

HEGEL'S LOGIC AND METAPHYSICS

Kant said that logic had not had to take a single step forward since Aristotle, but German Idealists in the following generation made concerted efforts to re-think the logical foundations of philosophy. In this book, Jacob McNulty offers a new interpretation of Hegel's *Logic*, the key work of his philosophical system. McNulty shows that Hegel is responding to a perennial problem in the history and philosophy of logic: the logocentric predicament. In Hegel, we find an answer to a question so basic that it cannot be posed without risking incoherence: what is the justification for logic? How can one justify logic without already relying upon it? The answer takes the form of re-thinking the role of metaphysics in philosophy, so that logic assumes a new position as derivative rather than primary. This important book will appeal to a wide range of readers in Hegel studies and beyond.

JACOB McNULTY is Lecturer in Philosophy at University College London. He is the author of numerous journal articles and a Routledge *Philosophers* volume on Marcuse (forthcoming).

HEGEL'S LOGIC AND METAPHYSICS

JACOB McNULTY
University College London



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 Jacob McNulty
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For Anna

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Preface

Hegel's *Logic* is often thought of as a work in metaphysics, rather than one in logic. Whatever, exactly, is meant by logic – Aristotelian syllogistic, “formal” or mathematical logic – the concerns of this area of philosophy are simply too austere to capture Hegel's ambitions. Hegel's *Logic* has more often seemed to pursue some unique form of metaphysics, of transcendental idealist philosophy (or even of some unique combination of these). While I am sympathetic to this received interpretation of Hegel's *Logic*, I believe it is potentially misleading. Hegel's *Logic* is not a logic in any straightforward sense, but it does contain an interesting answer to an old question in the philosophy of logic.

That question is the following. What justifies a law of logic, for example the law of noncontradiction? What legitimates the use of some set of logical materials, for example the proposition? What case is there for laws and materials on which all, or nearly all, of our justifications (ultimately) depend? In the face of this problem, we seem to confront a dilemma. On the one hand, we may simply shirk the demand for an argument-based justification and treat their justification as a type of brute fact. However, this seems philosophically suspect. On the other, we may attempt to provide a rational argument for these laws. However, this risks vicious circularity. Most authors, historically and down to the present day, have preferred the former route. As I hope to show, this more sober approach is characteristic of both the Scholastic-Aristotelian tradition, on the one hand, and Kant, on the other. However, Kant's followers, the German idealists, opt for the latter, more ambitious, approach. Fichte and Hegel attempt the impossible feat of arguing for the laws and materials of traditional logic noncircularly. Since it is Hegel's attempt that will mainly concern me here, I argue that he sets out to achieve this ambitious feat with three sets of resources.

First, a set of principles whose content and justification are independent of formal logic. This is Hegel's ontology or theory of the categories.

Compared with traditional varieties, it (or the relevant part of it) is primordial in being independent of ordinary logic in this way.

Next, Hegel employs a method of rational argument, the dialectic, that dispenses completely with the laws and materials of formal logic. It concerns not concepts, judgments and inferences but a more primitively characterized subject matter. Though rule-bound, it obeys norms distinct from those of formal logic, even avoiding the strictures of such seemingly inescapable principles as the law of noncontradiction. It is neither a method of reasoning, in the sense that Kant and the tradition recognized under the head of formal logic, nor a form of nonrational insight, advocated as an alternative by Romantics, fideistic religious believers, aesthetes, mystics and others. It is intermediate between these.

Finally, Hegel avails himself of concepts that are *necessarily nonempty*, ones that could not possibly fail to be instanced. These are concepts like those that figure in classical versions of the ontological argument for the existence of God. As they figure here, however, their interests are mainly methodological, not theological or religious. These concepts are (or purport to be) inherently contentful, meaning they can figure in a system of thought forms, all of which are necessarily instantiated. In this way, Hegel avoids the risk Kant saw for any form of metaphysics that attempts to make do with concepts alone. I mean the risk that the result will be little more than a game that thought plays with itself, devoid of contact with reality.

In sum, Hegel noncircularly derives the laws and materials of traditional logic from protological ones contained in his ontology, and whose application to the world is secured by their self-instantiation, the template for which is provided by the ontological argument from the tradition of rational theology.

Some will object to the thesis that logic depends on metaphysics, pointing out (correctly) that Hegel's *Logic* is consistently logical and metaphysical throughout. I agree, but see no incompatibility between my project and this received view. I use the terms logic and metaphysics in the narrow, un-Hegelian senses of the term that represent their (then) received meaning. Hence, I focus on those parts of the logic that overlap with their traditional subject matter, specifically the part overlapping with formal logic and the part overlapping with general and special metaphysics. All of these are just so many parts of the broader enterprise Hegel called speculative logic. However, I prefer to approach the *Logic* with traditional conceptions of logic in metaphysics in mind and have the new Hegelian idea of a "speculative logic" emerge from the confrontation. Hegel held that there

can be no satisfactory account in advance of the nature and method of our science. He further held that full insight into the nature of this science is only achieved at its close. I take my interpretation to be supported by these two tenets of the Hegelian method.

Though Hegel's logic is a not a work in "logic as commonly understood," the subject matter of this science does take up a proper part of the work. Hegel treats orthodox logical topics, albeit against the backdrop of much that is patently non-formal logical: the nature and forms of concept, judgment and those of inference, and even the fundamental laws of thought (contradiction, identity, sufficient ground and so on). Most of these discussions, though not all, can be found in the "Subjective Logic," which Hegel tells us corresponds with logic-conventionally-so-called. This division is itself preceded by an "Objective Logic," which Hegel tells us corresponds with the former metaphysics, in its general and special branches: in particular, ontology and theology.

While the relationship between the two is complex, and likely one of interdependence, I am interested in the dependence of subjective logic on objective. My argument is that it is this that expresses Hegel's resolution of the logocentric predicament. By treating the laws and materials of traditional logic taken up in this section as subordinate and dependent part of a larger metaphysical system, we can locate in Hegel's logic a noncircular argument for the laws and materials on which all rational argument depends.

The result is not simply the old principles of traditional logic on a new foundation but, rather, new versions of those principles. Only those that admit of being justified in this ambitious way survive the transition to Hegel's system – some are completely jettisoned. Also changed is the status of these logical principles, which were previously merely formal, that acquire a content through their intimate association with forms of ontology and rational theology: for example, affirmation and negation, the copula and contradiction through their relationship with being and nothingness, identity and difference. Approached in this way, Hegel's treatment of orthodox logical topics, for example contradiction, appears in a more sympathetic light. Yet while Hegel's approach is more revisionary than reconstructive, this does not mean his project is not addressed to traditional logicians. He is attempting to show that this is what their logic would have to become if it is to surmount the logocentric predicament.

Granted that ordinary logic is dependent upon the former metaphysics, the latter is in a sense logic again: "speculative logic." Indeed, both are "speculative logic," the name for the whole in which both these branches are encompassed. What is more, it is at the level of this broader enterprise

of logic in the broad Hegelian sense that we encounter the fiercest controversies over the nature of Hegel's metaphysics and its compatibility with Kant's critical philosophy. In a different book, my focus on the two sub-parts of speculative logic might have been a way of sidestepping controversies concerning this issue. I am describing the relationship among two of the *Logic's* parts, so it is possible that this account be compatible with different conceptions of the whole. However, I do embrace controversy to some extent by choosing a more traditional interpretation than is now in favor, among either the so-called Kantian-idealist interpreters or "neo-metaphysical" interpreters.

Here, I defend my decision to interpret Hegel's metaphysics in this more traditional way not in general terms, as others have already done, but rather in terms of the specific philosophical problem that interests me: the logocentric predicament. What is needed is a set of laws and materials as well as a method of employing them wholly independent of formal logic. Hence, the success of Hegel's project will depend on his ability to convincingly cast ontological and theological principles of his logic as more primitive than any with which traditional logic would have been concerned. That is not something any previous ontology or theologian sought to do, so far as I know. Those who accuse my Hegel of regression will at least need to contend with *this* original feature of his project.

Though I do not want to exaggerate the ecumenicism of my interpretation, I do reject an assumption often made tacitly in the debate over Hegel's metaphysics, namely that Hegel's logic must be consistently one thing throughout. I prefer instead to distinguish between prospective and retrospective orientations toward the logic. The logic begins in a metaphysical mode, fundamentally un-Kantian, though always self-critical. Yet at its close there is a turn to the standpoint of the self-conscious, knowing subject, though I disagree with the common idea that this is a version of Kant's Copernican turn. What is more, the retrospective perspective does not revoke the prospective but supplements it. There is a mutual dependence of each of these components on the other. In retrospect, being will turn out to be something thought of by a self-conscious knower, though this should not be assumed from the outset. For this discovery to take place, a self-conscious knower must be shown to be – unlike Descartes, Kant, Reinhold or Fichte, thinkers for whom the first-personal knowledge we have of our own capacities will suffice for ambitious philosophical purposes.

Interpretive issues aside, the main philosophical risk confronting such a project should be obvious, and is that of attempting to explain the obscure by the still more obscure: the grounds of formal logic by the categorial

structure of being and the nature of God. Yet I think this is to miss the point of Hegel's undertaking, which is to challenge the received Kantian view of these disciplines. On this view, formal logic articulates thought's default, uncontroversial employment, presupposed in all its subsequent employments (mathematical, scientific). By contrast, speculative metaphysics as a further extravagance is to be pursued with caution, if at all. As I understand it, Hegel's proposal is that the situation is very nearly the reverse. It is not excessive ambition that leads thought into impasses but undue humility.

A subordinate aim of the book is to suggest an account of the history of German idealism in terms of the philosophy of logic. Idiosyncratic as it may seem, this project in philosophical logic is one Hegel is compelled to take up by his engagement with Kant's critical philosophy. As I hope to show, Hegel and other idealists criticized Kant for his uncritical reliance on the logic of the day. They contend that Kant's ability to criticize mathematics, the sciences and metaphysics was purchased at the cost of an uncritical reliance on ordinary or formal logic. Hence a reconstituted version of the critical philosophy, more consistently self-critical, would require nothing less than a new orientation toward logic. Kantian critique must be radicalized, not only to include such putatively uncontroversial assumptions as the finitude of our knowledge *vis-à-vis* that of an intuitive knower, the two stems of our cognitive power and so on but also to include formal logic itself.

While the dilemma set out above, between treating the justification of logic as brute and arguing for it in a way destined to be viciously circular, emerges repeatedly in the history of philosophy and even today, I claim it arose for the German idealists as well. It did so at a decisive point in their reception of Kant's critical philosophy. Indeed, this very dilemma was laid out by Jäsche in his preface to the first edition of Kant's logic lectures in 1800. It is Kant who, Jäsche tells us, regards as primitive the justification for such fundamental logical laws as the principle of noncontradiction. Yet his idealist followers, Jäsche observes, were unsatisfied, and sought something more ambitious.

Hegel does not claim to be the first to attempt a noncircular derivation of logic's laws and materials, but he does regard his predecessors as having failed. Reinhold experiments with a form of virtuous circularity but fails to show it is not ultimately vicious after all. Fichte, in programmatic remarks on his system, contends that the laws and materials of logic, even the law of noncontradiction, can be derived from a unique post-Kantian version of the cogito: "I am I." Yet in the system itself he ends up showing only

that ordinary logic and transcendental philosophy are equiprimordial, not that the former can be noncircularly derived from the latter.

Where Hegel finds inspiration for a superior approach is in Jacobi's version of the ontological argument, itself inspired by the precritical Kant and the version of the ontological argument in the Ideal of the first critique. Liberated from the form of syllogistic argument used by the Leibniz–Wolff School and the Romantic irrationalism of Jacobi, a new Hegelian version of the ontological argument emerges at the outset of Hegel's system. In an ironic reversal, the very argument necessary for a reconstituted, Hegelian version of general and transcendental logic is the one denounced by Kant as the epitome of precritical, dogmatic metaphysics.

In Chapter 1, I outline Hegel's conception of the logic that preceded him, the logic of the Aristotelian tradition, and explain his critique of it. Hegel's critique is essentially that this logic cannot meet a demand for justification through rational argument, *indeed the very demand makes of all other sciences*. Essentially, then, pre-Hegelian logic fails to overcome the logocentric predicament and is impaled on its first horn: complacency. An important historiographical point of this chapter is that Hegel, in all likelihood, treats both Aristotelian logic and Kantian pure general logic together as forms of traditional logic.

In Chapter 2, I describe Hegel's relationship to Kant's transcendental logic, specifically its theory of the categories, which I claim is implicated in his "swimming objection" (often thought to apply generically). As I argue, transcendental logic suffers from a problem parallel to the one that afflicts ordinary logic, an inability to self-justify without begging the question. Hence it too is incapable of providing the type of argument for itself that it demands of mathematics, the sciences and metaphysics. Worse still, transcendental logic incorporates ordinary logic, and therefore the problem that afflicted the latter as well. This occurs in Kant's decision to derive his table of categories from the table of forms of judgment. Hence the problem is not only redoubled with another related one but compounded. For Hegel, this is no coincidence. The two main problems are not only parallel but interconnected.

This raises the stakes of resolving the parallel dilemmas raised by ordinary and transcendental logic, and the resolution comes in the form of a revival of a well-known argument from the early modern period. Only with a concept that vouchsafes its own instantiation, such as the I-concept of Descartes' Cogito or the God of his ontological argument, can we derive a complete table of the categories. Of course, both must be rehabilitated, in light of Kant's devastating assault on rational psychology and theology.

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The I-concept reemerges as Fichte's concept of "self-positing subjectivity," proposed by him as a basis for both formal logic and the categories. However, Hegel defends as superior Jacobi's God, a descendent of Kant's Spinozistic definition of God as the *omnitudo realitatis* from the Transcendental Ideal of the first critique.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I describe Hegel's relationship to precritical metaphysics and to Kant's critique of it. Unlike certain commentators, I distinguish very sharply between Hegel's critique of metaphysics and Kant's own. On my view, Hegel's has little to do with calling into question the conviction that empirically unaided thought can, all by itself, know the fundamental nature of reality. It is instead devoted to showing that the logic presupposed by precritical metaphysics, the logic of the Aristotelian tradition, led it into error.

Since Kant himself relied on this logic, even doing so in his critique of the tradition, Hegel tars him with the same brush. The Scholastic remainder in Kant's thought, especially his logic, compromises Kant's own critique of Scholastic metaphysics. The very same problems that compromise this tradition's approach to psychology, cosmology and theology compromise Kant's efforts to identify its shortcomings. In Chapter 3, I focus on the classically logical topics of judgment, syllogism, contradiction and identity. In Chapter 4, I focus on the ontological or transcendental logical topic of categories, treating Hegel's distinction between the finite categories, shared by Kant and the tradition alike, and the infinite ones Hegel himself prefers. I here devote special attention to Hegel's defense of rational theology against Kant's critique of it, focusing especially on Hegel's response of Kant's idea that "existence is not a real predicate."

In Chapter 5, Hegel's critique and reconstruction of "the former logic" on a metaphysical basis begins in earnest. I start with Hegel's treatment of the laws of logic, identity, noncontradiction and excluded middle. Some wrongly equate Hegel's critique of these traditional logical laws with Kant's critique of the categories, as if both were a matter of adopting into an idealist framework what was formerly regarded as part of general metaphysics. I deny this holds good, at least in the domain of general logic, where Hegel's complaint is if anything the reverse, a rejection of the approach shared by Kant and the tradition alike of tying logic too closely to faculty psychology. I also accept that Hegel is a critic of the law of noncontradiction, and, rather than regard his critique as an embarrassment, I attempt to present it in a more sympathetic light: considering more recent criticisms of classical logic by paraconsistent logicians. I claim that Hegel, like other intelligent

critics of the law of noncontradiction, emphasizes paradoxes in his account of their nature and limits. However, Hegel discovers an original class of category-theoretic paradoxes, rather than relying on traditional ones: for example, the liar or the truth predicate. These paradoxes concern identity.

In Chapter 6, I turn to Hegel's account of the nature of concepts – or, better, of “*the* Concept,” as well as his derivation of the forms of judgment and inference. Whereas in Kant, these topics belonged to general logic, preceding and making possible a derivation of the categories (and Ideas) of transcendental logic, Hegel inverts this approach. He, unlike Kant, derives the nature of the Concept, as well as its necessary judgmental and inferential forms by beginning from an ontological theory of the categories. This theory furnishes him with what I contend is the master argument of the logic and the one that makes possible Hegel's account of the nature and forms of concept, judgment and inference.

This argument, which spans the entirety of the first two divisions of the logic, shows, in a phrase, that “there is nothing purely immediate or mediated.” However, I interpret this claim in a less familiar way. I construe this claim not as an epistemological one concerning the manner in which sensible intuitions are always informed by our concepts but, rather, as a metaphysical one concerning the ubiquity of a type of structure in the natural and social worlds. The argument makes possible a complete taxonomy of forms of judgment and inference – but only on the condition that they are construed in terms of an ontological theory of the categories based in a version of the ontological argument.

In Chapter 7, I conclude by discussing a well-known feature of Hegel's argument in the logic: its circular structure, often depicted in terms of the Jungian ouroboros archetype (a snake eating its tail). While the status of Hegel's system as circular in this way is well known, I claim it can be related directly to the logocentric predicament. Essentially, Hegel's criticism of the two prior forms of logic is that they are non-self-comprehending sciences. Neither the Aristotelian tradition nor Kant, neither general nor transcendental logic, avoids self-opacity. Each comprehends its subject matter but fails to self-comprehend – indeed, the success and failure are connected. I explain how Hegel's *Logic* avoids this problem by rendering traditional logic a subordinate and dependent part of his metaphysics. This means rendering the subject matter of epistemology, knowledge and the relationship between the knower and the known, part of the subject matter of metaphysics, the fundamental structure of reality. However, this must be qualified, inasmuch as the close of the logic affords a perspective on its beginning not available there.

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Unfortunately, I was unable to engage with Houlgate's long-awaited commentary on the Being logic, which I understand will expand on his previous work. This commentary appeared in print after I made the final substantive revisions to the manuscript.

Abbreviations

Throughout this work, both in the body and in the footnotes, I provide references to the German and English versions of primary texts by Kant, Fichte and Hegel. The following are the abbreviations that I use:

Hegel

There are two editions of Hegel's complete works in German, Suhrkamp and Meiner. My references refer to the Meiner edition (1968 – *Gesammelte Werke, Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* [Hamburg: Meiner]), except where otherwise indicated. References to the English translations refer to titles from the series Cambridge Hegel Translations edited by Michael Bauer. I have occasionally referred to other translations of works by Hegel not yet available in this series.

The *Science of Logic* is cited by the volume and page number for the German and just the page number for the English. The *Encyclopedia* is cited by the section number (§) followed, where relevant, by an A for the *Anmerkungen* (remarks) and/or a Z for the *Zusätze* (additions from student lectures). The 1831 lectures on logic are cited by the page number in the English translation and the page number in the German from Meiner. The *Lectures in the History of Philosophy* are cited only by the English section name and subsection name, for example, “Aristotle: Logic.”

- EL *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse Teil 1: Logik. Werke vol. 13/Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline: Part 1, Science of Logic.* 2010. Edited and translated by Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- VL/LL *Vorlesungen über die Logik, Berlin 1831.* 2001. Transcribed by K. Hegel. Edited by U. Rameil and H. C. Lucas. Hamburg: Meiner/*Lectures on Logic, Berlin, 1831.* 2008. Translated by C. Butler. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- VGP/LHoP *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophy. Werke* vol. 30/*Lectures on the History of Philosophy.* 1995. 3 vols. Translated by E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- WdL/SoL *Wissenschaft der Logik. Werke* vols. 21, 11, 12/*Hegel's Science of Logic.* 2010. Translated by G. di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kant

References to the German are all to the Akademie Ausgabe (*Immanuel Kant: Gesammelte Schriften.* 1902–. 29 vols. Berlin: De Gruyter). I use the English translations from the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, except where otherwise noted. For the first critique, I use the standard A/B page references to refer to the first (1781) and second (1787) editions of the work.

- A/B *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft.* Ak. vol. 3–4/*Kant, I. Critique of Pure Reason.* 1999. Edited and translated by P. Guyer and A. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- P *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik.* Ak. vol. 4/*Kant, I. Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics.* 2004. Edited and translated by G. Hatfield. Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- JL “Jäsche Logik.” Ak. vol. 9/*Kant., I. “Jäsche Logic.”* In *Kant's Lectures on Logic.* 2004. Edited and translated by J. Michael Young. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fichte

German references are to the version of Fichte's complete works edited by his son Immanuel Hermann Fichte: Fichte, I. H. (ed.) 1971. *Fichtes Werke.* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Co. This is not the favored edition, but I refer to it because many of the English translations have references to it in

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the margins. English references are to what were, at the time of this writing, the most recent English translation.

References to the first *Wissenschaftslehre* are by volume and page number (German) or just page number (English).

WL/SoK *Wissenschaftslehre*. 1794–1795. *Werke* vol. 1/Fichte, J. G. *Science of Knowledge*. Edited and translated by J. Heath and P. Lachs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.