

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-49968-3 - Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity

Brady Bowman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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).

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-49968-3 - Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity

Brady Bowman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-49968-3 - Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity

Brady Bowman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

MODERN EUROPEAN PHILOSOPHY

General Editor

WAYNE MARTIN, *University of Essex*

Advisory Board

SEBASTIAN GARDNER, *University College, London*

BEATRICE HAN-PILE, *University of Essex*

HANS SLUGA, *University of California, Berkeley*

Some recent titles

Frederick A. Olafson: *Heidegger and the Ground of Ethics*

Günter Zöller: *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy*

Warren Breckman: *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory*

William Blattner: *Heidegger's Temporal Idealism*

Charles Griswold: *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment*

Gary Gutting: *Pragmatic Liberalism and the Critique of Modernity*

Allen Wood: *Kant's Ethical Thought*

Karl Ameriks: *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*

Alfredo Ferrarin: *Hegel and Aristotle*

Cristina Lafont: *Heidegger, Language, and World-Disclosure*

Nicholas Wolterstorff: *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology*

Daniel Dahlstrom: *Heidegger's Concept of Truth*

Michelle Grier: *Kant's Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion*

Henry Allison: *Kant's Theory of Taste*

Allen Speight: *Hegel, Literature, and the Problem of Agency*

J. M. Bernstein: *Adorno*

Will Dudley: *Hegel, Nietzsche, and Philosophy*

Taylor Carman: *Heidegger's Analytic*

Douglas Moggach: *The Philosophy and Politics of Bruno Bauer*

Rüdiger Bubner: *The Innovations of Idealism*

Jon Stewart: *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*

Michael Quante: *Hegel's Concept of Action*

Wolfgang Detel: *Foucault and Classical Antiquity*

Robert M. Wallace: *Hegel's Philosophy of Reality, Freedom, and God*

Johanna Oksala: *Foucault on Freedom*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-49968-3 - Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity

Brady Bowman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Béatrice Longuenesse: *Kant on the Human Standpoint*

Wayne Martin: *Theories of Judgment*

Heinrich Meier: *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*

Otfried Höffe: *Kant's Cosmopolitan Theory of the Law and Peace*

Béatrice Longuenesse: *Hegel's Critique of Metaphysics*

Rachel Zuckert: *Kant on Beauty and Biology*

Andrew Bowie: *Music, Philosophy and Modernity*

Paul Redding: *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*

Kristin Gjesdal: *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism*

Jean-Christophe Merle: *German Idealism and the Concept of Punishment*

Sharon Krishek: *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*

Nicolas de Warren: *Husserl and the Promise of Time*

Benjamin Rutter: *Hegel on the Modern Arts*

Anne Margaret Baxley: *Kant's Theory of Virtue*

David James: *Fichte's Social and Political Philosophy*

Espen Hammer: *Philosophy and Temporality from Kant to Critical Theory*

Robert Stern: *Understanding Moral Obligation*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-49968-3 - Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity

Brady Bowman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

HEGEL AND THE METAPHYSICS OF ABSOLUTE NEGATIVITY

BRADY BOWMAN

Pennsylvania State University



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-49968-3 - Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity

Brady Bowman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107499683

© Brady Bowman 2013

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2013

First paperback edition 2015

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Bowman, Brady.

Hegel and the metaphysics of absolute negativity / Brady Bowman,
Pennsylvania State University.

pages cm. – (Modern European philosophy)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-03359-7 (hardback)

1. Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 1770–1831. I. Title.

B2948.B664 2013

193–dc23

2012036033

ISBN 978-1-107-03359-7 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-49968-3 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>A note on citations and translations</i>	xiii
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xv
Introduction: “A completely altered view of logic”	1
1 The Hegelian Concept, absolute negativity, and the transformation of philosophical critique	26
2 Hegel’s complex relationship to “pre-Kantian” metaphysics	62
3 Hegelian skepticism and the idealism of the finite	102
4 Skeptical implications for the foundations of natural science	134
5 The methodology of finite cognition and the ideal of mathematical rigor	158
6 <i>Die Sache selbst</i> : absolute negativity and Hegel’s speculative logic of content	201
7 Absolute negation and the history of logic	239
<i>Works cited</i>	261
<i>Index</i>	271

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-49968-3 - Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity

Brady Bowman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-49968-3 - Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity

Brady Bowman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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.

The ideas that began to take shape in Germany came to fruition in the United States. I have profited immeasurably from the openness and diversity of the American academy in general and from the supportive and stimulating climate among my colleagues at Penn State in particular. I am grateful to our head of department, Shannon Sullivan, for working to help maximize the time available to me for research and smoothing my path in other ways, as well. My heartfelt thanks go to Dennis Schmidt, my faculty mentor, and to Leonard Lawlor and Robert Bernasconi for their invaluable help and advice. Vincent Colapietro has also been a mentor and friend since before my arrival at Penn State and is now a trusted neighbor as well. Following Vincent's suggestion, Chris Lauer and I led a faculty–graduate student reading group on Hegel from 2007 till 2009 in which Vincent participated; a number of the views expressed in Chapters 3 and 4 on Hegel and natural science originated in our discussions there. John Christman, Paula Droege, Mark Fischer, and Jennifer Mensch have been great friends and partners in conversation on all things philosophical, and in this place I would also like to thank Jeffrey Wilson, who was there before it all began. I am also grateful to the students who took part in my seminar on the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in spring 2011; our discussions were instrumental in elaborating the views I present in Chapter 6.

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.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

xi

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.

During the final phase of revisions to the manuscript, I was able to take advantage of an Erasmus Mundus “Master Mundus” stipend to spend a semester working with Dietmar Heidemann at the University of Luxembourg. This allowed me adequate time to polish the manuscript and was also felicitous in affording me the opportunity to make several new philosophical acquaintances. My thanks to Dietmar for his gracious invitation and to Dean Susan Welch of the Penn State College of Liberal Arts for kindly granting me a leave of absence on impossibly short notice.

I am especially grateful to Hilary Gaskin and Wayne Martin of Cambridge University Press for their support and encouragement while I was preparing the manuscript for its final review. My thanks also to the two anonymous reviewers of the original manuscript who read and commented on it with extraordinary care. Without their incisive criticism and helpful suggestions, this would have been a far less successful project than it has, I hope, become in the end.

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!

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-49968-3 - Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity

Brady Bowman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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: Meiner 1968–). 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.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-49968-3 - Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity

Brady Bowman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ABBREVIATIONS

6:12	<i>Kant's gesammelte Schriften</i> (Akademie Edition): volume and page number
A/B	First/second edition, Kant's <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>
CSM	<i>The Philosophical Writings of René Descartes</i> , ed. Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch
Disc. Prael.	Wolff, <i>Discursus Praeliminaris</i> , trans. and ed. Gawlick and Kriemendahl
Dt. Log.	Wolff, <i>Vernünfftige Gedanken von den Kräften des menschlichen Verstandes und ihrem richtigen Gebrauche in Erkenntnis der Wahrheit</i> , in <i>Gesammelte Werke</i> , Abteilung 1, vol. 1, ed. Arndt
Dt. Met.	Wolff, <i>Vernünfftige Gedanken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt</i> , in <i>Gesammelte Werke</i> , Abteilung 1, vol. 111, ed. Corr
E	Spinoza, <i>Ethics</i> : part, definition, axiom, proposition, corollary, and/or scholium, in <i>Collected Works</i> , vol. 1, ed. Curley
ENC	Hegel, <i>Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences</i> (1830 edn.). References are given by section (§) and indicate remarks (R) and additions (A)
FHJW	Jacobi, <i>Werke: Gesamtausgabe</i> , ed. Hammacher and Jaeschke
GA	Fichte, <i>Gesamtausgabe der Bayrischen Akademie der Wissenschaft</i>
GW	Hegel, <i>Gesammelte Werke</i> (Akademie Edition); for GW 9 (<i>Phenomenology of Spirit</i>), the section number (§) is also given
HA	Goethe, <i>Werke (Hamburger Ausgabe)</i> , ed. Trunz

HBr	Hegel, <i>Briefe</i> , ed. Hoffmeister
KStA	Hölderlin, <i>Sämtliche Werke (Kleine Stuttgarter Ausgabe)</i> , ed. Beißner
Ontol.	Wolff, <i>Philosophia prima, sive Ontologia</i>
PPC	Spinoza, <i>Principles of Cartesian Philosophy</i> , in <i>Collected Works</i> , vol. 1, ed. Curley
SW	Schelling, <i>Sämtliche Werke</i> , ed. K. F. A. Schelling
TIE	Spinoza, <i>Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect</i> , in <i>Collected Works</i> , vol. 1, ed. Curley
TW	Hegel, <i>Werke in zwanzig Bänden</i> , ed. Moldenhauer and Michel