HEGEL AND THE METAPHYSICS OF ABSOLUTE NEGATIVITY

Hegel’s doctrines of absolute negativity and “the Concept” are among his most original contributions to philosophy and they constitute the systematic core of dialectical thought. Brady Bowman explores the interrelations between these doctrines, their implications for Hegel’s critical understanding of classical logic and ontology, natural science, and mathematics as forms of “finite cognition,” and their role in developing a positive, “speculative” account of consciousness and its place in nature. As a means to this end, Bowman also re-examines Hegel’s relations to Kant and pre-Kantian rationalism, and to key post-Kantian figures such as Jacobi, Fichte, and Schelling. His book draws from the breadth of Hegel’s writings to affirm a robustly metaphysical reading of the Hegelian project, and will be of great interest to students of Hegel and of German Idealism more generally.

BRADY BOWMAN is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the Pennsylvania State University. His recent publications include Sense Certainty: On the Systematic Pre-History of a Problem in German Idealism (2003).
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is my attempt to arrive at a general understanding of Hegel’s theoretical philosophy. I have been occupied with this task for longer than my doubtless very imperfect degree of success at it would indicate. The origins of the project go back to my doctoral studies at the Freie Universität Berlin, in the 1990s, and its basic conception and character have been shaped by the German community of Hegel scholars among whom I began my career. I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to my Doktorvater, Andreas Arndt; through my work on this book especially I have come to appreciate how much I learned from him. At an early stage in my career I received important impulses from Walter Jaeschke. My philosophical friendship with Albrecht Heil, also in Berlin, continually reminds me of why I got into this business to begin with. Klaus Vieweg, at the Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, recruited me into my first job; traces of the work I did with him on skepticism can be found throughout these pages. When I look back at the years I spent in Jena, they appear to me as an unbroken philosophical conversation – above all with Ralf Beuthan, my flatmate, fellow Hegelian, and constant interlocutor. Surely almost all the ideas in this book were, at one stage or other, topics of discussion with him and with our friends and colleagues Tommaso Pierini and Christian Spahn. In this context I would also like to mention my former colleague Jonas Maatsch. Dietmar Heidemann and Ulrich Schlösser, who were frequent guests at the department, have both also contributed to the ideas in this book in substantial ways. My association with Birgit Sandkaulen, who has since left Jena for Bochum to head the new Forschungszentrum für klassische deutsche Philosophie, was of decisive importance in broadening my vision of the sources and forces that shaped German thought around 1800; the philosophical exchange I enjoyed with her and her students, such as
Daniel Althof, Sandra Frey, and Oliver Koch, is continued in this book. Through my position in Jena I also had the privilege of getting to know a number of philosophers who have made decisive contributions to the study of Hegel and post-Kantian philosophy more generally. In ways the book makes obvious, I have drawn inspiration and insight from the work of Michael Forster, Dieter Henrich, Rolf-Peter Horstmann, Anton Friedrich Koch, John McDowell, Terry Pinkard, and Robert Pippin.

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Concurrently to my work on this book, I had the pleasure of working closely with Eckart Förster on the English translation of The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy, which greatly expanded both my knowledge of many facets of classical German philosophy and my understanding of its systematic development. Some of what I learned surfaces explicitly in the pages to come; a larger portion implicitly informs my discussions of the subject matter; more importantly, though, Eckart Förster’s philosophical rigor and seamless interweaving of intellectual history with systematic argumentation are ideals to which I have hoped to aspire.
Dalia Nassar read a substantial portion of the original draft of this book and provided valuable feedback and encouragement. As my fellow panelist at a conference on German Idealism organized by Weimin Shi at Tunghai University, Taiwan, in March 2011, where I presented a version of Chapter 5, she helped me further refine my ideas and recognize important parallels between Hegel and Schelling.

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To Katja Stuckatz I am grateful for the world she means to me. Du, Deiner, Dich Dir, ich Dir, Du mir – das gehört beiläufig nicht hierher!
A NOTE ON CITATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

I cite Hegel's texts according to the historical critical edition, *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by the Academy of Sciences of Nordrhein-Westfalia (Hamburg: Meiner1968–). In referring to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, I also give the paragraph numbers of the translation by A. V. Miller. Kant’s works are cited according to the *Akademie-Ausgabe*, except for the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which I conventionally cite by reference to the A or B edition. In the case of the most frequently cited texts by Kant and Hegel, the standard English translations include the pagination of these editions for ease of reference. I have made use of Norman Kemp Smith’s translation of Kant’s First Critique. For Hegel’s writings, I have consulted the translations by Miller (*Phenomenology of Spirit*), Harris and Cref (*The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy, Faith and Knowledge*, and *The Relation of Skepticism to Philosophy*), di Giovanni (*Science of Logic*), and Brinkmann and Dahlstrom (*Encyclopedia, Part i*). For full details, please refer to the bibliography, where references to translations of less frequently cited authors will also be found. Throughout, I have tacitly modified translations as needed, and supplied my own where no authoritative English edition yet exists.

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ABBREVIATIONS

6:12 Kant’s gesammelte Schriften (Akademie Edition): volume and page number
A/B First/second edition, Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason
CSM The Philosophical Writings of René Descartes, ed.
        Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch
Disc. Prael. Wolff, Discursus Praeliminarius, trans. and ed. Gawlick
        and Kriemendahl
Dt. Log. Wolff, Vernünftige Gedanken von den Kräften des
        menschlichen Verstandes und ihrem richtigen Gebrauche in
        Erkenntnis der Wahrheit, in Gesammelte Werke, Abteilung
        i, vol. 1, ed. Arndt
Dt. Met. Wolff, Vernünftige Gedanken von Gott, der Welt und
        der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt, in
E Spinoza, Ethics: part, definition, axiom, proposition,
        corollary, and/or scholium, in Collected Works, vol. 1,
        ed. Curley
ENC Hegel, Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830
        edn.). References are given by section (§) and
        indicate remarks (R) and additions (A)
FHJW Jacobi, Werke: Gesamtausgabe, ed. Hammacher and
        Jaeschke
GA Fichte, Gesamtausgabe der Bayrischen Akademie der
        Wissenschaft
GW Hegel, Gesammelte Werke (Akademie Edition); for GW
        9 (Phenomenology of Spirit), the section number (§) is
        also given
HA Goethe, Werke (Hamburger Ausgabe), ed. Trunz
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<td>HBr</td>
<td>Hegel, <em>Briefe</em>, ed. Hoffmeister</td>
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<td>KStA</td>
<td>Hölderlin, <em>Sämtliche Werke (Kleine Stuttgarter Ausgabe)</em>, ed. Beißner</td>
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<td>Ontol.</td>
<td>Wolff, <em>Philosophia prima, sive Ontologia</em></td>
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<td>TW</td>
<td>Hegel, <em>Werke in zwanzig Bänden</em>, ed. Moldenhauer and Michel</td>
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