Hegel is above all a systematic philosopher. Awe-inspiring in its scope, his philosophy left no subject untouched. Logic provides the central, unifying framework as well as the general methodology of his system. Understanding Hegel’s logic is therefore essential to a comprehensive understanding of any piece of the system and any subject it deals with.

Hegel never slavishly accepted received wisdom in any field and less so in logic than anywhere else. The philosophical revolution began by Kant demanded a thoroughgoing reconception of the purpose, method, and content of logic, Hegel believed, and his expositions of this newly reconstituted discipline in the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* remain among the most intractable works of the philosophical canon. Hegel’s logic breaks radically from the Aristotelian and scholastic logic that had dominated previous philosophical speculation, and it is unrelated to the mathematical logic that began to develop soon after Hegel’s demise. The primary focus of this essay will be on what Hegelian logic is about, rather than on the details of its execution.

In the first section the essential problem of Hegel’s logic is introduced, viz., that logic, according to Hegel, cannot be a purely formal discipline. The second section summarizes the textual development of Hegel’s logic. The third section establishes the parameters constraining the interpretation of Hegel’s logic. Because of the obscurity of the texts, it is valuable to state explicitly the conditions that constrain an adequate interpretation. Succeeding sections address these conditions by showing what it means that Hegel’s logic is a self-movement of the
concept and how this relates to his theory of subjectivity (the fourth section), in what sense logic is a formal science for Hegel (the fifth section), how one begins the enterprise of logic (the sixth section), and why Hegel's logic exhibits such a particular structure (the seventh section).

The paramount importance of logic within Hegel's system cannot be denied. A relatively large proportion (over 30 per cent) of his written work is devoted to logic: Of the four books Hegel published, one (the largest) is solely devoted to logic, and it is that book Hegel wrote in order to make his mark in the philosophical world after his first book, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, garnered little notice. One-third of the *Encyclopedia* is devoted to logic. More importantly, Hegel's system begins with logic and culminates by returning to the point of departure for logic; logic is the alpha and omega of the system. Logic provides the alphabet for the system as well, for the conceptual analyses provided by logic serve as the patterns for the rest of the system. Logic is also the discipline in which Hegel's methodology is explicitly thematized.

The idea that there is a "dialectical method" that can be illuminatingly brought to bear on any subject matter has fascinated post-Hegelian thought. (What this method is, however, has been notoriously difficult to specify.) Hegel's logic remains the primary source for any understanding of dialectics.

Logic plays such an important role in Hegel's philosophy, in part, because of his revolutionary interpretation of the discipline. Traditionally, logic has been understood as the study of the *formal* conditions of truth or as the study of the laws of thought. As the study of the formal conditions of truth, logic pays no attention at all to the contents of the items it addresses. But Hegel rejects this interpretation of logic, arguing, in effect, that truth is both the subject and content of logic, and that logic cannot be a purely formal enterprise, for the notion of truth is not and cannot be a purely formal notion. If truth is the agreement of thought (or language) with reality, there is no guarantee that there must be certain conditions that thought or language on their own must satisfy in order to be able to agree with reality. The conditions for the possible agreement between thought and reality or concept and object must depend in part on reality (see e.g. *WL*, I: 25; *SL*, 44-5). But, then, they cannot be purely formal.

Hegel also picks up on the ancient theme that logic is the science of the laws of thought and infers that "as thinking and the rules of thinking are supposed to be the subject matter of logic, these directly constitute its peculiar content; in them, logic has that second constituent, a matter, about the nature of which it is concerned" (*WL*, I: 24; *SL*, 44). Whether the connection to truth or the connection to thought is emphasized in understanding the nature of logic, Hegel concludes
that logic cannot be a purely formal enterprise. Since logic concerns
the fundamental conditions of truth and thought and these cannot be
specified independently of their content, the fundamental structures of
reality, logic merges with basic metaphysics in Hegel's system.

The hope to derive metaphysics from logic is not peculiar to
Hegel by any means – besides Hegel's predecessors (Leibniz and Kant,
in particular), the twentieth-century logical atomists (Russell and early
Wittgenstein), who in most other ways were Hegel's antithesis, also
sought to read their metaphysics off of their logic. The logic–metaphys-
ics connection acquires still further weight in Hegel's system from his
idealism. Idealism is a tricky "ism" because so many different theories
have gone by that rubric. Hegel's version, absolute idealism, must be
distinguished from Berkeleyan subjective idealism (the claim that
material bodies do not exist and the only things that do exist are
mental substances and their modifications), what Kant calls Cartesian
"problematical" idealism (the claim that the only things we know for
certain are our own mental states, all other knowledge being a proba-
bilistic inference therefrom), and Kantian transcendental idealism (the
claim that our knowledge is restricted to things as they appear to us
given our forms of intuition and that things as they are in themselves
can never be known). Some versions of idealism thus have metaphysical
theses at the core, while others are grounded in epistemological theses.

Absolute idealism is principally a metaphysical position character-
izable as the claim that mind and reality share the same categorical
structure. The categorical structure of thought ("thinking and the rules
of thinking"), which is the subject matter of logic, must also be,
according to the absolute idealist, the categorical (read here "ontologi-
cal") structure of reality, and thus logic is metaphysics. Hegel's epistem-
ology, in contrast to his metaphysics, is fundamentally realist and
committed to our ability to cognize the objective structure of reality,
although it is complicated by a sophisticated understanding of the
historical conditions of knowledge.

Without looking in greater detail at the arguments Hegel gives to
back up his claims, it is hard to grasp his points fully, but one immedi-
ate warning is warranted in this introductory glimpse of his position.
Do not confuse mind (spirit) with minds. Hegel's German term Geist,
formerly translated as "mind" but now increasingly translated as
"spirit," can apply to individual minds, in which case Hegel would
talk of subjective spirit. This is the usage that is most like our contem-
porary use. Hegel has a specific section of the Encyclopedia, called the
"Philosophy of subjective spirit," focused on problems in philosophy
of psychology. But Geist or spirit can also apply more broadly. Hegel
generalized the Kantian notion that the self (the transcendental ego) is
a principle uniting a disparate manifold of sense impressions into the
notion that *Geist* is a principle uniting the disparate manifold of natural and historical events. Schematically:

Kant’s transcendental ego : phenomenal world ::
Hegel’s absolute spirit : the world

This vast oversimplification leaves at least two important questions: What happens to the Kantian thing-in-itself in Hegel’s version? And what is the relation between subjective spirits and absolute spirit for Hegel? Let me briefly address the second question here; we will return to both questions later. Individual minds *embody* spirit; they are necessary to and participate in the development of absolute spirit, but no individual mind is itself essential to spirit’s self-realization.

The movement and development of absolute spirit constitutes a higher level of abstraction than the psychological or historical development of individual people or societies. It is at this very high level of abstraction that we can describe pure thought. Logic is therefore not concerned with the thinking of any individual – that would make it psychology – nor with the “rules of thinking” governing any particular culture, period, or discipline.

Logic is to be understood as the system of pure reason, as the realm of pure thought. This realm is truth as it is without veil and in its own absolute nature. It can therefore be said that this content is the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind.

(WL, I: 31; SL, 50)

---

**DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY OF HEGEL’S LOGIC**

This essay does not purport to trace the development of Hegel’s logic (a study which is yet to be written), but here a few landmarks may help orient one within the somewhat idiosyncratic world of Hegel’s thought. Hegel’s earliest philosophical speculations center around issues in ethics and the philosophy of religion – in particular Hegel seeks to understand how it might be possible to reconcile the oppositions that he felt characterized modern life: the oppositions, e.g. between reason and faith, society and individual, universal and particular. In his earliest writings (1795–1801), Hegel believes philosophy cannot itself escape the contradictions of such finite oppositions, for it remains trapped within them. Philosophy can at best lead us to see their inadequacy; religion alone can take us beyond them.

In Hegel’s Jena period (1800–7) philosophy gains ascendancy over
religion as the field in which the sought-for resolution of the tensions and oppositions of the modern world can be found. Nevertheless, during most of this period at least, Hegel thinks of logic and metaphysics as an introduction to philosophical speculation, not yet an essential part of it. The principal problem governing Hegel's thinking in Jena is that of overcoming the subject-object opposition. Hegel assumes that beneath the apparent opposition there is an underlying unity that takes on different forms in each of the opposed concepts. Speculative philosophy itself is the consideration of this unity and its various forms. Logic and metaphysics are preliminaries: In logic and metaphysics the fixed oppositions in terms of which we normally understand the world are shown to self-destruct. This destruction of the concepts of the understanding should then liberate us from the rigid categories that make resolution of the conflicts of modern life impossible (the task of logic) and, according to Hegel, also establish the Absolute, the unity underlying all oppositions, as the principle of all philosophy (the task of metaphysics). After the ground is cleared by logic and metaphysics, philosophy proper - the philosophy of the object, the philosophy of the subject, and the philosophy of the Absolute - can begin.

Unfortunately, little of the material in which Hegel works out his conception of logic and metaphysics at this time has survived. Yet one of the most important changes in Hegel's development is the shift in his understanding of the nature and place of logic and metaphysics that occurs toward the end of the Jena period (c. 1805–6). During this period Hegel ceases to distinguish between logic, metaphysics, and speculative philosophy. Briefly, Hegel seems to have discovered the idea that the formal structure of self-consciousness provides a model in which the conceptual oppositions of logic as well as the phenomena of nature and the social world can be treated in a unified, meaningful manner. Logic is the science of pure, self-conscious thought, and is therefore an essential part of the new system. In the light of this new conception Hegel adds a new kind of introduction to the system, the massive Phenomenology of Spirit, published in 1807, in which he traces the different forms consciousness and self-consciousness may take, culminating in the pure self-consciousness that is both the subject and object of logic.

The Phenomenology of Spirit was finished, as the story goes, with the battle of Jena booming in the distance. Subsequent to Napoleon's defeat of the Prussian army at Jena, the university was shut down, and Hegel had to go looking for employment, spending the next year as editor of a newspaper in Bamberg before accepting a post as the rector of a Gymnasium (a college-preparatory academy) in Nuremberg.

During his time in Nuremberg the Hegelian system, especially the logic, as we now know it really took shape. The first installment
of his *Science of Logic* (the so-called objective logic) was published in two volumes, the Doctrine of Being in 1812 and the Doctrine of Essence in 1813. The second installment (the subjective logic) containing the "Doctrine of the Concept" was published in 1816, the year Hegel was called to a chair at the University of Heidelberg. Hegel needed a text for his students in Heidelberg, so he put together the first edition of his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. This contained a brief outline of his entire philosophical system and was intended only as an aid to those attending his lectures, orienting them within his system.

Hegel was called to Berlin, the leading university of Prussia, in 1818. He was to become the dominant figure in German philosophy during the subsequent decade. He published his last book, the *Philosophy of Right*, in 1821; he began another on the philosophy of subjective spirit, but never completed it. The second edition of the *Encyclopedia* appeared in 1827. Only a few years later, he revised the *Encyclopedia* yet once more, its third edition appearing in 1831. By 1826 the original copies of the *Science of Logic* were sold out, and the printer suggested reprinting the work. Hegel, however, decided to rework the book. The new version of the Doctrine of Being was given to the printer in 1831, the new preface dated 7 November 1831. A week later, on 14 November 1831, Hegel died of cholera.

After Hegel’s death a group of Hegel’s students, calling themselves the Society of Friends of the Eternalized, undertook to publish a complete edition of Hegel’s philosophy. Their edition of the *Science of Logic* combined the newly revised version of the first third with the older, still unrevised remainder. Thus the first third of the *Science of Logic* as it has come down to us was written almost a decade and a half after the rest of the book. In the posthumous edition of the *Encyclopedia* the editors decided that it was too cryptic in the form Hegel gave it and therefore added supplementary additions (Zusätze) drawn from both Hegel’s own and students’ lecture notes. Most of the original notes have since been lost, so there is some question about the authenticity of some of this additional material, but the Zusätze have been a part of the Hegelian corpus since shortly after his death and can provide a valuable perspective on the argument of the text.

In the new, critical edition of Hegel’s texts currently in preparation, both versions of the *Science of Logic*’s first part are available, as will be much more reliable editions of the notebook material utilized by Hegel’s various editors in compiling Zusätze and lectures.
ADEQUACY CONDITIONS ON INTERPRETATIONS OF HEGEL'S LOGIC

Since the texts of Hegel's logic are among the most difficult in the philosophical corpus, it is not surprising that there is a wide variation in the interpretations that have been offered and that no school of interpretation is currently dominant. The salient aspects of Hegel's logic that any interpretation must account for fall into two categories, the structural and the testimonial. Any adequate interpretation must account for the place of logic within the Hegelian system, the general structure exhibited by Hegel's logic, and the particular transitions found in it. Further, any adequate interpretation of Hegel's logic must also account for Hegel's own pronouncements about its scope, content, and method. An interpretation that gave a detailed, sensible account of the progress of the argument in the logic would be powerful and very valuable—but if it could not be made consistent with Hegel's own testimony, it would always face skepticism. It seems clear, however, that Hegel's practice in the logic does not always coincide with his preaching; every interpretation of Hegel's logic will have to construct a fine balance between the structural and testimonial evidence.

Structural conditions on interpretations

What role does Hegel's logic play in the system? The system consists of three parts: Logic, Philosophy of Nature, and Philosophy of Spirit. Hegel tells us that his system is a "circle of circles," so this is not merely a linear ordering. At the end of the Philosophy of Spirit we are to be in a position to begin again with the logic in some manner. Logic, therefore, is both the antecedent and the product of spirit. Other puzzling questions quickly arise in trying to understand this triad: The Philosophies of Nature and Spirit concern items within our experience that occupy space and time, but logic seems concerned with things of quite a different stripe. Just what is the relation between the logical realm and the realms of nature and spirit?

Next, the internal structure of Hegel's logic must be accounted for by any acceptable interpretation. It is instructive to look at the arrangement of topics in the logic to get a sense of what an interpretation must cope with. Hegel's logic appears to have a very rigid hierarchical organization. An interpretation that accounts for the gross structural organization may have difficulty with the fine structural detail of the system, and two different interpretations may be able to penetrate the fine detail better in different areas of the logic.
to this essay is an outline of the system as found in the *Science of Logic* (in the hybrid edition).

Several features of the logic immediately leap to the eye. Virtually everything is grouped in triads. The only exceptions are: (a) there are four groups of judgments at the fourth level under III.A.2 (see Appendix, pp. 246–7), and (b) the Idea of Cognition has only two subheadings, the Ideas of the True (which itself has only two subheadings, Analytic and Synthetic Cognition) and the Good. This triadicity is not a mere artifact of compulsive German orderliness; it is supposed to be a necessary consequence of the method of logic that generates the outline. But why, then, does it have any exceptions?

Several of the titles are repeated. Thus, Being is both heading I, heading I.A.1., and heading I.A.1.a; Appearance is both heading II.B and heading II.B.2. How can the same topic or concept appear at several places in the hierarchy? Other than the triad Concept, Judgment, Syllogism under III.A, most of the concepts have apparently very little to do with logic as standardly understood, then or now. Most of them are, however, connected with classical problems of metaphysics.

It is also notable that the relations among the concepts dealt with in each of the three main divisions differ. In the Doctrine of Being the concepts within a triad tend to be contrastive and mutually exclusive; in the Doctrine of Essence they tend to come in coordinate pairs, both of which can be applied to an object; in the Doctrine of the Concept the successor concepts are supposed to retain and contain their predecessors. Or at least Hegel tells us that there are such structural changes within the Logic, and on the whole his assertion seems borne out.

*Testimonial conditions on adequacy*

Any fully adequate interpretation will have to take account of what Hegel says about his Logic, its purpose, its method, and its achievement. We have already seen some of Hegel’s own interpretation: that his logic is about thinking and the rules of thinking, that it constitutes the system of pure reason, truth in its own nature, and, more obscurely, that it is an exposition of “God as he is in his eternal essence.”5 Hegel’s logic, while both logic and metaphysics, is a theology as well. According to Hegel religion and philosophy share the same content – the Absolute. In religion this content is couched in an imagistic form that is not fully adequate to the content itself; it is only in philosophy that this content receives a form adequate to itself. Thus we should expect a mapping between the truths developed within logic and the images and stories found in religion such that logic reveals the full message
embodied obscurely in the mythology of religion. Christianity may be the highest form of religion, the form in which the content can, given the limitations of the imagistic presentation, most fully express itself, but every religion has at heart the one true content, the Absolute.

Undoubtedly the most difficult problems in interpreting Hegel are generated by his pronouncements about the method of the logic. For his method is no method at all: What we have before us in the logic is the self-movement of the concept. That is, Hegel rejects the idea that in philosophy there is one thing, a method, that is applied to a separate thing, a content. The logic traces out what is contained in its content, and it does that not by applying some externally definable, content-independent method to produce a result, but by allowing the content to unfold itself. There is no “dialectical method,” despite its supposed practice by so many of Hegel’s followers. But then just how is the elaborate structure of the logic generated?

While Hegel’s logic is not in any normal sense a formal logic, Hegel does claim that it is a formal science in the sense that it is the science of form. What does this mean? Hegel attacks the form/content distinction, but he does not simply reject that distinction as either senseless or even necessarily confused: What he objects to is the notion that form and content are absolutely separable and autonomous elements of a whole. No form and no content are pure. Instead, Hegel believes form and content are necessarily correlative; some forms are best suited for some contents but not others, and vice versa. Hegel constantly distinguishes the formal aspects of phenomena from their particular contents — that is, in part, what the philosophies of nature and spirit are all about — but what kinds of forms are available and how they relate to each other simply as forms are matters for logical analysis. In the logic as a whole, form is its content, and this content dictates its form.

Logic must also be a presuppositionless science, according to Hegel. This is a fundamental distinction between logic and all other scientific disciplines. Other scientific disciplines must presuppose some particular, independent subject matter; to this subject they bring some method or procedure. In neither case is the justification of these presuppositions a problem within that discipline. “Logic, on the contrary, cannot presuppose any of these forms of reflection and laws of thinking, for these constitute part of its own content and have first to be established within the science” (WL, I: 23; SL, 43).

Let me summarize the set of adequacy conditions for an interpretation of the logic delimited here. These conditions are not exhaustive; the logic is an extremely rich and perplexing text. But an interpretation that can meet these conditions will have a good chance of responding to other challenges as well.
Any interpretation must explain the sense in which the logic is the self-movement of the concept and the implications of this for its methodology.

Any interpretation must explain how the logic is the science of form.

Any interpretation must be able to explain the relation between the Logic and the Philosophies of Nature and Spirit. It should also explain the logic’s relation to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which was proposed to be an introduction to the logic.

Any interpretation must explain the presuppositionlessness of the logic and how such a presuppositionless science can get started.

Any interpretation will have to account for the internal structure of the logic:
(a) Triadicity.
(b) Repetition of titles.
(c) Differences between types of concepts in the three parts of the logic.
(d) A detailed reconstruction of the particular arguments and transitions found in the texts.

Any interpretation must explain the relation between logic and God.

---

THE SELF-MOVEMENT OF THE CONCEPT

The concept

Understanding Hegel’s claim that logic is simply the self-movement of the concept requires understanding the particular meanings Hegel gives the terms of that dictum. Hegel has quite a particular notion of a *concept*, which is central to his whole system. Of course, Hegel’s notion of a concept is heir to a significant history, and much can be revealed by tracing its roots in the philosophical tradition. While there is little space here for such development, a few allusions may help situate the discussion.

Hegel’s logic, like that of his predecessors, is a logic of terms and concepts, not a logic of relations between sentences and operations upon sentences. The modern logician begins by specifying a syntax, that is, a vocabulary and rules of sentence formation. These initial steps are followed by specifying a proof theory and then a semantics. Thus, if the modern logician thinks of the syntax, the vocabulary and formation rules for the system, as the preliminary set-up, the actual beginning would most likely be a set of axioms or fundamental truths. One way in which Hegel differs is that he expects logic to develop a system of
relations among concepts, not a system of relations among sentence forms. Aristotelian logic provides very few sentence forms and no system by which to generate arbitrarily complex new forms. What flexibility Aristotelian logic affords, by which it can be applied to a relatively broad range of sentences and arguments, comes from our ability to formulate arbitrarily complex concepts to use within the sparse syntax provided. Hegel therefore focuses his logic on the forms of concepts, not the forms of sentences. So he looks to begin with a fundamental, simple, immediate, unstructured concept — the simplest form a concept can take — and end with the all-inclusive, absolutely self-constituting concept, the Idea. Just as the early Wittgenstein sought the general form of a proposition, Hegel seeks the general form of a concept.

The historical background for Hegel’s notion of a concept properly begins with Plato’s notion of a separable form (eidos), a universal in which any number of sensible things can participate. This notion was then transmuted by Aristotle into a form immanent in the sensible object that shared it and necessarily embodied in an appropriate kind of matter. The most important fact about these classical Greek speculations is that both considered their concept-precursors, the forms, to be objective features of the world graspable by human reason. The skeptical attacks of Hellenistic philosophy coupled with the rise of Christian metaphysics forced these objective universals inside the mind; they were saved from complete subjectivity only because they could be located in the mind of God, who created the world in accordance with his divine plan. But the mind of God itself became more and more distant as the Middle Ages wore on, and by the time modern philosophy came on the scene only such patently inadequate ruses as Cartesian innate ideas guaranteed by a beneficent but ultimately unknowable God protected universals from complete entrapment in subjectivity. In the subjective idealism of the empiricists this development reached its sorry nadir.

Kant began the climb out of the subjectivist coal pit when he reasserted the objectivity of certain universal concepts on the grounds that they are necessary constitutive conditions of thought itself. Such concepts are objective because without them thought could have no object at all. But Kantian concepts are limited to the material of sensuous intuition; substance, cause, and other a priori concepts objectively characterize phenomenal objects, but have no application beyond the bounds of sense. Our concepts do not apply to things as they are in themselves.

Kant falls back into a subjectivist skepticism despite his valiant effort to climb out (e.g. *Enz. [Encyclopedia]*, §§ 40–5). Hegel is quite convinced that any “knowledge” that is not of the object as it is in
itself is not *knowledge* at all. Hegelian concepts, like those of the great classical thinkers, must be objective, humanly graspable features of things as they are in themselves (*Enz.*, §§ 19–25). In order to develop and defend his idea of a concept, however, Hegel must demonstrate how finite, sensuous intelligences like ours can grasp such objective features of our world: He must develop both an ontology and an epistemology. The general outlines of both his ontology and his epistemology emerge from Hegel’s rejection of the possibility of a purely formal logic together with the constraints he believes govern any adequate theory of thinking. As a first step toward climbing out of the subjectivism Hegel thinks besets modern philosophy, let us develop the Hegelian theory of subjectivity, for only an adequate theory of subjectivity can demonstrate that we are not trapped in our own minds with no access to the world.

**Logic as a theory of subjectivity**

A full theory of subjectivity must account for all the phenomena of mind: sensation, feeling, perceiving, thinking, desiring, willing, etc. It would be a mistake, however, to think that the Hegelian theory of subjectivity is essentially a theory of human subjectivity. Human subjectivity is distinguishable from the pure thinking thematized in the logic in that it is still beset with the contingent, variable structures of sensation, feeling, desiring, etc. Pure thinking is abstracted from such contingencies. Here we will reconstruct the theory of pure thinking, for this is also the content of Hegel’s logic. There are two constraints that any adequate theory of thinking must observe: First, the Kantian transcendental unity of apperception, the fact that the ‘I think’ must be able to accompany all my representations.

Kant was always unclear about the exact status of the ‘I think’ – to this day his commentators wrangle about it – but it is at least clear that the ‘I think’ that occurs in the principle of the transcendental unity of apperception cannot, on Kantian principles, itself be a piece of objective knowledge. Objective knowledge requires application of a schematized category of thought to the sensuous content of intuition, and the transcendental unity of apperception is an analytic principle not based in any way on sensuous intuition. Kant, therefore, cannot justify his belief that he thinks. Hegel could not accept the notion that our self-reflection is in a substantially worse position than our other knowledge, and is furthermore unwilling to draw the distinctions in kind between, on the one hand, transcendental ‘knowledge’ of the form of experience and the role of the unity of apperception and, on the other hand, objective knowledge of items within our experience.

The second constraint on the theory of thinking is that the ‘I
think’ expresses an objective cognition. In this sense Hegel reasserts the Cartesian cogito. These two constraints jointly require thought to be capable of objective self-reflection.

Hegel’s theory of thinking is logic itself. In what sense logic is a theory of thinking, however, needs further clarification, for a thorough-going empiricist such as J.S. Mill might agree with this and conclude that logic must itself be an empirical discipline, though admittedly at a very high level of abstraction. Hegel is certainly not an empiricist, though the extent to which his system accommodates the empirical has generally not been well enough recognized. Nor is Hegel’s logic itself psychologized, for it is a mistake to assume that thinking is solely an activity of human subjects. Psychology is a particular discipline handled within the system at its appropriate place. But thinking is the activity of the universal, the concept itself.

If the psychological process of thinking is not what provides logic with its content, then in what sense is thinking the content of logic? Kant distinguishes between general logic – a formal discipline that concerns the conditions of thought in general, regardless of its object – and transcendental logic – the discipline concerned with the a priori conditions of thinking about objects of our sensibility (objects located in space and time). General logic must be purely syntactic, but transcendental logic has an irreducible semantic component, for it must deal with the conditions of reference to spatio-temporal objects. Kant’s table of categories, the list of those a priori concepts he thinks structure our abilities to think and know about the sensible world, is a product of transcendental logic, the analysis of the a priori conditions for applying the forms of judgment to spatio-temporal objects.

Hegel maintains, in effect, that the syntax/semantics distinction Kant presupposes to separate general and transcendental logic cannot be sustained. Syntax is always contaminated with semantic content precisely because syntax’s role is to subserve a semantic purpose: the embodiment of truth. The hope of analyzing out of language or thought a pure logical syntax without any metaphysical implications about the nature of objects is a pipe dream, or worse, a delusion. Even the bare subject/predicate distinction constrains our metaphysics; it is no accident that a traditional definition of ‘substance’ is the ultimate subject of predication. Again, noun is usually supposed to be a syntactic category, but its classical definition, “name of a person, place, or thing,” is given semantically. In fact it is impossible to give a nontrivial but general, purely syntactic characterization of the nouns, verbs, etc. of any natural language.

For Kant, pure (unschematized) thought has no intrinsic relation to anything; it is, as it were, merely the form of relatedness to an object. Actual relation to objects is the business of another and separate
faculty of mind, sensibility. Hegel responds that thought must have, intrinsically, a relation to itself — that, as he sees it, is the point of Kant's transcendental unity of apperception. And this relation is capable of sustaining a knowledge-claim; that is the point of the cogito. The cogito does not express a piece of sensory knowledge, according to Hegel; neither does it express a direct nonsensory intuition of a thing-like existent. The self or 'I' is itself a concept in Hegel's special sense of that term. The cogito expresses a recognition and preliminary understanding of that concept, an understanding that presupposes a good deal of sensory knowledge, but cannot be reduced to such sensory knowledge. Since the 'I think' does not itself contain distinctively sensory knowledge, Hegel sees it as purified of such sensory content, as having left the sensory realm behind. Thus, although he rejects the Kantian notion of a pure reason entirely and in principle divorced from sensibility, Hegel recovers a notion of pure reason by postulating a form of thought and knowledge that rises above the sensory to achieve independence of any and all particular sensory contents.

Reason necessarily goes beyond sense, but the cogito shows that it does not thereby lose either its object of its objectivity. It therefore cannot be the case that all relation of thought to its object is the business of an entirely separate, nonrational faculty of mind. Since not all relation to objects is directly mediated by sensibility, sensibility is no longer the universal limitation on all thought. Thus for Hegel the distinctions Kant relied on to separate general and transcendental logic have evaporated, and the conclusion must be that all logic has a transcendental component and thus merges into metaphysics.

Bluntly put, since thought must be capable of self-relation, the conditions necessary to that self-relation are conditions on all thought. Some objects we may relate to through sensation, but the thinking that relates to them must still belong to a structure of thought capable of pure (nonsensuous), objective self-relation. The cogito shows the reality of this self-relation of thought to itself, but the lesson of the cogito goes beyond a mere ability of thought to refer to itself: It shows that thought must be capable of knowing itself. Hegel would not claim that the cogito itself contains or expresses such self-knowledge of thinking by thinking, but he does believe that he can demonstrate that the self-reference of thought to thought contained in the cogito is itself possible only if thought is also capable of complete self-comprehension. (This is a major result of the Phenomenology of Spirit.) The reality of the self-related structure of thought demands closure. The self-related structure of thought is the topic for logic.

Thus Hegel's logic is at the same time an implicit theory of subjectivity, of what kind of structure is necessary in order for thinking to comprehend itself. The self-comprehension of thought requires a
comprehension of the object of thought and thought’s relation to that object, for, as we have seen, thought cannot be characterized in an entirely self-contained, purely syntactic way. In completely characterizing itself, thought must also completely characterize its range of possible objects, and there can be no remainder, no things-in-themselves left over outside the structure of thought. The structures revealed by the self-comprehension of thought include necessarily the structures of all objects of thought as well; an object that is not a possible object of thought is nothing at all. But what the logic does not itself directly consider are the ways in which thought structures are embodied in the world. The rest of Hegel’s philosophy deals with this, for thought structures are embodied in nature (thus the philosophy of nature), in social structures (thus the philosophy of objective spirit), in the expressive products of human activity (thus the philosophy of absolute spirit), and, of course, in the psyches of individual organisms. It is the task of the philosophy of subjective spirit to discuss how it is possible for an individual animal organism to embody within itself the structures definitive of thinking. Needless to say, the complex organization requisite to embodying a self-comprehending structure of thought imposes significant constraints on the nature and capacities of such an organism. But for our purposes it is more important to see that Hegel does not believe that the embodiment of the structures constitutive of thought is confined solely to individual animal organisms: The world as a whole also embodies these structures. In order to see why Hegel thinks this is necessary and how he believes it to be possible, we need to look more closely at his ontology.

The active concrete universal

Hegel believes that most of his predecessors chose the wrong paradigm of predication. These philosophers – philosophers trapped in the “attitude of the understanding” according to Hegel – took accidental predications (e.g. “The ball is red”) as paradigmatic. In such a case there is no intrinsic connection between the universal and the individual it is predicated of; both the universal and the individual seem quite indifferent to each other. Taking this to be the paradigmatic predication relation, Hegel believes, leads to a metaphysics in which the world is seen as composed of a nexus of bare particulars (in his terminology abstract individuals) and ontologically independent universals (he would call these abstract universals). Hegel thinks such a metaphysics impossible; to escape being trapped in it one must reject both the abstract individual and the abstract universal.

In the place of accidental predication Hegel substitutes a version of essential predication, for in an essential predication the universal and
the individual are intrinsically tied. The essence of something is also seen by Hegel to have some explanatory power; saying of what kind a thing is can be a legitimate explanatory move. In Hegel's view an essence, something's concept, is not a descriptive characterization, but a prescriptive ideal, and it plays a role in a teleological explanation. Something's concept offers an ideal pattern which the thing strives to realize in the course of its existence, though individual things are never perfect exemplars of their essence. In this respect we can begin to see a rather strange melding of Aristotle's concept of an essence with the Kantian notion of a concept. Kant insisted that "a concept is always, as regards its form, something universal which serves as a rule" (Critique of Pure Reason, A 107). Hegel seizes on three aspects of Kant's a priori concepts - their unrestricted universality, their prescriptive force, and their conceptual priority over their instances - and transfers these properties to the basically Aristotelian conception of an essence or thing-kind.

Hegel also learned from Kant that concepts are not discrete entities that exist and can be known each independent of any others; neither thinker employs the notion of a simple concept. We can say that Hegel took over from Kant a coherence theory of concepts: Even bottom-level basic ideas are to be understood through their interaction with other ideas in basic principles, in contrastive relationships, and so forth. Hegel is committed to a more thoroughgoing holism of concepts than Kant, for he cannot distinguish absolutely between formal and material representations. Perhaps most important, the crucial relationships between concepts need not all be construed as analytic 'inclusions': Kant inaugurated the search for nonanalytic but also non-psychological, rational connections between concepts, and Hegel willingly followed. Thus, what Hegel calls a concept is a prescriptive ideal that is part of a system of such ideals that the world is striving to realize and in terms of which we can make sense of what happens in the world.

However, Hegel takes the rulelike character and implicit systematicity of concepts so seriously that he made a move Kant would never have dreamed of making. Hegel insisted that the being of the 'I' is the being of a concept, for the 'I' is the rule for the unification of all experience. The unity of apperception is the ideal governing all synthetic activity in the mind. Indeed, since the 'I' provides the ultimate rule - all concepts must be unified under the 'I,' including the pure concepts - the 'I,' the self, becomes a superconcept, a concept of concepts, the concept (WL, II: 220–1; SL, 583). Thus the cogito becomes the first and immediate expression of the self-directed, self-organizing activity of the concept. The 'I' or self is not a thinglike substance, but a conceptlike self-organizing activity.
Every universal of whatever kind unifies something, but in contrast to abstract universals like 'red,' concrete universals like 'dog' or 'thinker' not only unite various different individuals under some heading but also account for their internal unity. The model for this internal unification is the synthesis of the manifold into the unity of apperception. The manifold is unified, according to the Kantian vision, because I make it mine, constituting myself in that very process. Hegel attributes this kind of self-constituting activity to every concrete universal, to all concepts. Any unity of a manifold that is not thus actively involved in the very nature of the elements, while also constituting its own self in the activity, is to that degree a merely abstract universal. A concrete universal is therefore different from the abstract universals that previous thinkers in the classical tradition took to be the objects of thought.

The universal of the concept is not a mere sum of features common to several things, confronted by a particular which enjoys an existence on its own. It is, on the contrary, self-particularizing or self-specifying, and with undimmed clearness finds itself at home in this antithesis.

(Enz., § 163; my translation)

An abstract universal is a tag which can be hung on things otherwise quite indifferent to it in order to sort them out for whatever purposes one may have. A concrete universal, on the other hand, divides nature at the joints; it must reach to the very hearts of things and afford an understanding of their being. An abstract universal is static and unchanging because it is dead, a mere sum of otherwise unrelated features. A concrete universal, a concept, however, is alive, dynamic, and dialectical; it is essentially a part of a self-developing system.

In sum, the foremost characteristic of a concept is that it is active. Thus Hegel explains the stability of the world, the fact that the world is not a sheer, unstructured chaos, by the activity of concrete universals. The manifold unified by these concepts is not itself entirely separate from them in nature, provided from the outside, but must itself be of some determinate kind and therefore itself already conceptualized. Thus there is a complex structure of interrelated concepts, a structure that is not built up from the outside by some external agency, but develops its own organization from within. Its mode of action is teleological, that is, it is self-realization. The concept is both cause and effect; it is self-developing. Second, a concept is the truth of those objects it characterizes and animates. It is their essence, that which explains what they are and why they have the unity they do. Third, a concept is not separable from its instances, but actively manifests itself in and through them. Fourth, concepts have an essence of their own, the concept,
which realizes itself in the active self-realization of its contributory moments. Concepts are essentially parts of a self-realizing system. What ultimately is, according to Hegel, is a universal self-constitutive activity that becomes self-conscious in man’s knowledge of it – the Absolute.

The self-movement of the concept

In Hegel’s vision this universal self-constitutive activity expresses itself in the world via the articulation of nature into different orders of entities and properties. But the expression of the Absolute in nature is itself static; the movement and change within nature are but a pale reflection of the dynamic self-activity of the Absolute, for nature itself is a-historical, it does not develop, but simply changes endlessly. It is in the realm of spirit that this universal self-constitutive activity expresses itself adequately, both as historical development across the human, spiritual community and as the individual development of a thinker’s thought in contemplation.

Subjectivism is no longer a problem, Hegel thinks, because the active concrete universals that structure and inform the world are one and the same as the structures that animate subjective thought (when it has freed itself from the strictures of sense and understanding). One and the same rule system governs both thought and the world. That structure is reason itself, and it is grasped by individual minds through their instantiating the structure of rules in a self-conscious way.

All this grand talk of self-constituting activities can still, however, leave one dissatisfied, convinced that the fundamental questions still remain: In the self-movement of the concept, just what is moving, and how? We have seen that concepts are items in a complex, self-developing system and that this system is itself supposed to be a concept. It is easy to get the impression that this is a case of pulling oneself up by one’s own bootstraps. This is a serious charge against Hegel, and one that is not without merit, but a finer appreciation of his position shows that the situation is at least a good deal more complex.

Concrete universals must be embodied, so Hegel would not take the self-movement of the concept to be something that occurs only in a kind of Platonic heaven, apart from all sensuous, material reality. The movement of the concept must be embodied in a movement of things embodying the concept. Nature embodies the concept in one way, but not a way best suited to showing the concept’s own self-movement. It is spirit that embodies the concept in a way capable of exhibiting its self-movement. On the one hand the social structures of humanity embody the concept, and thus the historical development of those social structures is one form of the self-movement of the concept.
But this is not the sense in which the logic is the self-movement of the concept. The other form in which spirit embodies the concept is in thinking itself. In philosophy, pure thinking, we realize the self-movement of the concept by instantiating the self-developing system of concrete universals in a higher and still more adequate form than either nature or social reality finds possible.

Importantly, however, Hegel realizes that even this pure thinking must be embodied, and its embodiment is language, for "we think in names" (Enz., § 462). But if we think in words, then the movement of thought must also be a movement of words, and an investigation of "thinking and the rules of thinking" will result in conclusions that apply indirectly to language as the essential expressive embodiment of thought. This line of thought leads to the notion that Hegel's logic is an attempt to construct an ideal language. What is the Hegelian ideal for language? This is a difficult question, but one desideratum stands out above all others: The ideal language must be its own meta-language. It must contain its own truth concept and be capable of expressing its own relation to the world (and itself) truthfully. Indeed, since Hegel believes thought must necessarily know itself as thought, its embodiment, ideal language, must also necessarily be expressively complete and capable of demonstrating this expressive completeness. Thus Hegel's logic is an attempt to elaborate a set of conceptual linguistic structures that are expressively complete and capable of demonstrating this completeness by (a) reconstructing the depth-conceptual and linguistic structures we in fact find around us in ordinary language, in the sciences, and in religion and philosophy, and (b) accounting for its completeness by generating these structures from the very idea of (linguistically embodied) thought.

Hegel takes this project to be implicit in the very existence of language. He regards it as a project to which language users contribute unconsciously as they use language in navigating through the world and consciously as they engage in logic or philosophy. Hegel's logic presents an explicit and self-conscious culmination of this historical development, but not as an historical development – that occurs in the philosophy of history and also, in part, in the Phenomenology. Hegel's logic presents us with the pure results of this process: an expressively complete and self-reflexive set of linguistic/conceptual structures.

--- LOGIC AS THE SCIENCE OF FORM ---

Since everything that can be thought or expressed must utilize one of the conceptual structures/expressive forms elaborated in the logic, it is easily seen how the logic constitutes the science of form. Every possible
form is systematically generated in the course of the logic, Hegel claims, and all content, every phenomenon, will find its appropriate form somewhere in the battery of conceptual forms so generated.

It is no objection that this means Hegel intends his logic to be irrefutable and unfalsifiable; anything properly called logic intends to be irrefutable. Usually this is explained in terms of the contentlessness, the pure formality of logic. This explanation is not open to Hegel. His explanation can only be that his logic simply spells out the necessary conditions of thought, and therefore the necessary conditions of the existence of the refutable. It would be self-defeating to reject it because it is irrefutable.

But there is also no guarantee in Hegel's logic that phenomena come with their logic already patent. Although it seems to be a consequence of his interpretation of the form/content distinction that every content will have some form in which it is best expressed and comprehended, given the imperfection of nature, form–content mismatches in which both moments are obscured are only to be expected. In this case a great deal of acumen may be required for proper analysis. Surface structure may conceal logical form.

So-called “dialectical” consideration of nature or society is nothing more than a learned ability to identify the conceptual structures characteristic to the phenomena at stake. This means that one understands the dialectic of X when one has properly diagnosed the kinds of conceptual structures definitive of X's. For instance, the dialectic of the family is controlled by the fact that implicit in the very concept of a family are certain kinds of relationships within the family, certain kinds of relationships between the family unit and the external world, the general function of the family in the ethical life of a community, and the relation of the family, as a social structure, to other forms of social organization such as the commercial marketplace. Not all of these relationships are superficially evident within the concept of the family, however, Dialecticians may start with a superficial understanding of the concept of a family, but as they seek to understand the concept more deeply, they can use the abstract structures plotted out in logic to explore the conceptual space of the family in greater detail. What conceptual tensions are resolved within the family structure? What tensions does it itself generate? Under what higher heading would the family fall? The concept of the family reveals as well the dysfunctional family, for it will then be clear how families can fall short of the concept. The logic provides the theoretical structures within which our comprehension of such phenomena operates; all of these phenomena and their relationships will be instances of the most general kinds of objects of thought as laid out in the logic.
Though we have now seen how Hegel thinks his logic compares to the traditional conceptions of logic and metaphysics, the characterization has been very abstract. It is still hard to see how to begin this project and then carry on with it. Let us therefore consider these matters at a more practical level. How does one start doing logic? Since logic is the self-movement of the concept, it seems that there is nothing that one does at all. How does one get concepts to move themselves?

Hegel insists that logic can have no presuppositions, even to the point of not having a clear conception of the discipline itself until it is completed. "What logic is cannot be stated beforehand, rather does this knowledge of what it is first emerge as the final outcome and consummation of the whole exposition" (WL, I: 23; SL, 43). Yet, as we will see, he also knows exactly where to begin: Being. The presuppositionlessness of logic is apparently the guarantee of its purity, its universality, its necessity, its absoluteness, and it is therefore extremely important. Yet Hegel also says that the system is a circle of circles, and that seems clearly to imply that the logic is in some sense generated by, derived from, or entailed by the rest of the system as well; why isn’t this a form of presupposition?

Apparently, then, one can begin doing logic without any clear idea of what it is that one is doing or how it is to be done. Nonetheless, despite all the talk about presuppositionlessness, it is not the case that logic is begun absent of all conditions. "The beginning is logical in that it is to be made in the element of thought that is free and for itself, in pure knowing" (WL, I: 53; SL, 68). The point seems to be that the essential condition for logic consists in a certain attitude or state on the part of the logician. This state of pure knowledge is reached at the end of the 1807 Phenomenology of Spirit by overcoming the subject–object distinction altogether. However one arrives at it (there is no reason to believe it can be reached only via the train of thought contained in the Phenomenology),^18^ pure knowing is a state in which thinking is directed solely upon thought itself (shades of Aristotle’s thought thinking thought!), without constraint from any sensory conditions, prejudices of the understanding, or even preconceptions about thinking. One has, as it were, opened oneself up to the world, which can finally lay itself bare before one, unobscured by merely subjective intrusions. Even this way of describing the situation rings slightly false, for it makes the world seem something distinguished from and therefore opposed to an observing consciousness. But in pure knowing the distinction between knower and known, subject and world, has utterly vanished, or more accurately, there is only a distinction in their forms, for in pure knowing the content of world and thought is identical."
Now starting from this determination of pure knowledge, all that is needed to ensure that the beginning remains immanent in its scientific development is to consider, or rather, ridding oneself of all other reflections and opinions whatever, simply to take up, *what is there before us*.

Pure knowing as concentrated into this unity has sublated all reference to an other and to mediation; it is without any distinction and as thus distinctionless, ceases itself to be knowledge; what is present is only *simple immediacy*.

(Hegel, *WL*, I: 54; *SL*, 69)

Hegel admits that in this case pure knowing as an outcome of finite (impure) knowing is presupposed, but pure knowing in this sense is not a thesis or claim that is presupposed. It is itself a mode of being, a being in a position to know. It is not itself a cognitive presupposition, but only the presupposition of pure cognition. The circle is complete when this mode of being has itself been reapprehended in knowledge and the identity of thought and being it is predicated upon is vindicated.

But if no presupposition is to be made and the beginning itself is taken *immediately*, then its only determination is that it is to be the beginning of logic, of thought as such. All that is present is simply the resolve, which can also be regarded as arbitrary, that we propose to consider thought as such.

(Hegel, *WL*, I: 54; *SL*, 70)

The claim here seems even more radical: The honest, even naive resolve to think about thought as such should be sufficient to begin logic, for that honest, if naive, resolve begins from the identity of thought and being. We do not need to know that we are in the state of pure knowledge to begin logic. To require that before we begin doing logic we know that we have achieved a state of pure knowing would introduce a cognitive presupposition again. The possibility of pure knowing – which Hegel equates with the identity of thought and being – means that the honest resolve to think about thought can and eventually will succeed. The vindication of the state of pure knowing achieved by the end of our deliberations suffices to legitimate the entire undertaking. The only things that stand in the way of reaching that consummation are the sedimented preconceptions we have accumulated through our experience of acculturation.

But why should the appropriate beginning be pure being? Hegel tells us that since it is a pure beginning, it must be something immediate, that is, not derived from anything else, not mediated by any other. Further, it must be simple, without any internal structure (or we would have to start with that). He then informs us that “this simple
immediacy . . . in its true expression is pure being" (WL, I: 54; SL, 69). Why is this? What makes “being” the correct expression of the beginning point of logic? Here we encounter a general difficulty with Hegel’s logic: The concept designations he chooses often seem less than compelling. That the simple, immediate universality with which logic begins should be called “being” is, in fact, more intuitive than many of his other choices. Although we have said that logic is tied to language in that thought must express itself in language, there is no guarantee that the purified structures of thought will map exactly onto the pre-existing vocabulary and manipulation rules of any language. Ordinary language gives us a rich resource refined over millennia of reflection, but the logician must get behind the surface structures of the language to uncover the real logical structures embodied in that language.

Philosophy has the right to select from the language of common life which is made for the world of pictorial thinking, such expressions as seem to approximate to the determinations of the Concept. There cannot be any question of demonstrating for a word selected from the language of common life that in common life, too, one associates with it the same concept for which philosophy employs it; for common life has no concepts, but only pictorial thoughts and general ideas, and to recognize the concept in what is else a mere general idea is philosophy itself. (WL, II: 357; SL, 708)

The history of philosophy provides a particularly rich resource, for it mirrors (though by no means exactly) the progress of thought itself. Thus, the attempt to think pure immediacy appeared early on in the philosophy of the Eleatics. Parmenides’ pronouncement that “Being is and Not-Being is not” is its earliest expression, and surely Hegel is leaning on this phrasing when he says that the beginning point, simple immediacy, is being. The attempt to think pure being turns out to be unstable – it is identical to a thought of pure nothing, even though the two concepts are superficially in absolute opposition. And it is no accident that this conflict generates a concept Hegel expresses as “becoming,” the key word in Heraclitus’ philosophy.

--- TRIADS AND DIALECTIC ---

Hegel is perhaps most renowned for the constant triadic structure of his logic, popularized without much textual basis as “thesis–antithesis–synthesis.” But whatever slogan one uses to characterize the triadic structures encountered throughout the logic, Hegel believes this pattern
arises necessarily from "the method" of the logic. Since, as we have seen, this method is no method at all, but rather the self-movement of the concept, Hegel believes the triadic structure is inherent in concepts themselves (Enz., § 79). What are these triads, and why does Hegel believe that the conceptual realm is so structured?

Logic is the self-investigation of thought; at its end, thought must comprehend itself. We can therefore think of each concept encountered in the logic as a candidate theory of thought. This is a slightly misleading way to phrase it, for it seems to presuppose that someone, a subjectivity external to and separate from the object of its thinking, is proposing some abstract set of propositions intended to characterize correctly that object of thought. Thus, there would be three relata here: a subject, an object, and a theory. But in logic there is only one presence: self-related thought. We might better think of each concept in the logic as a mode of thought's self-relation. And since thought is self-constituting activity, each concept is therefore a mode of thought's existence. The highest mode of thought's existence, the mode without which it could not be the completely self-constituting activity of thought, is the Idea, thought's adequate self-comprehension.

Put another way, the constant content throughout the logic is thought itself; each of the concepts encountered up to the Idea is a less than fully adequate form for that content. Though less than fully adequate, each captures a dimension of thought, a real mode of thought's existence. The form adequate to the content of logic is, in fact, none other than the comprehension of the whole of the series of less than adequate forms, for collectively the concepts embody and enable thought's self-comprehension.

Suppose, then, we begin with the honest resolve to think thought, and that we begin with the immediate, simple universality Hegel calls "being." It is important to be clear about what this beginning point is. It is to be pure being, which means that no determinate being is in question here. It is not the kind of being one may talk of in speaking of the being of a number or the being of space or the being of consciousness. Hegel is well aware that this concept is an abstraction, indeed, the absolute abstraction from all determinateness.

As the beginning point of the logic this concept is at once a proto-theory of thought and a mode of thought itself, a way in which thought is. As a proto-theory of thought, something a consciousness considers for adoption, there are many inadequacies to this concept: It is highly inarticulate, unable to describe or explain any of the phenomena we normally associate with thought, including its own existence. But as correct as such considerations are, they are irrelevant from Hegel's point of view. They do not exhibit the "self-movement of the concept," for one. They exhibit instead an external reflection upon a subjective
reality, according to Hegel. Second, while they may give good reason
for rejecting the proto-theory, they fail in two regards: (a) they do not
show whether the concept indeed captures something of the nature of
thought, and (b) they do not point the way to a better conception.

But consider this concept as itself a mode or determination of
thought. For being is as much a way of thinking as an object of
thought. Concepts are not simple, given entities, each capable of its
existence entirely separately from others. They are essentially and neces­
sarily involved in contrastive relations, in entailment relations, etc. The
system of pure thoughts forms a self-realizing structure. No single
determination of thought is entirely self-subsistent. The concept of
pure being, indeterminate immediacy, however, attempts to be just that
— without inner determination, without relation to anything else. In its
attempt to purify itself from every determinate content, it divests itself
of all content and turns out to be identical to the concept of nothing.
In this case the self-movement of these concepts turns out to be the
intrinsic connection between the contents (or in this case, lack thereof)
of the concepts.

Hegel confronts the question of how these concepts could be self­
moving more explicitly in considering Jacobi’s critique of Kant’s notion
of a priori synthesis. Jacobi claimed that when he achieved a state of
purified, abstract consciousness, no synthetic activity, no “movement”
among the concepts was evident at all. Hegel replies:

But this is found immediately in them. They [the thoughts of
pure space, pure time, pure being, and so on] are, as Jacobi
profusely describes them, results of abstraction; they are
expressly determined as indeterminate and this – to go back to
its simplest form – is being. But it is this very indeterminateness
which constitutes its determinateness; for indeterminateness is
opposed to determinateness; hence as so opposed it is itself
determinate or the negative, and the pure, quite abstract
negative. It is this indeterminateness or abstract negation which
thus has being present within it, which reflection, both outer
and inner, enunciates when it equates it with nothing, declares
it to be an empty product of thought, to be nothing. Or it can
be expressed thus: because being is devoid of all determination
whatsoever, it is not the (affirmative) determinateness which it
is; it is not being but nothing.

(WL, I: 85; SL, 99)
The attempt to think pure, indeterminate being is, in effect, a failure,
for its indeterminateness is its determinateness. But thought does not
stop here. The failure is not absolute. Thinking of pure being has
turned out to be thinking of nothing, but this unity of being and
nothing has transformed them both. The lesson is that in all thinking being and nothing are thought together.

Being and nothing are the same; but in their truth, in their unity, they have vanished as these determinations and are now something else. Being and nothing are the same; but just because they are the same they are no longer being and nothing, but now have a different significance. . . . This unity now remains their base from which they do not again emerge in the abstract significance of being and nothing.

(WL, I: 95; SL, 108)

Everything and everythinking is a union of being and nothing; just how these two are to be unified and what further transformations must occur before a fully stable conceptual scheme is available is the story of the logic. 20

But Hegel admits that the transaction between being and nothing is not typical: there is no real transition to be found, but only an immediate identity.

In the pure reflection of the beginning as it is made in this logic with being as such, the transition is still concealed; because being is posited only as immediate, therefore nothing emerges in it only immediately. But all the subsequent determinations, like determinate being which immediately follows, are more concrete; in determinate being there is already posited that which contains and produces the contradiction of those abstractions and therefore their transition.

(WL, I: 86; SL, 99)

Nonetheless, this unity of being and nothing, which is their “truth,” is labeled “becoming” by Hegel.

_Becoming_ is the unseparatedness of being and nothing, not the unity which abstracts from being and nothing; but as the unity of _being and nothing_ it is this _determinate_ unity in which there is both being and nothing. But in so far as being and nothing, each unseparated from its other, is, each is _not_. They are therefore in this unity but only as vanishing, sublated moments.

(WL, I: 92; SL, 105)

Depending on whether one emphasizes being or nothing as the immediate element and the other as related to it, becoming has two forms, coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be. But is “becoming” at all an appropriate label for the unity of being and nothing? It has the historical pedigree of being Heraclitus’ response to Parmenidean Being, but it is so loaded down with temporal connotations and so closely associated
with the notion of change that it seems at best a highly misleading choice of terms. But it is also hard to see what other term might serve better. Becoming is the third, yet it is not itself stable.

Being and nothing are in this unity only as vanishing moments; yet becoming as such is only through their distinguishedness. Their vanishing, therefore, is the vanishing of becoming of the vanishing of the vanishing itself. Becoming is an unstable unrest which settles into a stable result.

(WL, I: 93; SL, 106)

The stable result is the concept of determinate being. Being and nothing have been transformed, or rather have revealed their true colors in their unity, becoming, but this very unity cannot retain the character of becoming. “It is . . . inherently self-contradictory, because the determinations it unites within itself are opposed to each other; such a unity destroys itself” (ibid.). Becoming destroys itself, not by negating itself entirely – that would return to mere nothing – but by settling into a stable and once again immediate oneness: determinate being.

The identification of being and nothing seems to be motivated by considerations of the nature of identity and individuation of concepts by their contents and other reasonable considerations in the context of the project of the logic. But the subsequent moves to becoming and thence to determinate being do not seem nearly as intelligibly grounded. It is hard not to think that talk of the vanishing of vanishing and suchlike is mere word play without significant philosophical import. Yet there is also something intuitively right about Hegel’s conclusion that the attempts to think pure immediacy must fail in favor of thoughts of determinately qualified forms of being. The text of the logic challenges the interpreter to show how Hegel’s principal moves actually trace the “self-movement of the concept” – a movement that is supposed to be the very soul of intelligibility – despite a superficial form as crabbed and obscure as any text ever written.

Numerous authors have attempted overviews of the progress of Hegel’s logic, and numerous claims have been made about the general course of the argumentation, but there is still no thoroughgoing commentary on Hegel’s logic to place beside the commentaries on other philosophical masters by scholars like Cornford, W.D. Ross, Vaihinger, or Kemp Smith. No one has been able systematically to reconstruct the flow of argumentation in the logic in a thoroughly coherent, detailed, and intelligible manner. In the opinion of this writer, generalizations about the overall pattern of argumentation followed by attempts to show with specific examples how the pattern is instantiated have for so long failed so badly to illuminate this text that a new push to investigate the individual arguments entirely on their own should
take precedence. If Hegel's pronouncements about his method are correct and in each case only the self-movement of the concept is involved, each argument should be intelligible in its own right. Indeed, if Hegel's remark that the method of the logic just is the self-movement of the concept is taken more seriously than most of his interpreters have allowed, there may be no higher principles involved throughout the whole course of the logic.21 The detail work may be all that there is to understanding Hegel's logic.

APPENDIX

I have marked one divergence between the Science of Logic and the Encyclopedia in the Doctrine of Being, but it should be noted that the Encyclopedia includes far less detail than the greater Logic and that the arrangement in the Doctrine of Essence differs fairly significantly, enough that it could not be easily marked on this outline.22

I. The Doctrine of Being
   A. Determinateness (Quality)
      1. Being
         a. Being
         b. Nothing
         c. Becoming
            (1) Unity of Being and Nothing
            (2) Moments of Becoming: Coming-to-be and Ceasing-to-be
            (3) Sublation of Becoming
      2. Determinate Being
         a. Determinate Being as Such
            (1) Determinate Being in General
            (2) Quality
            (3) Something
         b. Finitude
            (1) Something and Other
            (2) Determination, Constitution, and Limit
            (3) Finitude
               (a) The Immediacy of Finitude
               (b) Limitation and the Ought
               (c) Transition of the Finite into the Infinite
         c. Infinity
            (1) The Infinite in General
            (2) Alternating Determination of the Finite and Infinite
3. Being-for-self
   a. Being-for-self as such
      (1) Determinate Being and Being-for-self
      (2) Being-for-one
      (3) The One
   b. The One and the Many
      (1) The One in its Own Self
      (2) The One and the Void
      (3) Many Ones – Repulsion
   c. Repulsion and Attraction
      (1) Exclusion of the One
      (2) The One of Attraction
      (3) The Relation of Repulsion and Attraction

B. Magnitude (Quantity)
   1. Quantity
      a. Pure Quantity
      b. Continuous and Discrete Magnitude
      c. Limitation of Quantity
   2. Quantum
      a. Number
      b. Extensive and Intensive Quantum
         (1) Their Difference
         (2) Identity of Extensive and Intensive Magnitude
         (3) Alteration of Quantum
      c. Quantitative Infinity
         (1) Its Concept
         (2) The Quantitative Infinite Process
         (3) The Infinity of Quantum
   3. The Quantitative Relation or Ratio (Enc.: Degree)
      a. The Direct Ratio
      b. Inverse Ratio
      c. The Ratio of Powers

C. Measure
   1. Specific Quantity
      a. The Specific Quantum
      b. Specifying Measure
         (1) The Rule
         (2) Specifying Measure
         (3) Relation of the Two Sides as Qualities
      c. Being-for-self in Measure
   2. Real Measure
      a. The Relation of Self-subsistent Measures
         (1) Combination of Two Measures
(2) Measure as a Series of Measure Relations
(3) Elective Affinity
b. Nodal Line of Measure Relations
c. The Measureless
3. The Becoming of Essence
   a. Absolute Indifference
   b. Indifference as an Inverse Ratio of its Factors
   c. Transition into Essence

II. The Doctrine of Essence
   A. Essence as Reflection within Itself
      1. Illusory Being
         a. The Essential and the Unessential
         b. Illusory Being
         c. Reflection
            (1) Positing Reflection
            (2) External Reflection
            (3) Determining Reflection
      2. The Essentialities of Determinations of Reflection
         a. Identity
         b. Difference
            (1) Absolute Difference
            (2) Diversity
            (3) Opposition
         c. Contradiction
      3. Ground
         a. Absolute Ground
            (1) Form and Essence
            (2) Form and Matter
            (3) Form and Content
         b. Determinate Ground
            (1) Formal Ground
            (2) Real Ground
            (3) The Complete Ground
         c. Condition
            (1) The Relatively Unconditioned
            (2) The Absolutely Unconditioned
            (3) Emergence of the Fact into Existence

   B. Appearance
      1. Existence
         a. The Thing and its Properties
            (1) Thing-in-itself and Existence
            (2) Property
            (3) The Reciprocal Action of Things
b. The Constitution of the Thing out of Matters

c. Dissolution of the Thing

2. Appearance
   a. The Law of Appearance
   b. The World of Appearance and World-in-itself
   c. Dissolution of Appearance

3. The Essential Relation
   a. The Relation of Whole and Parts
   b. The Relation of Force and its Expression
      (1) The Conditionedness of Force
      (2) The Solicitation of Force
      (3) The Infinity of Force
   c. Relation of Outer and Inner

C. Actuality
   1. The Absolute
      a. The Exposition of the Absolute
      b. The Absolute Attribute
      c. The Mode of the Absolute
   2. Actuality
      a. Contingency, or Formal Actuality, Possibility, and Necessity
      b. Relative Necessity, or Real Actuality, Possibility, and Necessity
      c. Absolute Necessity
   3. The Absolute Relation
      a. The Relation of Substantiality
      b. The Relation of Causality
         (1) Formal Causality
         (2) The Determinate Relation of Causality
         (3) Action and Reaction
      c. Reciprocity

III. The Doctrine of the Concept

A. Subjectivity
   1. The Concept
      a. The Universal Concept
      b. The Particular Concept
      c. The Individual
   2. The Judgment
      a. The Judgment of Existence (Inherence)
         (1) The Positive Judgment
         (2) The Negative Judgment
         (3) The Infinite Judgment
      b. The Judgment of Reflection
         (1) The Singular Judgment
HEGEL'S LOGIC AND PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

(2) The Particular Judgment
(3) The Universal Judgment
c. The Judgment of Necessity
   (1) The Categorical Judgment
   (2) The Hypothetical Judgment
   (3) The Disjunctive Judgment
d. The Judgment of the Concept
   (1) The Assertoric Judgment
   (2) The Problematic Judgment
   (3) The Apodeictic Judgment

3. The Syllogism
   a. The Syllogism of Existence
      (1) First Figure of the Syllogism
      (2) The Second Figure: P-I-U
      (3) The Third Figure: I-U-P
      (4) The Fourth Figure: U-U-U, or the Mathematical Syllogism
   b. The Syllogism of Reflection
      (1) The Syllogism of Allness
      (2) The Syllogism of Induction
      (3) The Syllogism of Analogy
c. The Syllogism of Necessity
   (1) The Categorical Syllogism
   (2) The Hypothetical Syllogism
   (3) The Disjunctive Syllogism

B. Objectivity
   1. Mechanism
   a. The Mechanical Object
   b. The Mechanical Process
      (1) The Formal Mechanical Process
      (2) The Real Mechanical Process
      (3) The Product of the Mechanical Process
c. Absolute Mechanism
      (1) The Center
      (2) Law
      (3) Transition of Mechanism
   2. Chemism
   a. The Chemical Object
   b. The Chemical Process
c. Transition of Chemism
   3. Teleology
   a. The Subjective End
   b. The Means
c. The Realized End

247
C. The Idea
   1. Life
      a. The Living Individual
      b. The Life Process
      c. The Genus
   2. The Idea of Cognition
      a. The Idea of the True
         (1) Analytic Cognition
         (2) Synthetic Cognition
            (a) Definition
            (b) Division
            (c) The Theorem
      b. The Idea of the Good
   3. The Absolute Idea

--- NOTES ---

1 Ideally, the formal properties of items do not depend in any way on their semantic or representational properties, and therefore cannot depend in any way on the nature of the reality they represent. But this is really too simple, since the logician must distinguish logical from nonlogical particles. The whole reason for making the distinction and doing logic in the first place rests on the different kinds of content embodied in the symbols.

2 Traditionally, logic is thought to spell out the conditions for thought's 'agreeing' with itself, assuming that unless it agrees with itself, it cannot agree with reality. But there are substantive (and nonformal) assumptions here about the nature of such internal agreement and about the nature of reality.


4 I distinguish between the generic discipline of logic and Hegel's particular treatment of it by calling his treatment the logic. This usage does not distinguish between his treatments in the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*.

5 Note that Hegel explicitly does not say that the logic is an exposition of the ideas or the mind of God, for he would insist that this kind of imagistic and metaphoric way of describing the logic is very inadequate. Rather, it is an exposition of God himself.

6 A good example of this occurs in the Zusätze to § 24 of the *Encyclopedia*, where the Mosaic legend of the fall of man is read as an "ancient picture of the origin and consequences" of the self-disruption of spirit that makes all knowledge possible to begin with.

7 Actually, Hegel himself would have been more likely to have said that this development bottomed out with Kant, whom in this regard he classifies as an empiricist, simply because the hard-core nominalist empiricists still held onto
the simple faith that thought (in their case their ideas and impressions) and reality match. Only in Kant are we inescapably confined to a realm of thought without direct connection to reality.

8 "It is one of the profoundest and truest insights to be found in the Critique of Pure Reason that the unity which constitutes the nature of the Concept is recognized as the original synthetic unity of apperception, as unity of the I think, or of self-consciousness. . . . Thus we are justified by a cardinal principle of the Kantian philosophy in referring to the nature of the I in order to learn what the Concept is" (WL, II: 221–2; SL, 584–5).

9 Hegel does not believe that the cogito expresses a direct intuition of a substantial soul. Indeed, just what is at stake in the cogito turns out to be very complex and intertwined with a great deal of other knowledge about ourselves and the world around us. Thus, Hegel's interpretation of the cogito is highly anti-Cartesian. I have discussed this in greater detail in W.A. DeVries, Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), ch. 6.

10 Hegel, of course, never couches his objection to Kant in these terms.


12 This aspect of Hegel's logic has been emphasized in K. Düsing, Das Problem der Subjektivität in Hegels Logik, Hegel-Studien Beiheft 15 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1976).

13 The following section is derived, in substance, from DeVries, op. cit., pp. 171–4.

14 The attitude of the understanding seeks to find and hold on to a set of rigid categories and distinctions that can be brought independently to bear on any material. The pre-Kantian thinkers, both rationalist and empiricist, with their consistent drive to decompose everything into simple atoms, are strong examples of this (pre-)philosophical attitude.


16 Cf. the discussion of the active universal and "objective thought" in Enz., §§ 19–25.

17 Hegel seems to assume that with sufficient consideration one conceptual structure will present itself as being the structure characteristic of the phenomenon in question. But why could there not be alternative structures, perhaps each revealing something important about the phenomenon, but none with a claim to being the privileged structure inherent in the phenomenon? Hegel's own attempts to find the "right" structure for the philosophy of religion, for instance, show that he struggled with different alternatives.

18 Nevertheless, there are some contemporary commentators, e.g. Kenley Dove and William Maker, who seem to hold that retracing the Phenomenology is indeed the only way to achieve this state.

19 Although Husserl never thought much of Hegel, Hegel's conception of the attitude of pure knowing bears striking similarities to Husserl's notion of the phenomenological attitude. This may help explain why so many of Husserl's followers, unlike their master, found Hegel fascinating.

20 For any excellent review of the interpretations and criticisms of the opening moves in Hegel's logic, see D. Henrich, "Anfang und Methode der Logik," in
his *Hegel im Kontext* (Frankfurt Main: Suhrkamp, 1967). Unfortunately, this essay — the entire book, for that matter — is not available in English translation.

21 The major argument against this particularist reading of Hegel’s logic is that it leaves the systematic triadicity of the system totally unexplained. Surely there is no particular reason to think that each and every concept must have an intrinsic, implicit triadic structure. I am willing to hazard the revisionist guess that the triadicity is an artifact of Hegel’s commitment to a logic of terms in which the principal model of logical relation is a three-termed syllogism. But this is not the place to defend such a radical interpretation.

22 Hegel succeeded in revising only the Doctrine of Being before his untimely death. This revision brings it into accord with the logic as contained in the third edition of the *Encyclopedia*. But the Doctrine of Essence remains unrevised in the *Science of Logic*, and it differs in some significant ways from the version contained in the *Encyclopedia*. We must assume that had Hegel lived to revise the Doctrine of Essence in the larger *Logic*, it would have been brought into agreement with the version in the *Encyclopedia*. I am not aware of a thoroughgoing study of the differences between the two logics. Significantly, the Doctrine of the Concept as contained in the *Science of Logic* and published in 1816, several years after the appearance of the first two parts, accords substantially with the version in the *Encyclopedia*; apparently it would not have needed as extensive revision.

---

**SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY**

---

**Original language editions**


---

**English translations**


---

250

**Bibliographies and concordances**


**Influences**


**Hegel’s development**

THE AGE OF GERMAN IDEALISM

The philosophy of Hegel: general surveys


Hegel's logic and metaphysics

7.52 Trendelenburg, A. Logische Untersuchungen, Berlin: Bethge, 1840.
Hegel's philosophy of mind


