

## *Introduction*

### *German Idealism and the Logocentric Predicament*

#### 0.1 Logic in Hegel's *Logic*?

In spite of its title, Hegel's *Logic* seems not to have anything to do with logic at all.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, its ambitions go well beyond those of formal logic, the area of philosophy concerned with the nature of valid argument. The controversial philosophical doctrines the *Logic* contains seem unrelated to the most elementary rules of thought. Understandably, the *Logic* is more commonly considered a work of metaphysics, though this designation is also not without its problems.

On a received view, the *Logic* is a work whose primary aim is to defend an account of the fundamental nature of reality (“the Absolute”), even of God. Seen in this light, logic in Hegel's sense of the term means something like “the logos” of Platonic-Aristotelian metaphysics. Certainly this interpretation is one that Hegel himself invites when he describes the work's subject matter as “the logos, the reason of that which is, [*der Logos, die Vernunft dessen, was ist*] the truth of what we call things; it is least of all the logos that should be kept outside the science of logic” (WdL 21: 17/ SoL 19).<sup>2</sup> Yet if that is so, then Hegel's own designation of his work as one in logic can seem misleading.

An alternative approach to clarifying the sense in which Hegel's *Logic* is a logic would be to treat Hegel's *Logic* as a successor to the enterprise of “transcendental logic” began in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (A 131/B 170).<sup>3</sup> Clearly, both Hegel and Kant are concerned to offer theories of the categories or, as Hegel calls them, “thought determinations” (*Denkbestimmungen*) (WdL 21: 48/SoL 42; EL § 24 Z1, Z2). Categories

<sup>1</sup> Krohn (1972: 7).

<sup>2</sup> Hegel also invokes *Nous* a famous passage attributing to Anaxagoras logic's “intellectual view of the universe” (WdL 21:34/SoL 29).

<sup>3</sup> Hegel himself draws this parallel to Kant's “transcendental logic” (WdL 21: 47/SoL 40).

such as cause, substance, quantity and quality are among the most fundamental concepts we possess, the templates for all others. The categories are presupposed in all our thinking, and in scientific inquiry as well. Yet as Hume and others had shown, such concepts are incapable of being derived from sense experience: Causation, understood as “necessary connection” rather than “constant conjunction,” is an “idea” with no corresponding “impression.” Unlike ordinary empirical concepts, which can be derived from sense experience through Locke’s “comparison, abstraction and reflection,” a priori concepts such as these stand in need of a special type of justification. If they are to be legitimate, then they will need to be shown to have a different source than sense experience. What, then, might that source be?

In keeping with his Copernican revolution in philosophy and transcendental idealism, Kant offered a clear answer. For Kant, the categories are contributed by the knowing subject as “conditions on the possibility of experience” (B 160). Rather than have the categories derive from experience, as Hume would have done, Kant will have experience, meaning “empirical knowledge,” derive from them. This is Kant’s idealist strategy of defending our entitlement to the categories, but it has well-known costs. In particular, it requires that the use of the categories in theoretical knowledge be restricted to objects of possible experience or “appearances” (*Erscheinungen*). They cannot be used to know things as they are in themselves.

Hegel too is involved in the enterprise of giving a theory of the categories but departs from Kant in important ways. He certainly agrees with Kant that there are nonempirical concepts of this type, with a pervasive role in both scientific inquiry and everyday experience. He also agrees that they stand in need of a distinctive type of justification that ordinary empirical concepts do not require. However, he attempts to avoid the cost of Kant’s transcendental idealist strategy for justifying our use of the categories, namely, their restriction to the realm of appearances.

Here, matters become controversial, though the difficulties are less important to my question than might at first be apparent. There is one obvious parallel between Kant’s transcendental logic and Hegel’s speculative variety. Neither is an aesthetic, an analysis of sensibility and its a priori forms if any there be. Each concerns itself with conceptual thought and the categories or “thought determinations” internal to it. So much is uncontroversial. Beyond this, however, it is difficult to say much about what would unite the two projects. All readers of Hegel would agree that he wants to avoid the “subjectivist” character of Kant’s theory of the

categories and embrace a more resolutely “objective” theory. How, exactly, he does so is unclear, and the recent literature offers a range of options.

Does Hegel, for example, reject Kant’s idealist theory of the categories in favor of an alternative pre-Kantian or “realist” theory, an ontology such as those found in the Scholastic-Aristotelian tradition? Does he instead adopt Kant’s theory but amend it in such a way that we are no longer left disconnected from things-in-themselves? Or is this, perhaps, a false choice from Hegel’s point of view? Might his position be some type of hybrid of these approaches? And, if so, how, exactly would the synthesis be achieved? Which element, if any, would predominate? The jury, it seems, is out.

Yet this is of little use in the present context. Whatever the precise nature of Hegel’s theory of the categories, it will not help us understand whether, and in what sense, Hegel’s *Logic* is a logic. Even granting that Hegel’s logic is some type of descendent of Kant’s transcendental logic, this would simply relocate rather than resolve the issue. As Kant himself was well aware, transcendental logic is not logic in any ordinary sense either: “general logic.” Hegel registers this too when, in a remark concerning transcendental logic, he says that the latter differs from ordinary logic or what has usually gone by the name “logic”:

*Recently Kant has opposed to what has usually been called “logic” another, namely a transcendental logic ... Kant distinguishes it from what he calls general logic because it deals with concepts that refer to intended objects a priori, and hence does not abstract from all the content of objective cognition, or in that it contains the rules of the pure thinking of an intended object. (WdL 2I: 47/SoL 40, italics mine)*

At a first approximation, the difference between general and transcendental logic is this. In the former, we abstract from the object, considering only the internal consistency of our thinking. In the latter, we consider the object, albeit from a maximally abstract perspective. Of course, the question of the relationship between general and transcendental logic is controversial, but this much can safely be said. In concerning itself with such topics as causality, quality, quantity and so on, transcendental logic has a substantive content lacked by ordinary logic owing to its formality. Although not yet empirical science, transcendental logic operates at a slightly lower level of abstraction than formal logic.

Hegel’s speculative logic departs from ordinary logic in this respect as well, perhaps even to a greater extent than Kant’s transcendental logic. For Hegel, substantive notions such as cause, quality, quantity and so on

are just the beginning when it comes to enriching logic with content. Yet Kant, at least, does his readers the courtesy of providing an account of the precise relationship of his innovative contentful form of logic and the traditional variety (A 50/B 74). Unfortunately, Hegel does not seem to do so, at least not in any comparably explicit way. We are therefore left with the impression that Hegel was oblivious to the existence of logic in the ordinary sense, though this impression turns out to be misleading.

Even a cursory glance through Hegel's *Logic* confirms that logic in the traditional sense is a frequent topic of discussion. Evidently, innovative varieties of logic from the German idealist period are by no means the only ones Hegel recognizes. Alongside discussions of speculative and transcendental logic, there are others focusing on what Hegel calls "ordinary logic" (*die gewöhnliche Logik*) (WdL 2I: 35/SoL 30; WdL 12: 28/SoL 525). This is especially true in the so-called "Subjective Logic," which treats the trio of classically logical topics familiar from Kant and Wolff: concept, judgment and inference.<sup>4</sup> Yet there is also a discussion of the traditional laws of logic at the outset of the Doctrine of Essence in the "Objective Logic," such as the laws of identity, noncontradiction and excluded middle.

Evidently, logic in the ordinary sense is a concern of Hegel's *Logic*, but what exactly is common logic for Hegel? What would a reader of his time have understood by this phrase? One obvious approach to answering this question is historical, and it is Hegel's own conception of the history of logic that deserves to be heard first. Formulations such as "ordinary logic" "common logic" or even "the former logic" imply much more unanimity among Hegel's predecessors than actually seems to have existed. When we turn to Hegel's remarks on the history of logic, we find out why. As it turns out, Hegel has a fairly monolithic conception of the history of logic. To all appearances, Hegel shares Kant's assessment that there have been few developments of consequence in this science since the days of its founding by Aristotle.

*Aristotle* is the founder of this science ... To this day, the logic of Aristotle represents the logical [sphere], which has merely been made more elaborate, primarily by the Scholastics of the Middle Ages. The Scholastics did not add to the material, but merely developed it further. The work of more recent times with respect to logic consists primarily in omitting many of the logical determinations spun out further by Aristotle and the Scholastics, on the one hand, and in superimposing a lot of psychological material [on the other]. (EL § 20Z)

<sup>4</sup> Krohn (1972: 7–8).

... we have still Aristotle's science of abstract thought, a Logic, to consider. For hundreds and thousands of years it was just as much honored as it is despised now. Aristotle has been regarded as the originator of Logic: his logical works are the source of, and authority for the logical treatises of all times; which last were, in great measure, only special developments or deductions, and must have been dull, insipid, imperfect, and purely formal. And even in quite recent times, Kant has said that since the age of Aristotle, logic like pure geometry since Euclid's day – has been a complete and perfect science which has kept its place even down to the present day, without attaining to any further scientific improvements or alteration [*die keine Verbesserung und kein Veränderung erhalten hat*] (VGP 2/LHoP 2 “Aristotle: 4. The Logic:)

From a certain perspective, Hegel's conception of the history of logic is disappointing. Can a catch-all term such as “the former logic” really do justice to the more than two millennia of reflection on this subject that includes Aristotle's logical writings, Stoic logic, Scholastic logic, Port-Royal logic, the logic of the Leibniz–Wolff school, and Kant's logic? Here, there is a strong temptation for the commentator to step in and add some much-needed nuance and complexity to Hegel's account of the history of logic. However, I will defer completely to Hegel's own account of the history of logic and argue later that a failure to do so has led to fundamental distortions of Hegel's thought on this topic.

Ultimately, then, Hegel and Kant are in broad agreement about the history of logic, though it would be a mistake to conclude from this that they agree about logic itself.

Kant thought further of logic, that is, the aggregate of definitions and propositions that ordinarily passes for logic [*das im gewöhnlichen Sinne Logik heißt*], as fortunate because, as contrasted with other sciences, it was its lot to attain an early completion; since Aristotle, it has taken no backward step, but also none forward, the latter because to all appearances it seems to be finished and complete. If logic has not undergone change since Aristotle – and in fact, judging from the latest compendiums of logic, the usual changes mostly consist only of omissions – then surely the conclusion to be drawn is that it is all the more in need of a total reworking [*einer totalen Umarbeitung*]. (WdL 21: 35–36/SoL 31)

As we have seen, Hegel refers more than once and by and large approvingly to Kant's famous remark about the history of logic from the preface to the first critique. As Hegel reminds us, Kant said that logic had not needed to take a single step since its founding by Aristotle, in contrast to that endless battlefield of controversies, metaphysics (B viii). Yet Hegel here sounds a note of disagreement, remarking that if this is true then

Kant ought to have drawn the opposite conclusion. Rather than conclude that logic is complete, Kant ought to have concluded that a change is long overdue:<sup>5</sup>

To be clear, Hegel is not denying that the older logic was successful in the modest task it set itself. In spite of the sarcastic barb, he does share Kant's view that logic attained a certain form of completeness in Aristotle: in particular, observing and classifying "the phenomena of thought as they simply occur." Yet it is clear that Hegel regards this as insufficient:

A logic that does not perform this task [the task of Hegelian logic – JM] can at most claim the value of a natural description of the phenomena of thought as they simply occur. It is an infinite merit of Aristotle, one that must fill us with the highest admiration for the power of his genius, that he was the first to undertake this description. But it is necessary to go further and determine both the systematic connection [*systematische Zusammenhang*] of these forms and their value. (WdL 12: 28/SoL 525)

Unfortunately, beyond the allusion to exploring the "systematic connection" between the forms of thought, Hegel does not specify what it would mean to "go further."

If we are to understand how Hegel aspires to surpass the tradition, we must better understand what he took the tradition to have already achieved in the logical domain. As we will see in more detail later, Hegel also inherits from Kant and the tradition the conviction that four topics are central to logic.<sup>6</sup> They are as follows:

- i. The laws of thought, for example noncontradiction
- ii. Concepts
- iii. (Forms of) judgments
- iv. (Forms of) inferences (syllogism).

Broadly speaking, these topics are unified by a conception of logic as the authoritative source not only of the laws of good reasoning (i) but also of the basic materials or templates good reasoning uses (ii–iv). So we have four areas distributed among two main desiderata. Unclarity about either laws or materials could lead to different types of error. These four topics are discussed in passing in Kant's first critique, and more extensively in his logical writings. All are discussed in Hegel's *Logic* as well.

<sup>5</sup> See also Bowman (2013: Introduction: "A Totally Transformed View of Logic": 0.1 Hegel's Metaphysical Project).

<sup>6</sup> Dyck (2016).

To be clear, the four topics do not form a natural set in Hegel's *Logic* in the way that they did in more traditional works such as Kant's and also those of logicians before him.<sup>7</sup> Treating them as if they did, however, can be useful. The aim of doing so would not be to falsely assimilate Hegel to the tradition. On the contrary, it would be to take the full measure of his divergence from the tradition by comparing his views on these typical topics to the views of his predecessors, including those of Kant himself. If Hegel is broadly in agreement with Kant about the history of logic, he is by no means in agreement with Kant about logic itself.

As we have already said, Hegel's treatment of logic's laws and materials is part of a broader philosophical enterprise and encompasses much that is patently extralogical on virtually any conception of formal logic: a purified reconstruction of the entire history of philosophy, a survey of definitions of the Absolute, reflections on the nature of God, comparisons of different world religions (Christianity, Buddhism, Islam), then recent innovations in sciences such as chemistry, biology and physics. The logic not only treats much that we would expect empirical sciences of nature to treat but also, it seems, much that is supernatural – Hegel's antipathy to otherworldly forms of religion and metaphysics notwithstanding. If that is so, then we are confronted with a question one commentator, Paul Redding, has put with admirable clarity: What is the place of "logic commonly so called" in Hegel's *Science of Logic*?<sup>8</sup>

Admittedly, there are good reasons to doubt an investigation of Hegel's views on more conventional logical topics would be fruitful. In addition to being few and far between, these discussions are somewhat incongruous with their surroundings, where topics that are anything but abstract and formal are discussed (life, freedom, chemistry and so on). Even considered on their own, Hegel's more classically logical discussions are by no means the most promising or influential part of his legacy. Notoriously, Hegel, at one point, appears to deny the law of noncontradiction, providing

<sup>7</sup> In my view, Hegel includes both the Aristotelian-Scholastic tradition *and* Kant under the heading "the common logic." I here follow Hanna (1986: 305), who emphasizes that Kantian general logic is traditional, at least from a Hegelian point of view. Pippin (2018: Ch. 1) holds a different view, presenting Kant as a revolutionary figure in logic whose lead Hegel followed.

Whether or not Hegel held it, the view that Kant's logic is continuous with the Scholastic variety may have independent merit. See Dyck (2016) and also Tolley (2017).

Though he acknowledges differences between Wolff and Kant, Dyck is interested in Kant's remarks from the 1770s onward to the effect that Wolff's general logic is "die beste," "die beste die man Hat," "die beste die man antrifft." Dyck makes a compelling case that this is no mere back-handed compliment (2).

<sup>8</sup> Redding (2014).



fodder for some his critics in the Anglophone or “analytic” tradition who view him as an opponent of exact thinking.<sup>9</sup> More recently, Hegel’s fortunes have improved considerably with the massive revival of interest in nonclassical logics among Anglophone philosophers. Today certain logicians, for example Priest, are far more approving of this particular part of his thought than even a great many Hegel scholars.<sup>10</sup> Still, this remains a minority view, and it is noteworthy that those hoping to gain a hearing for Hegel’s thought in analytic philosophy have, by and large, denied that he is a critic of the law of noncontradiction.

An additional reason for concern has less to do with Hegel’s own unorthodox views in logic than with the broader tradition of logic in which he worked. Figures in this tradition have always seemed to their analytic critics to be much too interested in the (subject–predicate) judgment as well as the syllogism. These were topics central to Aristotelian logic but marginal (at best) in the new and more powerful mathematical variety invented by Frege. Syllogisms can be reduced to special cases of a more general theory, a project announced in the introduction of Frege’s *Begriffsschrift*. More fundamentally, the central place items such as judgment had in the older logic was thought to be a symptom of that logic’s impurity. In particular, judgment was thought of as being of merely grammatical or psychological significance.

Hegel may have aspired to transcend the tradition, but he can seem overly indebted to it just the same. As if to confirm his critics’ worst fears about the impurity of traditional logic, Hegel tells us that his *Logic* is a work in which logic and metaphysics coincide.<sup>11</sup> Hence, its focus on judgment could now be redescribed in even less flattering terms: as an artefact of Aristotelian substance–accident ontology. Yet much recent scholarship shows that Hegel considered the “logic-and-metaphysics coincide” idea to be his work’s chief innovation.<sup>12</sup> Before turning to the topic of the relationship between logic and metaphysics in Hegel’s own work, it is worth reflecting on why the two areas of philosophy would have seemed distinct to readers from his time, and often still do to us today.

<sup>9</sup> For an alternative perspective, see the section concerning “the myth that Hegel denied the law of non-contradiction” in Stewart’s (1996) anthology *The Hegel Myths and Legends* (Chs. 16–17).

<sup>10</sup> See Priest (1989: 388–415, 1995, 2006), as well as Bordignon (2017), Ficara (2020a: Ch. 16 “Hegelian Paraconsistentism”) and Moss (2020: Ch. 5 “Absolute Empiricism and the Problem of the Missing Difference”) for discussions of the parallels.

<sup>11</sup> “Logic thus coincides [*fählt daher ... zusammen*] with metaphysics” (EL § 24).

<sup>12</sup> Pippin (2017, 2018) and Pinkard (2017).



One reason concerns the differing roles they have traditionally had in philosophy. Logic may be necessary to help us avoid certain gross errors in reasoning, such as embracing a contradiction or drawing an invalid inference. However, it does not suffice for metaphysical truth. If principles as elementary and widely known as those of logic could resolve the persistent controversies of metaphysics, then one imagines they would have been resolved long ago. This is not to deny the obvious fact that logic is a field of sophisticated inquiry in its own right. It is merely to remind us that it is somewhat rare for its more technical findings to bear on fraught metaphysical questions, especially of the traditional variety.<sup>13</sup>

To be sure, logic is authoritative in a way vaguely comparable to metaphysics (“first philosophy”). It lays down rules for our thinking in all other areas of philosophy and the sciences. However, logic is also typically neutral, incapable of being invoked on behalf of any especially controversial philosophical position, metaphysical or otherwise.

Finally, logic has occasionally been said to be completely empty of content, lacking any subject matter at all.<sup>14</sup> This is a view sometimes attributed to Kant, in his general logic. It is also sometimes attributed to the early Wittgenstein, who thought this was an implication of logic’s status as metalinguistic rather than a science of such abstract objects as “Concept” and “Object.” Yet regardless of whether we hold that logic is *completely* empty or not, it should be clear that it lacks the type of content traditionally attributed to metaphysics: For example, we could recall here the three objects of special metaphysics in Kant’s time (God, the world, the soul). First-order logic, it is sometimes said, presupposes a nonempty world, a world with at least one object over which we can quantify. Yet this has no serious bearing on metaphysics, beyond ruling out such extreme views as that nothing exists.

While these philosophical intuitions concerning logic are deeply entrenched, they also suggest an intriguing possibility for any philosopher willing to challenge logic’s traditional role. I mean, quite simply, the possibility that logic, whose status was traditionally to be a point of unquestioned common ground for proponents of rival philosophical points of

<sup>13</sup> Dummett (1991) sought a “logical basis for metaphysics.” Yet even he would have acknowledged that this involved a conception of metaphysics that is quite deflationary. For this and other criticisms of Dummett’s proposal see Peacocke (2019).

<sup>14</sup> See Conant (1991: esp. 133, 138) for whom this view is characteristic of Kant and the early Wittgenstein, though not of Frege. For Frege, logic has a subject matter, though one more abstract than those of other sciences. Logic studies the laws governing concept and object, just as physics studies the laws governing matter in motion.

view, might nevertheless be invoked on behalf of a particular one. In this case, the position that a reformed logic would be marshaled to support will be Hegel's own: more specifically, his metaphysics. Hegel may well be one of the only figures in the history of philosophy to claim that his preferred metaphysics can be read off of logic – or, at least, the correct logic.

### 0.2 What Justifies a Law of Logic? A Dilemma

In this study, I argue that Hegel's thought contains a response to a very old problem from the history and philosophy of logic. This is a problem going back to Aristotle, though one I hope to show took on a new and unexpected significance in the wake of Kant's critical philosophy. Just to give the problem that interests me a name, I will call it "the logocentric predicament."<sup>15</sup> The name suggests a parallel with "the egocentric predicament" from early modern philosophy. Very roughly, this is the problem of how one can be in a position to verify one's perceptions if there is no getting outside "the veil of perceptions." The logocentric predicament is also a bootstrapping problem, though arguably an even more fundamental one. It concerns the justification of logic's most fundamental laws and materials. We rely on these principles in all our ordinary efforts to justify ourselves through rational argument. How, then, can they themselves be justified without already relying on them? In asking for such justification, we need not suppose that logic's principles are further premises in the arguments we make. Carroll's regress, from the parable of Achilles and the Tortoise, is commonly taken to show that this cannot be the case.<sup>16</sup> Yet logic's laws are undoubtedly underwriting our inferences somehow, even if they do not serve as premises. This makes urgent the question of these principles' justification, the source of their legitimacy.

<sup>15</sup> I here follow Ricketts' (1985: 3) discussion of the logocentric predicament. I believe I am the first to relate German idealism to the logocentric predicament, though others have sought solutions to problems with which it is easily confused.

In my view, the logocentric predicament is different from, and arguably more fundamental than, the Agrippan Trilemma that Franks (2005) relates to German idealism via the PSR from early modern rationalism. The logocentric predicament challenges our ability to express anything truth-apt at all, and not just to achieve ultimate justification in epistemology, metaphysics or natural science.

In this regard, the problem I emphasize might seem to more closely resemble the one that exercises Pippin and Pinkard's Hegel: making sense of making sense, the sense-making of all possible sense-makings (Pinkard 2017; Pippin 2017). But, once again, the problem that interests me is more specific, since formal logic – logic in the traditional and narrower sense – represents only one form of sense-making, alongside aesthetic judgment, normative evaluation and so on.

<sup>16</sup> Carroll (1895: 691–693).