed to concentrate on discrete areas of his oeuvre where they find material worthy of their own non-metaphysical interests. Thus, the so-called Pittsburgh Hegelians, Wilfrid Sellars, John McDowell and Robert Brandom, concentrate mainly on elements, in Hegel, where they find addressed their empiricist/realist concerns, for example, the Sense-Certainty chapter in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*¹.

Others, like Kenneth Westphal have read Hegel as an epistemologist; John Russon has read him as a phenomenologist; Dean Moyar and Michael Quante have read

him as an ethicist; Jere Surber has shown him to be a philosopher of language; Patricia Mills and others have found Hegel to be a rich source for feminist reflection. Robert Pippin has inspired some to see Hegel as carrying on the Kantian critical tradition². Still others, like Terry Pinkard, find Hegelian inspiration for their own political philosophies of modern liberalism.

While all of these approaches have certainly broadened and deepened Hegel studies, bringing to light new dimensions and perspectives on his thought, most contemporary Hegel scholars are still careful to avoid the metaphysical bugbears associated with him. Above all, this means deflating the systematic pretensions of Hegel's *Wissenschaft* where scholars may find themselves confronted with the spooky God-like entity he calls the Idea. Similarly, for some, *das Absolute* represents an unfortunate feature of their philosopher's idealism, an aspect that is particularly difficult to explain away in non-metaphysical terms. It often seems more prudent and "scientific" to concentrate on areas of Hegel's work where such chimeras can be set aside. Ironically, by focusing research on his specific writings on perception, consciousness, language, existence, economics, ethics, law, life, nature, politics etc., much contemporary Hegel scholarship seeks not only to preserve these "real" elements from metaphysical abstraction but to actually use them to challenge the systematicity of the very philosophy in which they make sense!

Within Hegel's system (a.k.a. Science) itself, the *Logics* are considered the privileged locus for abstract metaphysical reflection. This is understandable when, by Hegel's own account, the *Encyclopedia Logic* (EL) and the *Greater Logic* (GL, also known as the Science of Logic) are meant to articulate such purely idealist expressions as

“the Idea in the abstract element of thinking”³. Hence, far less scholarly ink is spent on the *Logics* than on other works in the oeuvre. When the *Logics* are addressed, commentators can be roughly divided into those who take the works’ metaphysical dimensions seriously and those who try to avoid them. Both are faced with difficulties. On one hand, metaphysical readers of the *Logics*, like Charles Taylor, tend to set themselves the onerous task of having to explain how all of reality follows the more or less rigorous dialectical program that Hegel’s logic supposedly presents, a task that, as Taylor himself writes, “may sound mad... to most philosophers.”⁴ On the other hand, non-metaphysical readers of the *Logics* tend to read them as divorced from any onto-theological considerations, i.e. as works of what we generally understand as “logic”: self-referential demonstrations of thought thinking itself, removed from any external foundations or presuppositions (Stephen Houlgate, John Burbidge, William Maker⁵).

Of course, these non-metaphysical approaches encounter their own challenges. How can the process of thought that Hegel describes “begin” if it has nothing presupposed to think about? How can the veracity of the *Logics*’ transitions be guaranteed without reference to anything else? More fundamentally, if we take seriously the systematic aspirations of Hegel, what is the relation between the non-metaphysical reading of the *Logics* and the other *realphilosophische* elements of the system: Nature and Spirit? The most popular response to these fundamental questions is once again to confine one’s investigations to discrete elements, this time within the *Logics* themselves⁶.

I would like to propose a metaphysical reading of Hegel’s *Logics* that fully recognizes their ontological mission without engendering the “madness” that Charles Taylor mentions above: the claim that reality runs along pre-set logical lines. At the

same time, my reading means to avoid the charge of undue, pernicious abstraction. In a word, I want to show how Hegel's *Logics* seek to ground *being* as scientifically knowable, in the form of nature⁷.

In order to begin to understand the metaphysics of Hegelian thought, we must understand the term itself in a deeper way than simply meaning "idealistic" or "abstractly conceptual" or even "ideological". I will attempt to outline how Hegel's metaphysics share the object assigned by Aristotle in his work on the subject, where they are defined as first philosophy or the science of being as being. While Hegel's *Logics* may indeed tell the tale of thought thinking itself, the truth is that thought only thinks itself to the extent that it thinks something other than itself and that otherness is being. In other words, in showing us how thought thinks itself thinking being, the *Logics* also recount the attendant determinations of being. It is through these thought determinations that being comes to be scientifically knowable *for us*. Because *we* are the thinking, determining agents involved in this account, Hegel's metaphysics, as the science of being as being, has a pronounced anthropological dimension.

Hegel's metaphysics tell us that being which is not determined, i.e. which is *not* thought of, is in fact nothing at all. Of course, hard-core materialists will maintain the contrary: reality exists independently of thought or, further still, thought itself is just another feature of material reality. However, according to Hegel, even such radical materialism is only another (metaphysical) way of *thinking* (i.e. determining) being (qua material), and as such not fundamentally different from radical (subjective) idealism, which is another one-sided way of thinking (determining) being. In fact, as thinking

agents, we are inextricably related to the worlds we determine ourselves to be in, and reciprocally, these worlds reflect an essential aspect of our thinking.

Given the anthropological dimension of metaphysics, i.e. the intimate relation between ourselves as thinking agents and determinate being, it should not be surprising that Hegel's ontological reflections are centered on a logical form that is essentially grammatical. Language mediates the relation between thought and being (between ourselves and the world) because it is the actual realization of both, i.e. words and the structures in which they take place are real, worldly occurrences invested with our thoughts. As Hegel writes, "The forms of thought are, in the first instance, displayed and maintained in language"⁸ or again, "It is in words that *we* think"⁹. If we accept our role in thinking/determining the realities that we inhabit, then we must also acknowledge the linguistic aspect of our world. Consequently, the logical forms that are present in our thinking/determining of being should also be seen as grammatical and ontological. The linguistic nature of this determinacy is perfectly appropriate with the anthropological agency of thought itself.

The fundamental grammatical form of systematic philosophy, of Hegelian *Wissenschaft*, is the predicative proposition (*Satz*) called judgment (*Urteil*)¹⁰, to use the logical terminology of the day. It is within this form that determinate being arises. This is why the GL introduces *undetermined* being as initially *nothing* in a written phrase that is *not* a proposition or judgment, in a phrase that has no copula, no conjugated verb "to be" between grammatical subject and predicate: "Being, pure being, without any further determination," Hegel begins. Such unpredicated being, he then continues, can be "nothing more nor less than nothingness"¹¹. Being appears first as totally undetermined

and consequently as nothing since there is no copula that is there to determine its existence qua something; consequently, pure being is not anything (for us) at all¹².

The reliance on judgment as the privileged form of onto-logy is understandable and even necessary if we refer back to what I take as Hegel's fundamental intuition of the agency of thought itself. Thought posits itself; it is essentially a *Setzen* and consequently must first present itself as a *Satz* (proposition). The idea of the ontological self-positing proposition is certainly derived from Fichte's much debated and discussed fundamental principle of all science, *Ich bin Ich*, a paradigmatic form of judgment which Hegel's early friend Hölderlin, in his text "Urtheil und Sein", helps him understand as the original sharing out of identity into difference¹³. As I will show, it is through the interplay between identity and difference that Hegel sees meaningful being arise in the judgment's copula.

In the *Logics*, being comes to be determined as something significant through the copula, the verb "to be" that relates subject to predicate in the logical form of determinant, predicative judgment. Such existing determination is fully expressed in neither the subject nor the predicate but in the "is" of the copula, telling us that what is determined has some degree of concrete, existing *being*. The destiny of the judgment form is the "fulfilment" of the copula and the passage to a more concrete form of linguistic determination, realized in Hegel's conception of the syllogism. This is why, in EL 180, at the end of the chapter on judgment, we find the move to the syllogism expressed as the *Erfüllung* of the copula, a term that can be translated as either fulfillment (the choice of Harris, Geraets and Suchting) or as actual filling¹⁴. I hyphenate ful-fillment in the title of this paper in order to emphasize the ambiguity of *Erfüllung*: both as the

fulfillment or destiny of the copula and its actual filling, so that the verb “to be” comes to really mean what it says through the carried out determination of being. With this filling, the judgment form actually moves beyond itself to its “truth,” in Hegelian parlance, and becomes the syllogism, “the form of what is truly rational” (EL 181), i.e. what Hegel refers to as the realized Concept, which I will further explain below¹⁵. It is in this sense that the judgment form *alone* “does not lend itself to expressing what is concrete” (EL 31 Remark)¹⁶. In more conventional terms, we might say that Hegel’s move from judgment to syllogism reminds us that systematic philosophy must involve predicative statements logically folded into an organic structure of argument¹⁷.

The fact that in the copula we are dealing with *real* filling and not just fulfillment is clear when we consider Hegel’s use of the term “empty” to describe the unfulfilled (i.e. unfilled) copula in EL 180 and when we consider the corresponding moment in the GL, where Hegel describes the “erfüllte” copula as “inhaltvolle”, or contentful. The copula is consequently no longer “abstract”, a synonym here for empty, formal and devoid of existence, but now relatively concrete. What first appeared, in judgment, as an empty verb linking subject to predicate now really *is* as the existing, unifying movement between thought and being, which is precisely what Hegel calls the Concept. Thus, “the Concept is the filling of the empty ‘is’ of the copula”, as we find in EL 180¹⁸.

With the passage from the proposition’s grammatical “is” to *is* as an actual positing (determining) of being, we move from the logical to the onto-logical. In so doing, the Concept now takes its truest form, that of the syllogism, the final form of “Subjective Logic”, the second half of both the *Encyclopedia* and *Greater Logics*. The move from the logical to the onto-logical takes place because the filled copula becomes,

within the Hegelian syllogism, the moment of particularity, the existing and essential middle term between the universal (general) and the singular (individual). It is here, in particularity, where things take on specific qualities and cease being either empty generalities or abstract individualities. For example, in order for me really to *be* someone, I must take on such particular qualities as “male”, “Canadian”, “father”, “professor”, “middle-aged” etc. To really *be*, I must be more determined than the generalized “all men” or the singular individual “John Doe”.

Whether the thinking, determining syllogism moves from the singular through the particular to the universal, or in the other direction, the moment of particularity is an expression of “external reality”, of essential existence (EL181), of things that really are what they are. Another way to put this is that the moment of particularity, in the Hegelian syllogism (a.k.a. the Concept), is where differentiation takes place within a systematic whole. As we will see, it is this feature of difference within identity that characterizes essentially meaningful existence, i.e. being that is knowable *for us*. In terms of Hegelian Science, which is what we are discussing here, it is only through its realization in particularity that the syllogism comes to embody “*everything* that is rational (emphasis added, EL 181).” Science cannot grasp, and has only a *passing* interest in, undetermined (un-thought) being.

In the syllogism, the judgment form realizes itself as, “the genuine particularity of the Concept (EL 166).” The question is, how does particularity actually come into the copula? How does the abstract verb “is” come to actually mean what it says and express knowable being as its content? How does the logical actually become the ontological¹⁹? The answer is that it does so as ground (*Grund*), namely as reason in the sense of “having

sufficient reason” to be or what the French call *raison d’être*. As Hegel writes in the GL: In the syllogism, “[t]he determined and filled [or fulfilled] copula, which before was formed by the abstract *is*... has subsequently been further constituted as the ground [*Grund*] in general, [and] is now present for us [*vorhanden*]”²⁰. To put this another way, we can say that particularity is an ontological determination where being has been given *reason to be* and is thus presented as knowable to reason, i.e. worthy of human knowing as outlined in Hegel’s *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*.

Consequently, to see how particular being arises in the *Logics* (and how being becomes knowable) through the filling of the copula, it is helpful to “go back” and look at the middle Doctrine of Essence section of the *Logics*, where Hegel examines determinate being as having the grounds to be²¹. As is the case (formally) in Aristotle, in Hegel, the particular, middle term of the syllogism is where essence (quiddity, meaning) is introduced, precisely because it is in this context where things take on the specific determinations that cause them to actually *be* something, to exist. In Hegel’s *Logics*, such scientifically meaningful existence arises (EL115-122) through the interplay of identity and difference, where things exist *because* they are both what they are and what they are not. This apparently abstract statement can perhaps be shown with the following example. It might initially appear that I am a male (my identity) simply because I am not a female (my difference). However, Hegel’s dialectic of identity and difference seeks to demonstrate that this difference is also constitutive of who I am, i.e. of my existing identity. My “not being a woman” actually involves incorporating differentiating womanhood into my existence. This is demonstrably the case, Hegel could argue: as an

individual existence, my “reason to be” is grounded or has been brought about through the very real (copulative?) interplay between man and woman²².

It is through a discussion of ground that we see how, for Hegel, what goes beyond pure, undifferentiated identity has reason to be. Significantly, by considering ground as the determinant element of being, we see how its question opens onto anthropological perspectives. What has reason or essential grounds *to be* shows itself to be knowable *for us* as reason-seeking human agents²³. I believe this is what Hegel means by the variously translated term “Sache”: “issue”, “matter” etc., all terms relating to knowable existence as grounded, i.e. as having reason to be and hence, as significant to us²⁴.

Knowable existence comes into the copula “is” through the interplay between identity and difference. It is therefore not surprising that Hegel’s discussion of Essence as Ground of Existence (in the Doctrine of Essence) again refers to the predicative form of the proposition (*Satz*), the same form that we began with in the discussion of judgment and the copula. In the context of ground, however, what is now stressed is the copula’s role in expressing both identity and difference, where “a proposition promises a distinction between subject and predicate as well as identity” (EL115)²⁵.

In the sub-section of the Doctrine of Essence that I am discussing, Hegel begins by looking at identity. This means conceiving essence simply in terms of self-identity: the essence of a thing is to be determined as self-identical, i.e. to be *itself*, to be what it is. Here, the rule of identity presents “A=A” as the basic law of all things. Things are simply what they are. A rose is a rose is a rose.

Briefly put, what Hegel demonstrates is that judgments of identity implicitly involve difference. After that, we will see how, conversely, judgments of *difference*

involve identity. Finally, the dialectical interplay between identity and difference will be shown to bring forth the determinate ground of existing being, i.e. being that is essential or knowable for us.

First, regarding identity, if we think things through as Hegel invites us to do, we see that the very statement of identity, in fact, already implies difference (distinction). $A=A$ is not really the expression of pure identity, otherwise, we would simply write A . Obviously, there is something happening in the copula beyond the affirmation of identity²⁶. In fact, a statement of identity without difference is quite simply the “negation of being and its determinations” (EL 116 *Zusatz*). Determinate existence (i.e. being qua something) is self-differentiating and only through such differentiating can identity actually come to be *expressed* (written, spoken, stated).

Hegel then invites us to see how difference gives onto a richer, full-filled identity, one that will be informed by such differentiation. To make his argument, Hegel evokes the logical principle of the excluded third, presented as the fundamental principle of distinction or difference. Everything is distinct from everything else. No two leaves are exactly the same, for example. Once again, Hegel refers to the propositional form of judgment. According to the principle of the excluded third, opposing predicates cannot be assigned to a subject. Thus, in Hegel’s terminology, “ $A = \text{either } + A \text{ or } - A$ ”. What is excluded is the possibility that “ $A = \text{neither } + A \text{ nor } - A$ ” but rather something else instead. However, in excluding “the third” that is neither $+A$ nor $-A$ but something else, the principle in fact recognizes it, recognizes it as *something else* (excluded) that is actually posited between the positive and negative poles. “Even the mere plus and minus of number (has) zero for their third term”, writes Hegel in EL119²⁷.

Thus, the principle of difference or distinction, expressed as a predicative judgment, implies the reality of a third, middle term, an enriched identity now conceived as the ground from which things actually come into existence. As I showed above, such ground or “reason to be” expresses the dynamic interplay between identity and difference, as instantiated in the copula “is” whose destiny is fulfilled in the syllogism’s moment of particularity. Such grounds present themselves for us in the language of predication.

The truth of the matter is that identity is always *self-differencing* and difference is always *self-differencing* or the differencing of an identity. The identity of identity and difference, i.e. the movement from identity to difference and “back” to identity, is the Hegelian Concept, the real, self-mediating identity of thought, through which things present themselves *to us* as grounded or having reason to be and hence, as knowable. This “knowability” takes on the determinate forms of those transcendental (Kantian) categories that have now been “deduced” into *being* itself, qua nature. In other words, nature can now be known according to the categories of quality, quantity, modality and relation, more or less the same categories that Aristotle had presupposed to be in nature itself.

Concretely, we understand that finite things, existing things, carry within themselves the contradiction of being both what they are and what they are not; they are both self-identical and self-differencing. This inner contradiction is what determines things as coming into existence, changing and finally ceasing to exist, as Heraclitus perceived. The inherent contradiction that determines the real, grounded existence of things also implies their relation to other things. Indeed, to exist is to *be* something,

which means being *finitely* and hence being in the sway of other finite things that are something else; such “eliveness” is thus an essential part of what things *actually* are²⁸, and, as such, opens them up to us as possible objects of knowledge. It also is what presents things to us as meaningful, gives our minds purchase in coming to know them, for example, through their causal relations to other things.

We could follow knowable being through higher or more determinate levels of reality, in the first “Objective” half of the *Logics*, beyond the being of finite, singular things, through the logical moments of *Erscheinung* (phenomenon)²⁹ and *Wirklichkeit* (actuality), but that is not necessary to demonstrate my point, which has been to show that Hegel’s logic, as an expression of his metaphysics, is the science of the determinate grounding of being. For us, as scientists, as knowing agents in the *Encyclopedic* narrative, existing being arises in the copula of the judgment form, and is further instantiated in the middle, particular moment of the syllogism, i.e. in the *realized* structure of what Hegel calls the Concept. Judgments and syllogisms are thus the two fundamental elements of all philosophical grammar.

References to judgment, syllogism and Concept do, however, require us to visit (briefly) to the second, Subjective part of the *Logics*, where these forms of thought are explicitly dealt with, and where knowable being now appears as “the Object” of natural science, i.e. objectivity determined in terms of mechanics, chemistry and (organic) teleology. Predictably, this section is found in the second, particular, differentiating position within Subjective Logic, thus corresponding to the second, particular moment that Essence occupies in the first half of the *Logics* (Objective Logic), where we saw knowable being come into existence through its grounds. However now, within

Subjective Logic, the ultimate, teleological determination of “the Object” indicates the scientific destiny of being as having purpose or reason to be. Whereas for Kant, the purposiveness of nature remained a regulatory idea of reason, Hegel’s *Logics* aim to demonstrate how the teleological determination that grounds natural science comes to be through the thinking (human) agency of the Idea itself.

The same grammatical ontology is at work in the Subjective side of the *Logics*, which is why Hegel writes, in EL 193 Remark, just before the middle section on “the Object”: “The ground from which existence emerges (and) the relationship that sublates itself into actuality are nothing but the still imperfectly [*noch unvollkommen*] posited Concept.” As we have seen, the complete positing of the Concept takes place when judgment’s copula is ful-filled in the realized syllogism³⁰. With such ful-fillment, Hegel remarks further on in the same text, “the Perfect [*das Vollkommene*] is that which is not merely in a subjective way but in an objective way as well.” However, in reaching this point of completion or perfection, where thought and being are conceptually reconciled, we have already moved beyond the *emergence* of knowable objects and on to their *full* grasp (sublation) within the dynamic structure of the syllogism with its organic moments of universality, particularity and singularity. Here, we arrive at the fully realized grammar of being as being, the self-positing *Satz* that expresses that most metaphysical of Hegelian entities, the Idea.

In the *Logics*, the difference between the Objective and Subjective contexts can perhaps best be understood as one of perspective. Whereas in Objective Logic (the Doctrines of Being and Essence), content arises from the cumulative determinacy of being (out of nothingness), in Subjective Logic (a.k.a. the Doctrine of the Concept),

content is “deduced” from the cumulative determinacy of thought. In fact, of course, the two actions are reciprocal and not redundant. Because the second half of the story, Subjective Logic, *presupposes* the logical forms of thought, i.e. judgment and syllogism, as conceptually complete, its account is necessary in order to arrive at fully determined being qua nature. Without the narrative rounding out, i.e. the perfecting (*Vollkommen*) that is recounted in Subjective Logic, determinate being can only arrive at the endless reiterations of Actuality (*Wirklichkeit*), which closes the first (Objective Logic) half of the *Logics*. To arrive at the holistic presentation of nature as determinate, knowable being, the full-filled copula must be comprehended within the absolute judgment between the Objective and Subjective sides of the Logics ($S = O$ or $O = S$) in the self-positing, self-differentiating identity which Hegel refers to, at the end of the *Logics*, as the Idea³¹.

Viewing the Idea in this light, as an expression of grammatical ontology, responds to a problem that Schelling had identified in his Berlin lectures on the history of philosophy: the apparent redundancy of the Idea within Hegel’s *Encyclopedic* system, appearing as it does at the end of the *Logics* and again at the end of the *Philosophy of Spirit*, in the guise of Absolute Spirit’s self-knowing self-enjoyment. The answer to Schelling’s misunderstanding is this: in the *Logics*, the Idea is presented as grounding truth and its knowledge through the adequation of thought and being, whereas at the end of the *Philosophy of Spirit* the Idea appears as the actual carrying out of that adequation (truth) in the system known as Science, and which must involve the *Realphilosophien* of Nature and Spirit.

I want to pick up again, briefly, the story of knowable being, now as the syllogized, content-ful copula, in its last moments, allowing us to discover the final

destiny of fully determined and grounded being in the *Logics*. As I said at the outset, what happens to the copula's content reveals being's significance, i.e. what it is *for us*. To put this another way: the conceptual destiny of the syllogism's particular middle term reveals the truth of the copula, its realized essence or meaning. What happens is this: in the final moments of the *Logics*, the fully accomplished, perfect (*Vollkommene*) syllogism, qua the Idea, lets itself out, freely releasing itself (*sich frei aus sich zu entlassen*)³²; in doing so, it reveals itself to us *as nature* (EL 244), which might now be somewhat playfully called the Idea's significant Other³³.

At the end of the *Logics*, this action is described as flowing from a "sich entschliessen", which might be translated as a resolving or "deciding" on the part of the Idea, a meaning that allowed Schelling to make fun of Hegel for entertaining such an absurd notion: the Absolute Idea reflectively and arbitrarily deciding to become nature. However, I believe that we have to see this "sich entschliessen" for what it is: a disclosure, an opening up, or better still, a de-syllogizing (*schliessen* = to conclude, to close or to syllogize) where the fully determined, perfect syllogism reveals itself in its truth (the unity of thought and being). Thus, at the end of the *Logics*, we may translate: the Idea "de-syllogizes itself, freely releasing out of itself the moment of its particularity... as *nature*" (EL244). The moment of particularity is the moment of knowable being, which now, at the end of the logic, is fully determined and grounded; it now has every reason to be, and so... is³⁴. What is discovered is the Idea's essential middle term, *being*, now determined as nature, knowable for us, scientists of nature.

This is the destiny of the copula, through its interplay of identity and difference, grounded in the particular middle term of the syllogism; it is de-syllogized (discovered)

for us as significant otherness that can be known. Consequently, the *Logics* can be understood as responding to the most fundamental epistemological questions: How is it possible that our thought may correspond to nature, that we may know nature? Further still, why should we care to know nature? The answer: because nature has reason (grounds, purpose) to be³⁵.

I will finish on the anthropological note that I evoked at the beginning. The outcome of Hegel's grammatical ontology is nature, which may now be defined as existing being that has been determined to be knowable for us. Since, for Hegel, knowledge of otherness always involves self-recognition in that other, we may surmise that to know nature is to recognize in it our own thinking selfhood, our own reason and finally, our own freedom. The discovery of freedom in the heteronomy of nature (nature's liberation, we might also say), which is the theme of Hegel's subsequent *Philosophy of Nature*, would be impossible if being were not already determined by thought as meaningful and grounded. This is what happens in the *Logics* if we read them as the metaphysical science of being. To know nature is now to recognize in it the possibility of our own freedom and thereby to begin to *realize* it. Perhaps this is what lies behind Hegel's enigmatic, seemingly cautionary statement: "It is unsettling when a nation [*Volk*] loses its metaphysics"³⁶.

¹ Globally, these thinkers are interested in problems on the status of "truth claims", i.e. how language can accurately tell the truth about empirical reality. The implied separation that this pursuit implies between thought, reality and language strikes me as deeply un-Hegelian.

² Robert Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

³ *Encyclopedia Logic*, section 36 (EL 36) *Zusatz*, translated by T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting, H.S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991) p. 45.

⁴ Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) p.225.

⁵ John Burbidge, *The Logic of Hegel's Logic* (Peterborough Ontario: Broadview Press, 2006). For Burbidge, Hegel's *Logics* should be understood as we understand logic generally: as dealing with the processes of thought as divorced from metaphysical investigations. Thus Burbidge prefers the GL since in it we are better "able to examine how thought functions on its own" (p.25), whereas in the EL, "the dynamic movement by which thought develops is lost (p. 120)". William Maker, *Philosophy Without Foundations: Rethinking Hegel* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994). For Maker, the *Logics*, like Hegel's systematic philosophy as a whole, is "self-grounding, self-determinative, presuppositionless or autonomous (p. 96)". Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic: From Being to Infinity* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2006). Near the beginning of his book (p.9), Houlgate writes: "Hegel's *Science of Logic* may not be the easiest book in the world to read, but there is, to my mind, no mystery surrounding its purpose. It provides an extensive analysis of the basic categories of thought".

⁶ Stephen Houlgate, "Essence, Reflexion and Immediacy in Hegel's Science of Logic", in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. S. Houlgate and Michael Baur (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2011) pp. 139-158. Two recent examples: Ioannis Trisokkas, *Pyrrhonian Scepticism and Hegel's Theory of Judgement* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Karin De Boer, "Hegel's Account of Contradiction in the Science of Logic Reconsidered", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 48.3 (2010) pp. 345-373.

⁷ There are exceptions to the general trend toward non-metaphysical readings of Hegel's *Logics*. One is Alan White's *Absolute Knowledge: Hegel and the Problem of Metaphysics* (Athens Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1983). White takes the *Logics* as an expression of Aristotelian first philosophy (metaphysical ontology), an approach that I share, as does Stanley Rosen in his recent book, *The Idea of Hegel's Science of Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014). Rosen demonstrates the absolute complicity of being and thought as stemming from the original, dynamic unity of being and nothingness that Hegel posits at the outset. See also Karen Ng in her excellent article, "Hegel's Logic of Actuality", *Review of Metaphysics* 63.1 (2009) pp. 139-72. As she so eloquently writes, "The Concept does not need to be applied to intuitions because it is its own content and determinacy; it is the drive of being as being thought as much as it is the drive of thinking that thinks itself. The absoluteness of absolute idealism is due to its being both an idealism and a materialism, both a logic and an ontology." More recently, Nathan Ross writes, "Hegel's *Science of Logic* is a bold attempt to redefine logic so that it no longer involves merely examining the forms of arguments, in isolation from their truth content, but the actual nature of concepts and hence the ultimate nature of reality." "Metaphysics", in *G.W.F. Hegel: Key Concepts*, Edited by Michael Baur (London: Routledge, 2015) pp.31-43. I want to show how such "truth content" is developed in copula of the judgment form, finally presenting knowable being as nature.

⁸ *Wissenschaft der Logik, Die Lehre von Sein* (1832), edited by H.-J. Gawoll (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag,) Second Preface, pp. 9-10.

⁹ Emphasis added. *Encyclopedia, Philosophy of Spirit*, 462 Remark. See also the 462 *Zusatz*: "Words become an existence enlivened by thought. This existence is absolutely necessary to our thoughts."

¹⁰ Hegel distinguishes between "proposition" and "judgment" according to the scientific destination of the latter, in contrast to the former's general, common language usage. (EL 167 Remark). This distinction is crucial in grasping how Hegel's "theory" of language is principally concerned with defining and refining its participation in scientific objectivity. Where I generally agree with J. Hyppolite's comprehension of the *Logics* as grounded in the "identity of thought and the thing thought of" and that the resultant reality (*Wirklichkeit*) "understands and expresses itself in language" qua *Logos*, I disagree with Hyppolite's extension of such language to all that is "human". Hegel distinguishes between everyday, common language and its scientific (*wissenschaftlich*) usage. Hyppolite, Jean, *Logique et existence* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961) pp. 3-4 (my translation). In general, Hyppolite's reading might be called Feuerbachian, and thus does not take seriously the Idea's self-revelatory agency.

¹¹ *Wissenschaft der Logik, Die Lehre von Sein* (1832), edited by H.-J. Gawoll (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1990) p.72. EL 84: "[Undetermined] being is the concept only in itself."

¹² Since determination is to be thought of, in Hegelian terms, as negation, we can say that thought negates being's nothingness and makes it a positive something. Further, since pure being is nothingness, it is indistinguishable from pure thought with nothing to think of. Thus the EL "begins" with the last "position of thought" from the work's introductory *Vorbegriff*: Immediate Knowing as the unity of thought and being.

¹³ See note 26.

¹⁴ French translators Labarière and Jarczyk choose “emplissement”, B. Bourgeois chooses the similar term, “remplissement”, A. V. Miller, in his translation of the GL, chooses the surprising and tendentious “impregnation”. Hegel’s ontological take on judgment can perhaps be thought of as an elaboration on Spinoza’s first definition of the Substance as *causa sui*, one that involves the freedom of self-positing subjectivity and the cosmogonical (as pronounced at the beginning of John’s Gospel) agency of the Word.

¹⁵ Judgement’s fulfillment in the syllogism seems to have escaped the notice of commentators. Ionnis Trisokkas, in his book, *Pyrrhonian Scepticism and Hegel’s Theory of Judgement* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), p. 319, justifies his not “making any substantial reference... to the syllogism” (an absence that he claims to share with Werner Salomon and Chong-Fuk Lau) thus: “Indeed, the syllogism does not replace the judgement as the locus of the expression of truth, as if the two were completely distinct elements. Rather, it provides only a more detailed version of the form and content of the judgement of the concept.” Such a view obviously does not understand the full-filled copula as the syllogism’s moment of particularity, as I am arguing. Although, refreshingly, Trisokkas avoids the jargon of analytic philosophy, he shares with the Pittsburgh “Hegelians” a primary interest in the status and possibility of “truth claims” and their ability to reflect (material) reality. On the complicit relationship between scientific language and objectivity in Hegel, see Jeffrey Reid, *Real Words: Language and System in Hegel* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), particularly the chapter on the ontological nature of judgment in Hegel.

¹⁶ “Abstract”, in Hegel, generally means one-sided or unilateral. Concreteness involves the interplay of contradictory positions, which are ultimately expressions of thought and being. Thus, the ground of existing being, as we will see, involves the fundamental interplay between identity (thought) and difference (being).

¹⁷ The structural, organic nature of Hegel’s use of the syllogism is far removed from its formal employ, which Hegel criticizes repeatedly: “Caius is a man; all men are mortal; therefore, he is mortal. Personally, I have never thought of anything so dull. It must be produced somewhere in our gut, without our being conscious of it.” Wastebook Fragments (#8), *Werke 2*, p. 541.

¹⁸ What is posited in the judgment form, one might say, is the “concept” in the Kantian sense of the word, i.e. an essential form of subjective mind but which is now, in Hegel, actually posited in reality through the agency of thought.

¹⁹ The ontological aspect of judgment, through the copula, is fundamental to Hegel in general and reflects his rehabilitation of the ontological argument for the existence of God, in his *Lectures on Religion*, where he criticizes Kant for his refutation of the argument in the first *Critique*. Indeed, Kant specifically refuses the ontological acceptance of the copula (ref.)

²⁰ *Werke in 20 Bänden* vol. 6, pp. 350-351. I have chosen to translate “vorhanden” as “presented for us” rather than as simply “existing”, which would better reflect the relatively neutral (impoverished) notion of “Dasein”. I believe “vorhanden” implies “for us”.

²¹ Recall that the *Logics* are divided into Objective Logic (Doctrine of Being; Doctrine of Essence) and Subjective Logic (Doctrine of the Concept) where he presents the forms of logical thought as pertaining to forms of objectivity.

²² Hegel uses the example of acids and bases. Finite chemical entities are the result of the dynamic contradiction between the acidic and the basic, where one is inherently in the other. Similarly, the magnet only exists as such through the interplay between north and south poles. “Generally speaking, it is contradiction that moves the world.” EL 119 *Zusatz 2*.

²³ It may be helpful to refer here to Spinoza, where the Substance is the immediate and total accomplishment of such grounded being, and so *is* absolutely. This is expressed immediately in the first Definition of the Substance as *causa sui*. Presenting the essence of substance in terms of cause already invites us, as reasoning beings, to contemplate and understand it. For Hegel, although this essential aspect is indeed immediately in being (as nothingness) it must be scientifically demonstrated through the full-filling of the copula. This mediation takes place in the *Logics*’ Doctrine of Essence.

²⁴ In the GL (1813), *Sache* arises as grounded existence in the Doctrine of Essence, *Werke 6*, p. 119. In EL, *Sache* appears as grounded, conditioned existence, in the same Doctrine, although later, in the subchapter on Actuality (EL 147). In both cases, *Sache* is presented as grounded (meaningful) existence: existence that is “at stake”, that is an issue, for Science. Ultimately, the fullest expression of *Sache* is revealed, as we will see, in the de-syllogizing of the copula as nature: being that has every reason to be and hence, what is at stake *for us*.

²⁵ Perhaps the best way to illustrate how identity and difference are involved in forming the determinate ground for *existence*, within a predicative proposition, is by referring to Leibniz’s metaphysics of

possibility and actuality (certainly the dominant metaphysics in the German pre-Critical/Kantian world). Without going into too much detail, in Leibniz the principle of identity (where subject is equal to predicate) is guarantor of what is merely possible, while the statement of actuality must involve causal differentiation through the principle of sufficient reason. “A triangle is a three-sided figure”, is a statement of identity because the subject (triangle) is equivalent to the predicate (three-sided figure). Hence, a three-sided triangle is a possible figure. However, things must have external (other) reasons to *be* in order to actually *exist*. For example, a triangle is *not* the pen that draws it, and this difference is constitutive of the sufficient reason (drawing) whereby the possible triangle becomes the actual triangle on this sheet of paper, in spite of (or because of) all its imperfections.

²⁶ It is again impossible to ignore Hegel’s reference to the ideas in Hölderlin’s short text *Urteil und Sein*, here. Indeed, that text helps us see the ontological nature of judgment, i.e. how the move from identity to difference involves a move into being. This is the point of Hölderlin’s text. It may have been written on the inside cover of Hölderlin’s copy of the first edition of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*. Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke* t.4, edited by F. Beissner, (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1962) pp. 226-227. See also Beissner’s commentary, pp. 391-392. For an English translation, see H.S. Harris, *Hegel’s Development: Toward the Sunlight 1770-1801* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) pp.515-516. Indeed, it is Hölderlin who first uses the etymological device of writing the hyphenated “*Ur-theilung*” to express judgment as this original division, a device which clearly impressed Hegel who uses it himself (EL 166). See also Jeffrey Reid, “The Ontological Grasp of Judgment”, in *Dialogue*, 45, 1 (2006).

²⁷ In EL 119, Hegel is probably referring to a little-known, pre-critical text by Kant, his 1763 essay on negative grandeur, according to which zero is presented not as null but as the existing middle or realized identity of + and – sums. In his essay, Kant applies this principle to ethical questions. Hegel refers, in EL 98, to Kant’s application of the principle to cosmology: the *actual* orbits of the planetary bodies are the realized identities of opposing centrifugal and centripetal forces. Hegel extrapolates in EL 119 *Zusatz*: an acid is at the same time, in-itself base, and the existing liquid is the positive identity of this contradiction, a point Hegel later takes up in Chemism, where the product of chemical process is a neutral state (e.g. water). An acid is only an acid with regard to its self-distinction from the alkaloid. Or, in physics, polarity (electrical, magnetic) produces an existing centre, a magnetic body which is the existing identity between the two. The same fundamental idea informs Schelling, the philosophy of identity, and the physicist Ritter’s reading of galvanism as showing water to be constituted by positive and negative gases (hydrogen and oxygen).

²⁸ Significantly, the dialectic of finitude/infinity informs the determinations of Being in the *Logics*, both as Quality (Being-there) and as Quality (Quantum). See EL 92 *Zusatz*: “Thus we suppose, for instance, that the moon, which is something else than the sun, could quite well exist if the sun did not. But, in fact, the moon (as something) has its other in itself, and this constitutes its finitude.”

²⁹ I believe “phenomenon” is a more satisfying translation for *Erscheinung* since the “appearance” that Hegel is discussing in EL 132-141 is one that is scientifically significant: a phenomenon.

³⁰ The German term *Vollkommen* (perfection) expresses the “complete arrival” of the Concept at its syllogistic term. Regarding the copula and the Concept, see EL 166: “The copula ‘is’ comes from the nature of the Concept, of being identical with itself in its alienation.”

³¹ Overall, the *Logics* can be said to articulate, in a completely different way, Schelling’s definition of the Absolute as $S = O$. I am trying to show how, for Hegel, this absolute *Urteil* involves the emergence of knowable being in the copula (=) through the dynamic interplay of identity and difference. Schelling tends to see the copula as an original unity that underlies all differentiation.

³² The “letting itself out” or “unbuckling” metaphor comes from Jean-François Marquet, who likened the full-filled Idea to a replete diner having to let out his belt after a particularly substantial, and satisfying meal. There are too many interpretations of “sich frei entlassen” to mention. One interesting one was advanced by John Burbidge at the 2006 conference of the Ontario Hegel Organization, in Montreal: “makes itself redundant.” While this is certainly a common euphemism for “being let go” (another euphemism for being fired), I still don’t understand how, in Hegel, the Idea can ever be made redundant. After all, it does have the final (and first?) word at the very end of the *Encyclopedia*, through the words of Aristotle. Elsewhere, I have advanced the hermeneutical device of reading “sich frei entlassen” in terms of the big bang theory of cosmology (*Real Words: Language and System in Hegel*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007) pp. 54-57.

³³ My contention that the *Logics* determine being as scientifically meaningful or significant responds to a major issue in Hegel studies: Just how “other” is his pronounced otherness of nature within the systematic articulation (Concept) of the Idea? For an exploration of natural otherness and a summary of different positions on the matter, see Jeffrey Reid, *Real Words*, pp.40-54.

³⁴ The EL gives “sich entschliesst”; the GL: “Entschluss”. *Werke in 20 Bänden*, Eva Moldenhauer und Karl Markus Michel (eds.) (Frankfurt am Main : Suhrkamp, 1970) vol. 6, p. 573. Cf. EL 206 *Zusatz* Where Hegel plays with the terms schliessen, beschliessen, entschliessen = a decision to step forward out of one’s inwardness.

³⁵The first moment of the *Philosophy of Nature*, the subsequent book in Hegel’s *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, is immediate being, not in the element of thought, however, but rather in the element of otherness that characterizes nature in Hegel. At the end of the GL, Hegel anticipates how the immediate exteriority of being, as nature, will be overcome, truly liberated, in the *Philosophy of Spirit* GL *Werke in 20 Bänden* vol. 6, p. 573.

³⁶ Preface to the First Edition of the GL. Indeed, a nation is a highly determined metaphysical entity mediating the relation between selves and being; it is itself an essential determination of being. *Wissenschaft des Logik, das Sein* (1812), Hans Jürgen Gawoll (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1986) p.3.