The Province of Conceptual Reason: Hegel's Post-Kantian Rationalism

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THE PROVINCE OF CONCEPTUAL REASON:
HEGEL'S POST-KANTIAN RATIONALISM

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A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School, Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

August 2019

ABSTRACT
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In this dissertation, I seek to explain G.W.F. Hegel's view that human accessible conceptual content can provide knowledge about the nature or essence of things. I call this view "Conceptual Transparency." It finds its historical antecedent in the views of eighteenth century German rationalists, which were strongly criticized by Immanuel Kant. I argue that Hegel explains Conceptual Transparency in such a way that preserves many implications of German rationalism, but in a form that is largely compatible with Kant's criticisms of the original rationalist version.

After providing background on Hegel's relationship to the traditional rationalist theory of concepts and Kant's challenge to it, I claim that Hegel's central task is to provide a theory of conceptual content that allows a relationship to the objective world without being dependent on the specifically sensory aspect of the world, which Kant's theory of concepts required. Since many interpreters deny that Hegel's use of the term "concept" is comparable to other historical philosophers (or our own), I first show that Hegel's critique of standard conceptions of concepts presupposes an agreement of subject matter. I then show how Hegel's account of the "formal concept" provides the skeleton for a view of conceptual content that relies on negative relations between terms, rather than a relation to sensibility, to provide content.

Hegel's account of conceptual content is completed when he shows how a universal term is further specified so that it can determine singular objects. This occurs in its adequate form in a teleological process. I argue that Hegel's account of teleology in the *Science of Logic* is an attempt to explain how and where Conceptual Transparency obtains. A teleological process is one in which a concept constitutes an object, and this means that a concept is perfectly adequate to express that thing's nature and not merely to represent it. However, in the final chapter, I show that Hegel's concept of teleology is meant paradigmatically to illuminate how human purposive processes have constituted a social world that is conceptually accessible to us. In this way, the primary "province" of Hegel's rationalism is the human constructed world.

ACKNOLWEDGEMENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS OF HEGEL'S WORK

The following are the main abbreviations of Hegel's work used in the text. See the Bibliography for full bibliographic information. Hegel's work will typically cited first in the German *Werke* edition, then in English translation (where available), followed by paragraph and section number where applicable.

(W)   *Werke in zwanzig Bänden.*

(GW)   *Gesammelte Werke.*

(*EG*)   *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften III. Werke*, vol. 10. (*Encyclopedia Philosophy of Mind*)

(*EL*)   *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften I. Werke*, vol. 8. (*Encyclopedia Logic*)

(*EN*)   *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften II. Werke*, vol. 9. (*Encyclopedia Philosophy of Nature*)

(*GPR*) *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts. Werke*, vol. 7. (*Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*)

(*PG*)   *Phänomenologie des Geistes. Werke*, vol. 3. (*Phenomenology of Spirit*)

(*VA*)   *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik I. Werke*, vol. 13. (*Lectures on Aesthetics*)

(*VGP*) *Vorlesungen uber die Geschichte der Philosophie, I-III. Werke*, vols. 18-20. (*Lectures on the History of Philosophy*)

(*WL*)   *Wissenschaft der Logik, I & II. Werke*, vols. 5-6. (*Science of Logic*)

Introduction

One of the most influential ways of distinguishing the character of philosophy in contrast to other modes of inquiry is to say that philosophy is in some way uniquely "conceptual." All sciences *use* concepts; philosophy is the science or study of concepts themselves. The specific characterization of the philosophical attention to concepts often varies: it is "analysis," or "explication," or "mapping," or perhaps "engineering."[1] But at the very least, the "conceptual" qualifier has been a useful heuristic for demarcating philosophy, the simplicity of which has not been matched by a naturalistic approach to philosophy that does not acknowledge the strict distinction between conceptual and empirical sides of inquiry.[2] Even so, the 'conceptual conception' of philosophy (as it can be designated) has some notorious problems, not least of which is determining what a concept is, and how knowledge of a concept can be anything other than a belief in which the concept is employed.[3] For many, this conception of philosophy is associated especially with the "linguistic philosophy" and "conceptual analysis" of the twentieth century and has waned with the (supposed) waning of those traditions. However, its provenance is not necessarily

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[1] Cf. in order Grice (1958); Carnap (1950); Ryle (1971, Vol. 2, 201-2; 441-45); Cappelen (2018). The following description of Ryle shows that "analysis" was never the best metaphor for the conceptual conception: "[T]he philosopher's task is never to investigate the *modus operandi* just of one concept by itself; the task is always to investigate the *modus operandi* of all the threads of a spider's web of inter-working concepts. … To fix the position of one concept is to fix its position *vis-à-vis* lots of others. Conceptual questions are inter-conceptual questions; if one concept is out of focus, all its associates are out of focus" (1971, Vol. 1, [1962], 189). For Ryle, it is inappropriate even to think of concepts as separable "atoms" of thought (ibid., 185).

[2] Consider, for example, Kornblith's (2002, 1) strong renunciation of a conceptual conception of philosophy: "The idea that philosophy consists in, or, at a minimum, must begin with an understanding and investigation of our concepts is, I believe, both natural and very attractive. It is also, I believe, deeply mistaken. On my view, the subject of ethics is the right and the good, not our concepts of them. The subject matter of philosophy of mind is the mind itself, not our concept of it. And the subject matter of epistemology is knowledge itself, not our concept of knowledge." Since on this naturalistic view, philosophical questions are (usually) also empirical questions, there may be no clear way to demarcate philosophical subjects from others (cf. ibid., Ch. 6). Whether this is a virtue or not is itself a matter of dispute. Note the remark of Jerry Fodor: "If [what I've written] doesn't sound like philosophy, I don't mind; as long as it doesn't sound exactly like psychology, linguistics, or AI either" (quoted in ibid., 169).

[3] Classic challenges include Quine (1951) and Williamson (2007).

tied to such a limited historical moment; nor perhaps is the source of its renewal. Immanuel

Kant himself says that the "*philosophy* of any subject" is "a system of rational cognition from

concepts" (Ak. 6: 375/181), and that the "analyses" of concepts is "[a] great part, perhaps

the greatest part, of the business of our reason" (A 5/B 9).[4] It is perhaps G.W.F. Hegel,

though, who is most emphatic among historical philosophers about the distinctly conceptual

nature of philosophy: "[P]hilosophical thinking has its own *peculiar forms,* apart from the

forms that they [philosophy and the empirical sciences] have in common. The universal

form of it is the *concept*" (*EL* 52/33/§ 9).[5] "[Q]uite generally, the whole course of

philosophizing, being methodical, i.e., *necessary*, is nothing else but the mere *positing* of what is

already contained in a concept" (188/141/§ 88R).[6] Despite the notorious historical antipathy

between Hegelianism and analytic philosophy, in view of such passages it is not altogether

inappropriate when Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer speaks of Hegel's philosophy as "conceptual

analysis *avant la lettre*" (2005, 9).

It is true that Hegel not only *uses* concept-talk but speaks *about* concepts pervasively

in his writings, perhaps more than any philosopher who preceded him (with the possible

exception of Kant himself). In addition to numerous less systematic references, Book III of

his *Science of Logic* (*WL*) is *The Doctrine of the Concept*, and it is far more than a perfunctory

taxonomy of concepts, as such a doctrine would have been in other contemporary "logics."

Yet a remark Hegel makes about other writers applies aptly in his case: "[I]t is not as easy to

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[4] Quotations from Kant will cite the standard *Akademie* edition, followed by the English translation, typically from the Cambridge edition of Kant's work. Citations of the *Critique of Pure Reason* will simply refer to the page-numbers of the first (A) and/or second (B) editions. The English is the 1998 Guyer/Wood translation.

[5] Quotations from Hegel (unless otherwise specified) will cite the 1970 German *Werke* edition, the English translation, and (if applicable) the section or paragraph number. In citations from the *Encyclopedia* or *Philosophy of Right*, "R" refers to the paragraph remarks added by Hegel, and "Z" to *Zusätze* (additions), added from Hegel's students' lecture notes.

[6] Just prior, Hegel describes the deduction of a concept as "to this extent entirely *analytic*."

ascertain whatever else [they] have said about [a concept's] nature" (*WL* II: 252/514). The remark applies differently in Hegel's case than to those writers to which he is alluding. In the latter case, it is not easy to know what they mean by "concept" because of a lack of explanation: "For in general they do not bother at all enquiring about it but presuppose that everyone already understands what the concept means when speaking of it" (ibid.). As is still the case today, the word "concept" was used in many (and often un-explained) senses by Hegel's philosophical contemporaries. But in Hegel's case, it is not the lack of explanation but the difficulty of the explanation that has led to a difficulty in knowing what, for him, concepts are, and why they can be philosophically significant. Hegel has not generally been regarded as an ally for a 'conceptual conception' of philosophy because his discussion of concepts, or more curiously, "the concept," has seemed to involve a change in topic.

The problem can be simplified in this way: Hegel's apparent conceptual *metaphysics* seems to block any potential relevance of his conceptual *method*. In the tradition of conceptual analysis of the twentieth century, part of its appeal was supposed to lie in its metaphysically deflationary character. That is, in an analysis of <*knowledge*>[7], one was not speculating about a transcendent *eidos*, but simply drawing out 'what we mean' when we use the term in the relevant way. One was thus not, in the practice of philosophy itself, committed to new or strange entities beyond those involved in the 'object language'.[8] However, Hegel's discussion of conceptuality has easily invited the view that concepts for him are not only (if at all) the determinate meanings of his terms or the medium of thought but further supersensible entities (or one supreme entity) about which Hegel has a theory:

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[7] I follow Stang (2016) in using this convention to refer to concepts rather than words. One can read the notation as "the concept *knowledge*" or "the concept of knowledge."

[8] Cf. Ryle's "Systematically Misleading Expressions" ([1932] in his 1971, vol. 2) for an especially self-conscious approach to this issue.

concepts are "in" things, and they explain what things do, or the world itself is the emanation of a single "Concept." We will have opportunity to see how such views can seem precisely to be Hegel's. But were one to take such a view, then Hegel's characterizations of philosophy I quoted above would take on a whole new coloring: now the "analysis" of the concept (or positing what it contains) would involve a claim that one was drawing out the basic structure of reality, or explaining the inner *conatus* of living entities.

Such metaphysical views would block the methodological relevance of Hegel's theory of concepts not simply because they are (or may be) false, implausible, or unfashionable. Instead, these views turn conceptuality from the 'fabric' or medium of thought itself to a new object of theory, something postulated (apparently outside our thought) in a way that may or may not conform to our theory of it. If that is what a concept is for Hegel, then presumably we need some other medium of thought or method to attain knowledge of "concepts" in this new sense.[9] The putative advantage of the conceptual conception of philosophy is then lost, for that approach assumed that philosophical knowledge would be the clarification of something we either *already* have (in some inchoate form) or else could have, rather than something about which we form theories *ab initio*. A metaphysical reading of Hegel's "concept" is uniquely problematic in this regard. For it is one thing if Hegel's talk of "Substance" or "God" is genuinely metaphysical, for these are simply unique *objects* of conceptual thought. But if the *subject* of conceptual thought – our own thinking, so we thought – is similarly alienated from us and treated as the object of a metaphysical theory, then Hegel's whole philosophizing seems to be unmoored from any

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[9] This strategy is admitted by Kenneth Westphal, who uses "conceptions" for concepts in the more ordinary sense: "Hegel analyzes 'the concept' (*der Begriff*) as an ontological structure, like a law of nature rather than a conception, though when we are thinking rightly, 'the concept' (in Hegel's ontological sense) is an object of human thought (via the right use of our conceptions)." See also Bowman (2013, 32-33).

direct connection to us. On the other hand, if Hegel's reference to the concept can be connected in a recognizable way to a humanly accessible form of thought, then Hegel's philosophy as a whole may touch ground in an important way.

The aim of this dissertation is to provide an interpretation of Hegel's talk about concepts, especially as found in his *Doctrine of the Concept*, that explains both how Hegel's view is about concepts in a recognizable way and how that view can seem to have the metaphysical consequences that have led many to treat his view as *sui generis*. As we will see, Hegel's view is recognizably about concepts because he uses "the concept" to refer to the general structure of thought, within which many individual concepts may be distinguished. Hegel thinks that this structure is free and creative, so that concepts are not something merely given, but rather something determined by us. He often uses the term "negativity" to describe this subjective activity. Hegel's view has a metaphysical dimension, however, because he thinks that the self-determining of conceptual content can result in the constitution of objects, objects whose nature or essence is a concept itself. I will call this conviction of Hegel's "Conceptual Transparency," the view that our concept of something can fully express its essence. As Hegel writes, "[T]he nature, the specific essence, that which is truly *permanent* and *substantial* in the manifold and accidentality of appearance and fleeting externalization, is the *concept* of the thing [*Sache*], *that which is universal in it*" (*WL* I: 26/16; modified). The key interpretive *explanandum* for this project will be to show precisely *how* these two dimensions of Hegel's view can be compatible, especially without ascribing to Hegel a severely subjectivizing idealism that would say, e.g., that the world as a whole is the product of our creative thinking.

Though my inquiry will not be directly oriented toward contemporary debates about the method of philosophy and conceptual analysis, it offers a glimpse of an apparent

advantage of Hegel's view *vis-à-vis* the traditionally prevalent conceptual conceptions of philosophy, which may go some way to addressing some standard criticisms of those approaches. For it is frequently objected to conceptual conceptions of philosophy that they are capable merely of clarifying what we mean, without touching the truth of the subject matters they consider, except perhaps coincidentally.[10] Whether this is objectionable is controversial in its own right. Someone such as P.F. Strawson seemed to think that this was a task enough for philosophy. His own program of "descriptive metaphysics" thus attempted simply "to describe the actual structure of our thought about the world" or "to lay bare the most general features of our conceptual structure" (1959, 9). But is this the most one can say about what philosophy achieves? At the very least, Strawson's conception seems to fall short of what Hegel credits to philosophy. For Hegel undoubtedly sees conceptual knowledge as capable of essential knowledge and does not feel the need to qualify conceptual knowledge as only 'ours', as if different beings could have different concepts of the same objects. Hegel's view promises to combine the 'subjective' dimension of conceptual analysis with the ambition to claim 'objective' truth. Yet it is not clear at the outset how such a view is possible.

In claiming such objectivity for concepts, and even that they express what things are "in themselves," Hegel's view most obviously conflicts with Kant, or at least seems to do so. For Kant believes that concepts are objective only to the extent that they refer to sensible marks of objects, but that these sensory qualities do not themselves constitute the essence of things, which is hidden from us. It seems that on this Kantian view, conceptual analysis cannot yield essential truths (except of the 'nominal essence' of something). Recent years of

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[10] See again Kornblith (2002, 170): "If we want to understand the mind, then we would be well advised to look to our best current theories rather than the concepts we have prior to such theoretical engagement."

Hegel scholarship have seen a renewed appreciation of Hegel's dependence on Kant, but the most dominant attempts to treat Hegel as a Kantian have failed to explain the compatibility of Kant's skepticism about concepts with Hegel's view of Conceptual Transparency. Hegel says that concepts can be the "source of their own actuality," and this surely seems to mean more that conceptuality is a necessary and ineliminable feature of all apperceptive self-consciousness.[11]

Scholars have worried that if Hegel is not sufficiently Kantian, then he will be guilty of a "pre-Critical" rationalism or "dogmatism." This despite the fact that Hegel frequently praises this pre-Kantian tradition in no uncertain terms, as, for example, standing at "a higher level than the later critical [sc. Kantian] philosophizing" (94/66/§ 28). It is in view of such high praise from Hegel, as well as the tendency of contemporary scholars to dismiss or fail to explain these remarks, that I have labelled Hegel's view in the present work a "rationalism." What Hegel seeks to retain from rationalism is precisely what the Strawsonian conception of conceptual analysis seemed to lack, namely the conviction that conceptual content is not only an expression of our subjective habits of thought, but also (at least in some cases) an expression of something's essence, namely Conceptual Transparency. ("Rationalism" can surely mean something more or different than this, but this will be the primary characteristic of interest here.) More common these days is to discuss the sense in which Hegel is an "idealist."[12] This has led to an extensive focus on the way that Hegel thinks of thought and conceptuality as involved in sensory experience. Idealism thus understood is almost identical with a "conceptualism" about sensory experience.[13] Yet

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[11] Here I allude to the approach of Pippin (1989ff.), which will be discussed at many points in what follows.

[12] The relevant connotations of idealism and realism will be discussed further below, at 4.2.

[13] I treat this issue further in Wolf (2019). It is not a focal topic of the present work.

Hegel's primary interest in concepts is the role they play in philosophical thought, not

sensory experience. And "idealism" seems to be a less pertinent label for treating the role of

concepts in philosophy itself.[14] For Hegel's view of philosophy has less to do with the 'mind-

dependence' of the entities philosophy discusses as with their "rational" character.[15]

Moreover, whatever Hegel's views are about the reach of conceptuality to all objects of

worldly experience, he sets *limits* to the ability of concepts to make things rationally

intelligible. Hegel's rationalism has a "province." My aim is to articulate the source and limits

of this province in Hegel's thinking.

0.1 Plan of the Work

In Chapter 1, I clarify the role that "Conceptual Transparency" plays in eighteenth

century German rationalism in the Leibnizian tradition and show why a modified version of

that view would be appealing to Hegel even after Kant's Critical philosophy. Despite Kant's

great influence on Hegel, Hegel continued to affirm that in philosophical thinking, concepts

can express the essence of things, and he frequently ties this view to the pre-Kantian

rationalists. The unique conviction of these rationalists is that Conceptual Transparency

holds universally, so that any truth is a conceptual truth, and every truth is determined by the

essences or natures of the things in question. This view had important epistemological,

metaphysical, and methodological dimensions for rationalism. Hegel rejected Conceptual

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[14] At least with the most common connotations of the term. But see Hegel's remark: "The idealism of philosophy consists in nothing else than in the recognition that the finite is not that which truly is [*ein wahrhaft Seiendes*] . Every philosophy is essentially an idealism…A philosophy that attributes to finite existence, as such, true, ultimate, absolute being, does not deserve the name of philosophy" (*WL* I: 172/124; modified).

[15] Cf., e.g., "The science of right is a section of *philosophy*. Consequently, <u>its task is to develop the Idea—the Idea being the rational factor in any object of study</u>—out of the concept, or, what is the same thing, to look on at the proper development of the thing itself" (*GPR* 30/18/§ 2; underlined).

Transparency in this universal form, relying as it does on accepting the existence of a "happy coincidence" between our thought and the world, which is supported theologically. However, Hegel realizes that Kant's critical rejection of Conceptual Transparency in all its forms had deleterious consequences for philosophy itself. Kant's critique of metaphysics depends on what I call the "Aesthetic Constraint," the view that the content of concepts depends specifically on objects of the spatio-temporal world. Yet holding this view, Hegel thinks, rules out the very kind of conceptual inquiry that is characteristic of even Kant's philosophy. The challenge, then, is set: to arrive at a version of Conceptual Transparency that does not rely on a happy coincidence, but escapes the strictures of Kant's semantics.

Chapter 2 sets out the basic structure of Hegel's view of conceptual content as it appears in the *Doctrine of the Concept*. Yet since Hegel so often speaks of concepts in the singular as "the concept," I first defend the view that Hegel is properly considered a conceptual theorist, and that his remarks that distance his view of concepts from an ordinary one apply to a limited set of characteristics popularly seen as defining concepts, which I call the "standard model." I argue Hegel's critique of the standard model assumes a wider agreement about what concepts are and seeks only to show that certain special features of the standard model can be discarded. I then seek to show how Hegel's account of the "formal concept" in the *Doctrine of the Concept* works out a basic conception of conceptual content. Hegel's use of "concept" in the singular is his term for the "universal" structure of conceptual content, which is divided by negative relations he calls "particularity" and realized in "singular" objects. In Hegel's view, a concept proper is the unity of these three "moments." On this purely formal basis, Hegel attempts to show that a concept could have content without appeal to sensibility (Kant's Aesthetic Constraint) because of the sense-independent role of negativity and contradiction in determining conceptual content. Even if

conceptual cognition depends genetically on sensibility and inherited language, it comes to be conceptual when its structure is determined by "negativity" alone.

Why does this schematic account of conceptual content arrive in the middle of a book that is supposed to effect the "replacement" of metaphysics? In Chapter 3, I seek to answer this question by offering an account of the relationship between the *Doctrine of the Concept* and the prior Books of the Objective Logic. Rather than ending with the purely critical results of the Objective Logic, which shows in many cases that the received view of metaphysical concepts lead to contradictions, Hegel uses the account of conceptual form, judgment, and syllogism to *recapitulate* metaphysical concepts. In effect, Hegel's *Begriffslogik* carries out a more extensive version of Kant's "Metaphysical Deduction of the Categories." This allows Hegel to explain that the proper role of metaphysical concepts like <*substance*> and <*essence*> is to express the satisfaction of thought within certain forms of judgment and syllogism. Thus, Conceptual Transparency is possible in Hegel's case because talk about essences (in particular) does not terminate with the critique of metaphysics in the Objective Logic.

The transition from "Subjectivity" to "Objectivity" in Hegel's *Begriffslogik* shows how the bare account of conceptual form is sufficient for an account of objective conceptual content. In Chapter 4, I show how Hegel's account of objective conceptual content depends on a logical interpretation of teleology consistent with Hegel's account of conceptual form. Teleology explains how objective conceptual content is possible because a teleological process involves the realization of a universal, through a definite means (particular), in a singular object. Teleology satisfies Hegel's criteria for the unity of conceptual form. In doing so, it shows how an object can be conceptually transparent: in being constituted by a purposive process. I show how this conception of Conceptual Transparency leads to a

restricted ("provincial") form of rationalism. Since Hegel also thinks that non-teleological objects are possible (which I discuss by means of his "Mechanism" chapter), Hegel is not committed to the view that every object has an essence that can be conceptually known. Philosophy, insofar as it has objectively true content, must thus be restricted to domains in which teleology can be said to hold. I illustrate this claim by considering a few cases of Hegel's *Realphilosophie*, his philosophy of right, aesthetics, and the philosophy of nature.

Chapter 5 concerns the paradigm case in which Conceptual Transparency holds in Hegel's philosophy: the social ontology implicit in his concepts of "objective spirit" and "ethical life." Social ontology is conceptually transparent if and when it is the product of collective intentions that Hegel would regard as conceptually or purposively structured. I first attempt to show that Hegel's social ontology results from his development of the view of Kant and Fichte on practical conceptuality. Both Kant and Fichte recognizes that practical concepts could play an active role in determining how things are, and that this effect was not reducible to an explanation in terms of sensibility. I show that in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, he builds on this view by showing how, if practical activity leads to objective results, these will be conceptually transparent objects. And the world of social ontology, especially social institutions, are just these kind of objective results of practical activity. Social ontology thus becomes the paradigm case of Conceptual Transparency. I then show how this paradigm case helps elucidate Hegel's rationalism in its metaphysical, epistemological, and methodological dimensions: it helps illustrate why Hegel speaks of the social world in terms of substance and essence, it shows how "absolute knowing" of the social world is possible, and it explains how a form of conceptual analysis is possible that has fully objective credentials.

Chapter 1: Conceptual Transparency in German Rationalism

1.1. Conceptual Transparency

To call Hegel a rationalist is both to flatter the encyclopedist and embarrass the apologist; for it seems to promote the very tired stereotype recent interpreters have tried to overturn.[1] In the popular conception that owes its influence to Kant, rationalism is nearly synonymous with "worm-eaten dogmatism" (A x), the philosophical mood that died with the latter's *Critique of Pure Reason*, a success typically credited to the *Critique* however else its positive merits are assessed. And while Kant still used the term "dogmatic" technically (and even approvingly), for the attempt to deliver philosophical proofs a priori from principles (B xxxv), for us today it is only a term of reproach.[2] Hence, despite the affinities often cited between Hegel's thought and that of certain pre-Kantian rationalists (Spinoza being most often invoked), when Hegel's thought is being *defended*, these affinities are typically disavowed.[3] This trend is, of course, subject to changes in philosophical taste.

Too often, however, apologetic disavowals of Hegel's rationalism are predicated on a shallow interpretation of the pre-Kantian rationalist tradition and a myopic conception of

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[1] I have in mind generalist remarks on Hegel which are still common in the philosophical mainstream, such as we find in, e.g., Glock (2008, 25), "Philosophy [for Hegel] once more turns into a super-science which encompasses all other disciplines. *All* genuine knowledge is *a priori*, since reason can derive even apparently contingent facts through the method of 'dialectic', which was rehabilitated in the face of Kant's strictures." Characterizing Hegel as an "arch-rationalist" was a tendency among older generalist readings. Cf., e.g., Cohen (1932).

[2] Kant continues to refer to features of his own thought as "dogmatic" in his later work. Cf., e.g., the "Dogmatic Division of All Rights That Can Be Acquired," in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (Ak. 6: 284/1996, 432). Clearly, Kant does not mean the term as derogatory in such a context.

[3] Robert Pippin writes, "But nothing is more important, I believe, for the correct understanding of Hegel's project than noticing, first, how radical and unmotivated such a resurrected rationalism would be in the context of the problematic of German Idealism…" (1989, 76).

where the affinity between it and Hegel is supposed to lie.[4] In particular, opponents of

rationalist interpretations of Hegel provide an unflattering portrayal of what the ambitions of

pre-Kantian metaphysics are. In general, if Hegel is to have any contact with his rationalist

forebears, it is seen to involve an "uncritical" assimilation of "thought" and "being." Tom

Rockmore writes, "Pre-Kantian metaphysics uncritically assumes a basic isomorphism

between thought and being…. This amount to uncritically assigning predicates to the

absolute, Hegel's term for mind-independent reality…" (2016, 137). Robert Pippin has

recently suggested that rationalist metaphysics involves "simply … identifying thoughts with

the 'essentialities' of things, as if empirically unaided thought were transparent to the

conceptual structure of the real" (2017, 202).[5]

However justified the dismissals of such aspects of rationalist thought may be, they

do not exhaust the distinctive features of the rationalism that dominated German philosophy

prior to Kant and which continued to exercise an influence on Hegel (see section 1.2.1. for a

further characterization). In particular, when Hegel discusses this tradition (what he often

calls "former metaphysics"), he frequently mentions and even approves of a unique

methodological *cum* epistemological conviction he discerns therein. In the "Preliminary

Conception" (*Vorbegriff*) to his *Encyclopedia Logic* (*EL*) he generalizes this conviction under

"The First Position of Thought with Respect to Objectivity" as follows:

> The first position is the *naïve* [*unbefangene*] way of proceeding, which, being still
> unconscious of the antithesis of thinking within and against itself, contains the *belief*
> that *truth* is [re]cognized, and what objects genuinely are is brought before

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[4] This can be seen especially in the influential work of Pippin (esp. 1989), which includes many mentions of "rationalism," along with many doctrinal attributions (many of which do not apply to the Wolffian tradition, especially a reliance on intellectual intuition; cf., e.g., 105), with hardly a reference to any rationalist writings. Fulda's (2014) repeated but largely unspecified mentions of "vormalige Metaphysik" is also typical. Nuzzo (2018, 24 n. 1) writes that despite the resurgence of interest in Hegel and metaphysics "there is no reference [in the "incredibly vast" literature] to Hegel's possible connection to Baumgarten." This will be remedied at least to some extent below.

[5] Accounts giving a more favorable conception of the relation between Hegel and German rationalism include Horn (1965), Doz (1987), de Boer (2011; 2015), Bowman (2013), and Nuzzo (2018).

consciousness, through *thinking about* them. In this belief, thinking goes straight to the objects; it reproduces the content of sense-experience and intuition out of itself, as a content of thought, and is satisfied with this as the truth. All philosophy in its beginnings, all of the sciences, even the daily doing and dealing of consciousness, lives in this belief. (*EL* 93/65/§ 26)

Hegel suggests that untutored thinking and philosophy alike naturally affirm the self-sufficiency of thought for knowledge of objects. Despite the generality of this conviction, in the subsequent paragraph, Hegel goes on to say that "[i]n its most determinate development, which is also the one closest to us, this way of thinking was the *metaphysics of the recent past*, the way it was constituted among us before the Kantian philosophy" (§ 27). Hence, though pre-Kantian rationalists were not unique in their affirmation of the objective efficacy of thought, they provide in Hegel's mind the most complete articulation of the position.

Hegel states the rationalist conviction more specifically in the next paragraph, and here, much to the apologists' chagrin, he credits it with a *superiority* vis-à-vis Kantian philosophy:[6]

This science [sc., pre-Kantian metaphysics] regarded the thought-determinations as the *fundamental determinations of things*; and, in virtue of this presupposition, that the cognition of things as they are *in-themselves* results from the *thinking* of what *is*, it stood at a higher level than the later critical philosophising. (94/66/§ 28)

Taken at face value, the statement that "the cognition of things as they are *in-themselves* results from the *thinking* of what *is*" affirms precisely what Kant criticized as dogmatism: "the presumption of getting on solely with pure cognition from (philosophical) concepts according to principles, without an "antecedent critique of [reason's] own capacity" (B xxxv).

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[6] *Pace* Pippin's (2017, 200-201) claim that Hegel's appreciation of Kant required him to reject "former metaphysics" *tout court*. Cf. Bowman (2013, 97-98) and Houlgate (2006, 119) for similar accounts of Hegel's affirmative attitude toward this aspect of rationalism. Pippin occasionally admits, but then laments, that Hegel seems to transgress Kantian strictures: "On the face of it, there are several places where Hegel … slips frequently from a 'logical' to a material mode, going far beyond a claim about thought or thinkability, and making a *direct* claim about the necessary nature of things …." (1989, 187).

While I do not want to identity rationalism with dogmatism as Kant defines it, I speak of rationalism to signify this belief in the objective efficacy of reason.

Before investigating it historically and interpretatively, I want to clarify the aspect of rationalism of interest here more systematically. The specific claim that lies behind the view put forward in the above quotation is one I will call *Conceptual Transparency*.[7] To affirm Conceptual Transparency is precisely to claim, as the above quotation does, that the content of a concept provides knowledge of what something is "in itself" or in its "essence."[8] Or, more technically:

Conceptual Transparency: The fully stated content of a concept expresses the

essential constituent features (the *nature*) of the object expressed by the concept.[9]

A "transparent concept" will be a concept which satisfies the above definition. A

"nontransparent" or "opaque" concept will be one which does not. The view can then be

further qualified:

Universal Conceptual Transparency: For every object, there is exactly one

transparent concept corresponding to it.

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[7] It is traditional to associate rationalism above all with the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR). See Della Rocca (2003) and Dasgupta (2016) for contemporary accounts. However, the way that the German rationalists understood the PSR was primarily in terms of non-causal, constitutive or essential "grounds," among which efficient causes were at best a species (see Stang 2019). These grounds are also what these rationalists would have seen as contained in the concept of a subject. Arguably, then, Conceptual Transparency is another way of expressing (or perhaps a consequence of) the German rationalists' conception of the PSR, since the PSR was itself grounded in a theory of concepts. However, I will not belabor this point, since Hegel more frequently associates Conceptual Transparency with the German rationalists than PSR.

[8] Though I will save my full exegetical case for later, another important passage is the following: "Thus, inasmuch as subjective thought is our own most inner doing, and the objective concept of things constitutes what is essential to them, we cannot step away from this doing, cannot stand above it, and even less can we stand step beyond the nature of things. We can, however, dispense with this last claim; inasmuch as it is symmetrical with the one preceding it, it says that our thoughts have a reference to the essence of things; but this is an empty claim, for the essence of things would then be set up as the rule for our concepts whereas, for us, that essence can only be the concepts that we have of the things" (*WL* I: 25/16).

[9] This statement coheres quite directly with the demand Leibniz sets in what he calls the "law of expressions": "The law of expressions is this: the expression of a given thing [*res*] is to be composed of the expressions of those things the ideas of which compose the idea of the given thing." Quoted from a handwritten manuscript of Leibniz in Mates (1986, 186).

Restricted Conceptual Transparency: For some objects, there is exactly one transparent concept corresponding to them.

From the primary definition it is clear that "transparency," here, refers not to an intra-subjective relation ('I know what I mean transparently') but to an objective relation: the relation of concepts to their objects.[10] Though it will clearly be necessary that a subject has the right subjective relation to a concept to count as possessing it at all, what matters primarily is that whenever Conceptual Transparency holds, any difference that might be assumed between the concept of x and 'x itself' or 'the essence of x' vanishes.[11]

From a methodological angle, Conceptual Transparency can be understood as implying the availability of *real definitions*: if a concept of x is transparent with respect to x, the concept provides a real definition of x.[12] A real definition is one that characterizes what it is to be something, its essence. A nominal definition, by contrast, provides a characterization of how something can be picked out, relative to some perspective. "Venus" can be defined nominally as "the planet closest to Earth"; that tells us which object should answer to the name Venus, but it does not tell us what *being Venus* is. Nominal definitions as such are "opaque."

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[10] Recall the quotation in the text above from Pippin (2017, 202) which denies such transparency to Hegel's metaphysics (also taking inspiration from Anderson's [2015] use of the term). By contrast, note the opposing characterization of Hegel's view by Morris: "All that truly exists is rational and *nothing is opaque to thought* because everything is the outcome of the power of mind as thought" (1932, 289-90; emphasis added).

[11] Compare Kit Fine's (2012, 9) remarks about the nature of metaphysical concepts: "The concepts of metaphysics are also distinguished by their transparency. Roughly speaking, a concept is transparent if there is no significant gap between the concept and what it is a concept of. Thus there *is* a significant gap between the concept *water* and the substance H_2O of which it is a concept but *no* significant gap between the concept *identity* and the identity relation of which it is a concept."

[12] See *WL* II: 512-19/708-13 for Hegel's detailed discussion of real and nominal definitions. It should be noted at the outset that, while part of Hegel's critique of rationalists concerns their use of definitions (i.e., *more geometrico*), he certainly thinks one aim of philosophy is to establish definitions: "We should, moreover, take not here that philosophy has absolutely nothing to do with merely correct definitions and even less with merely plausible ones … ; it is concerned, instead, with definitions that have been *validated*, i.e., definitions whose content is not accepted merely as something that we come across, but is recognized as grounded in free thinking, and hence at the same time as grounded within itself" (*EL* 210/158/§ 99Z). Cf. Bowman (2014) for a positive take on Hegel's treatment of real definitions in geometry.

If Universal Conceptual Transparency implied the existence of *nominal* definitions for

every object, it would still not be a trivial claim – it may even be false – , but it would be

satisfiable (to the extent that it is) on almost purely subjective grounds. For the availability of

a nominal definition for something depends on any mere *description* that is able to distinguish

an object from all others, relative to some subject.[13] I am free to describe things however I

like, so long as my descriptions keep things numerically distinct. It is certainly debatable

whether everything could be described according to this standard,[14] but the limits lie largely

in the creativity and interest of the subject doing the describing. Moreover, the grounds for

the correctness of the definitions would seem to lie in their *effectiveness* in bringing the subject

to track the difference between objects, not in their objective adequacy or truth. So if

Conceptual Transparency depended on a subject being able to fix definitions for some or

(impossibly) all objects, that would be a claim solely about *her*, not about the world she was

trying to describe.

Instead, if a concept is transparent in the relevant sense, it does not just enable us to

pick out objects, it reveals the nature or essence of objects. But depending on how we

understand what the "essence" of something is, this too might seem uncontentious.

According to the remark of Hegel above, we should find such a view quite natural to

ordinary thought: everyone, he says, thinks that mere thought contains the truth about

things. Whether or not this is an accurate anthropological generalization, let us consider how

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[13] Note that John McDowell's (1994) brief account of "demonstrative concepts" (Lecture II) seems to show how nominal definitions could be available beyond the coarse descriptive power of language. This is one path to show how nominal Conceptual Transparency could work, but it also shows the subjectivism of the approach. McDowell's grounds for his conceptualism seem to lie almost wholly in his understanding of human conceptual capacities, not in what objects are.

[14] If for no other reason than because of the ambiguity of "everything." For, at least on the ordinary use of the word, there is (in principle) no definite answer to a question like 'how many objects are in the room?' (Cf. Putnam 1987). Any version of Universal Conceptual Transparency would have to include reductive criteria for being a 'real' object.

a philosophical curmudgeon might (as many do) make an exception. The denial might come from two main directions. First, one might deny that there *are* essences or natures; it would then follow that no concept could express them (though they could pretend to). Second, one might affirm that there are essences, but deny that they are expressible by concepts (in terms of the suggestion above: there are only nominal but no real definitions).

I hope stating the objections in these two ways shows that denying Conceptual Transparency is both common and even compelling in terms of much contemporary philosophy. Therefore, it is a view that requires both explanation and defense, and Hegel's account may be significant for this undertaking. As for those who would deny that there are essences or natures, such views can again be divided in two. One version of such a claim would deny that putative essences, considered *generically*, provide any determining constraint on objects as individuals.[15] That is, falling under a type is (if not a pure fiction) at best a *loose* relation, considered descriptively, and a *non-binding* one, considered normatively. For example, on this view, any putative definition of human beings (say, "rational animal") will be descriptively loose in the sense that it does not constitute the essence of individuals of the type in every case, and it will non-binding in the sense that no fault or defect lies in those individuals who are exemptions.[16] Here there is no rational fittingness between individuals and the types they fall under. A second kind of non-essentialist would not deny that there are essential features of general kinds, but would deny that there are essences belonging uniquely to individuals. For example, Julius Caesar may be essentially a human being, but 'Julius-

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[15] See Wiggins (2001) for an (Aristotelian) account of identity conditions (and hence essentialia) that depends on sortal concepts. *Pace* Pippin (2008, 62-63), I do not think that an essentialism has to be opposed to elements of a 'constructivism'. As will be central to my argument later on, for Hegel essences can be 'constructed' (though this is not my favored term) by means of concepts.

[16] Contrast the recent revival of theories of "natural goodness" (Foot 2001; Thompson 2012), which claim that, at least for natural things, generic statements pertaining to types ('black bears hibernate') articulate judgments of propriety for the things falling under their scope. See also Rand (2015) for a connection of such views to Hegel's own.

Caesar-ness' (as a *haecceitas*) does not constitute a meaningful essence for him. There is no meaningful property of 'being Julius Caesar' that he could be or fail to be. But the kind of individual essentialism questioned here, if even intelligible, would only be required by the most universal form of Conceptual Transparency (one that will show up in Leibniz[17]) and need not concern us now. For one could deny individual essentialism and still affirm Restricted Conceptual Transparency.

Despite the controversy surrounding individual essentialism, a global anti-essentialism suffers from a difficulty already pointed out in Plato's *Meno*. It seems committed to claim that there are *F*'s – but nothing it is to be *F*. That there are bees but nothing it is to be a bee, that which "makes"[18] something a bee (72a-c). This is, at the very least, an awkward claim, and often countenanced today only to avoid an "ontological commitment" that only dubiously attends its alternative.[19] Though there is often good justification for denying essentialist claims in particular instances, denying essentialism *überhaupt* amounts to saying "things merely are," but they aren't really anything.[20] Even genuine counterexamples to universal essentialist claims depend on maintaining a proper relation of the counterexample to the type in some way. For example, if a newborn infant counts as a counterexample to a putative essence of being a human (in terms of certain intellectual capacities, say), this can

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[17] Even Leibniz, however, denied that we can reduce our knowledge to that of the lowest species (cf. Leibniz 1981, 255, 275). How this squares with his theory that each individual represents a complete concept is a complex issue that we cannot deal with here.

[18] Opposition to essences seems almost always to come when they are conceived (implausibly) as independent forces or entities inside something, stemming perhaps from a quasi-physical interpretation of apparently causal locutions like 'makes'. But nothing in a basic kind of essentialism is lost if we replaced that phrase with 'qualifies … as'.

[19] For an extended discussion of this issue with reference to Quinean anti-essentialism, see Krämer (2014). That ontological commitment here is dubious relates partly to what is said in the previous note. We are too inclined to think that affirming the existence of something requires conceiving it as a separate "thing."

[20] The phrase comes from the title of Critchley's (2005) work on Wallace Stevens. When Hegel contemplates a view that denies that concepts can express the essence of things, he protests that "then there is no saying what such an individual could still be if this foundation [of the universal or concept] were removed from him, no matter how many the predicates with which he would still be otherwise adorned – if, that is, such a foundation can be called a predicate like the rest" (*WL* I: 26/17).

only because the infant *is* a human *for some other reason*, a reason that would in turn *correct* the initial essentialist claim but not abolish an essence altogether. Were a case to resist *all* putative essential conditions for being *F*, then it is no longer a counterexample to putative *F*-ness, it is just no longer an *F*. This suggests that truthful predication as such depends on *some* form of essentialism.

Hegel himself has plenty to say in criticism of certain versions of essentialism (part of which occupies his *Doctrine of Essence*), and his own version of essentialism, as I understand it, depends on a complex argument developed in his *Doctrine of the Concept*, to which I will turn later. Thus, I do not expect to have laid to rest all concerns about essentialism just now. But a far more likely rejection of Conceptual Transparency stems from epistemological considerations. On the one hand, one could admit the metaphysical possibility of *de re* essences, of objective conditions that make things what they are, but be suspicious that any particular claim about something's essence is correct. Maybe this fallibility of all essentialist claims could simply result from the provisional nature of any 'evidence' about an essence, especially in the realm of the natural sciences, where new discoveries often overturn old truisms. Or maybe it stems, rather, from a conviction about the complexity of things: the essence of one thing cannot be isolated from everything else. In this case, perhaps, one could pick out a collection of features belonging to the essence of something, but never its *complete* essence, not even of a type or kind. With regard to the first kind of epistemological concern, when it comes to natural objects I am happy to concede it for my purposes here. For what my account requires, it may be only a convenient act of self-congratulation to assure ourselves that we have discovered the essence of even simple natural beings, even if we grant that these objects are constrained by an essence. My account will stake a positive claim to knowledge of essences primarily in the "spiritual" (*geistige*) world, where the kind of

fallibilism that may properly attend the natural-scientific enterprise seems out of place.[21] As

for the second concern about the complexity of essences, we must simply insist that an

account of the complete essence of any individual is not required here. Even a thinker like

Leibniz who would affirm the existence of such complex essences did not think any finite

mind could know them (an achievement left for God alone); that would be raising the bar

above any interest we could have in reaching it.

Most difficult to address, and perhaps even to adequately express, is a rejection of

Conceptual Transparency that, without denying essentialism as such, denies that essences

could be *conceptually* apprehended. This is not, as above, a concern about the fallibility or

completeness of the conceptual knowledge of essences, but a denial that the *form* of

conceptual knowledge is adequate for knowledge of essences.[22] This is the kind of objection

presented by Kant. Kant's rejection of Conceptual Transparency works in two steps (these

points will be developed further in section 1.4.). First, Kant allows that concepts are

objectively adequate, but only to spatio-temporal "appearances" (*Erscheinungen*). Any attempt

to express a purely intelligible feature of reality must fail. Secondly, and perhaps less

famously, Kant denies that even what we can know, namely appearances, are "structured" in

such a way to admit discursively expressible essences. If there are essences, they pertain to

"things in themselves," which we are not in a position to know. So by their very form, at

least as possessed by us, concepts are not adequate to express essences of the things

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[21] The basic principle of this distinction for Hegel is that nature is (or at least includes) the otherness of spirit or mind, whereas knowledge of culture is a kind of knowledge of self. So while any attempt to comprehend nature will always have to overcome its principled otherness, knowledge of spirit has to remain "with itself" (*bei sich selbst*: even 'at home with itself').

[22] A certain version of this objection is used by Hegel himself to criticize Universal Conceptual Transparency. Hegel sees that this view would require that everything corresponds to the form of *judgments* and hence that the subject-predicate form corresponds perfectly to substance-attribute complexes. Hegel associates this perspective with the mere "understanding" (*der Verstand*). Cf. *EL* §§ 27-28; *WL* II: 285-87/538-40, 307-309/554-55.

knowable by us.[23] This is not merely a case of fallibility, but a deficit in the kind of content concepts can have: empirical concepts are not in position to reconstruct what something is starting from its true nature and working out, since conceptual constituents are always sensory marks of appearances (see 1.4.1. below). Hence, Kant denies that we have any adequate concepts, or even real definitions, of anything empirical.[24]

Thus, Kant presents us with a model of someone who denies Conceptual Transparency for quasi-formal reasons: given the *kind* of content that concepts can have, and given some conception of the way things are 'anyways', concepts do not express the nature of things.[25] But Kant's rejection of Conceptual Transparency shares much in common with contemporary sentiments (however distantly derived from him). On a popular level, we find this kind of view expressed when someone doubts whether 'our', or 'merely human', concepts should have any purchase on reality, given, say, our infinitesimal importance in the cosmos. Despite recent attempts in contemporary metaphysics to counter such doubts,[26] it is likely that such skepticism about Conceptual Transparency reigns in popular consciousness. Hegel's view is not only not obvious; it has an uphill battle to face. Not only does it need to

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[23] While it is clear that concepts are not fully adequate to appearances for Kant, the issue of how an "intuitive intellect" (such as God would possess) would represent things in themselves is much debated. Cf., e.g., Leech (2014) and Winegar (2017).

[24] "It would be excellent and would give great worth to our cognitions *if, in philosophy, we had concepts that are adequate to the object*, and which also did not exceed precision, for this is the aim of our sciences. But since *we are not in a position to accomplish such a thing*, we must make do with as many clear marks as we can discover in our reason. Such incomplete concepts, which also occur in physics, we call descriptions" (Ak 24: 917/1992b, 359; emphasized). Accordingly, we have no real definitions in empirical science (cf. *Jäsche Logik* § 106, Ak. 9: 143/1992b, 634). Interestingly, (and important for what comes later) Kant does grant that we have real definitions for "arbitrary" concepts, "[j]ust because it lies solely with me to make up the concept and to establish it as it pleases me, and the whole concept has thus no other reality than merely what my fabrication wants…" (Ak. 24: 268/216).

[25] Here a divergence from Kant is possible, which from Hegel's point of view is more consistent: for one to *compare* the conceptual relation to things with the way things are in themselves, one must have a different kind of epistemic access to those things that is somehow non-conceptual. This provided the motivation for many post-Kantian thinkers (especially Romantics) to pursue against Kant a substantive place for intellectual intuition. See Beiser (2002, 299-301, 395-397, 580-584).

[26] Cf., e.g., Sider's (2012) aptly titled *Writing the Book of the World* for a representative example of this new trend.

show why some version of essentialism is correct, it then needs to demonstrate that concepts are adequate to express essences. It will be my subsequent task to show that Hegel's *Science of Logic*, culminating in the *Doctrine of the Concept*, attempts to achieve both tasks at once.

1.2. Conceptual Transparency in German Rationalism

I now wish to show how the German rationalist tradition attempted to formulate a version of Universal Conceptual Transparency, which later earned the title of dogmatism. It is this tradition that provides a precedent for the view we find (however modified) in Hegel. By "German rationalism" I mean the *Schulphilosophie* that developed in Germany under the influence of G.W. Leibniz, whose central figures include Christian Wolff, Alexander Baumgarten, G.F. Meier, and Moses Mendelssohn. Since Wolff himself is largely credited with consolidating this philosophical tradition – Kant called him "the greatest among all dogmatic philosophers" (B xxxvi) – , I will sometimes refer to this school as "Wolffian rationalism."[27] Moreover, though this tradition was not (as no philosophical movement can be) purely homogenous, its representatives are remarkably consistent in both their central doctrines and even style. The main representative figures I will discuss, apart from Leibniz himself, form a chain of largely faithful and continuous tradition. Since I am dealing with only quite general aspects of Wolffian rationalism, for the sake of my modest purposes here I will treat their work as roughly harmonious, differing in the quantity and manner of

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[27] It is common practice to group this school together under the "Wolffian" umbrella. Cf., e.g., Anderson (2015, Ch. 3), de Boer (2014; 2016).

exposition rather than substantively.[28] In any case, they are unified in their affirmation of a

set of doctrines and practices that evince a remarkable conviction in the efficacy of concepts

– the aspect of their view shared by Hegel.

1.2.1. Leibnizian Foundations

We can explain the core of German rationalism, insofar as it leads to a form of

Conceptual Transparency, as taking its departure from a theory of true judgment inherited

from Leibniz. It is often forgotten that Leibniz develops a conception of truth that, if it does

not substantively reject the traditional doctrine of truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei*, at least

inverts its typical order of explanation.[29] Whereas the scholastic doctrine conceives truth as a

relation such as conformity (*conformatur rei*), likeness (*similtudo*), or even causation (*a re causetur*)

between the intellect and the object known,[30] Leibniz sees truth as a quasi-syntactic relation

between the terms of a judgment. As he writes in correspondence with Arnauld:

> Finally, I have given a decisive reason, which to my mind will do for a
> demonstration; it is that always, in every affirmative true proposition, necessary or
> contingent, universal or singular, the concept [*la notion*] of the predicate is included
> [*comprise*] in some way in that of the subject: *praedicatum inest subjecto* [trans. reverted -
> WCW]; or I do not know what truth is. … [T]here must always *be some foundation for
> the connection of the terms of a proposition, which must be found in their concepts.* That is my
> great principle, with which I believe that all philosophers must agree.... (Leibniz
> 2016, 111; Letter to Arnauld, 14 July 1686)

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[28] This point requires most justification in the case of G.F. Meier, especially given that Hegel only knew his translation of Baumgarten, rather than his original writings (cf. GW 31.1). Meier's work is helpful, however, especially due to its greater use of illustration and exposition compared to the Euclidean prose of his teacher Baumgarten. In Meier (especially in his *Metaphysik*) we find a more popular version of German rationalism that likely conforms to the way it was taught in the schools. Here I follow Wundt (1945, 227-28).

[29] Cf. Aquinas, *ST* I-I, Q. 16, Art. 2. As Stephen Voss ("Introduction" to Leibniz 2016, xxxiv) writes, "It is not easy to find in Aristotle a precedent for the Leibnizian concept containment theory, and some scholars … resolutely take Leibniz to be proposing an alternative to a supposed Aristotelian correspondence theory."

[30] Aquinas, *ST* I-II, Q. 16, Art. 2, co. & ad 3.

This explanation of truth is not straightforwardly a rejection of the scholastic view, since Leibniz does not conceive concepts here as merely inhering in human intellects. It is not the relation of *my* or *your* concepts that explains the truth of a judgment, but those concepts "in themselves," namely as they are understood by God (cf. Mates 1986, 103). Still, Leibniz's conception allows him to circumvent the need to explain (as the traditional doctrine seems to require) how the mental and "extramental" are related for a proposition to be true. Instead, the ground of truth lies in the proposition itself, however else the propositional terms are realized in human minds or objective reality.

Many of the more exotic features of Leibniz's thought, especially his monadology, become more comprehensible in light of his conception of truth. Leibniz's metaphysics is guided by the need to articulate the constituents of reality on the model of subjects of true propositions. This is part of what leads him to think that reality must not be irreducibly material, for material atoms as conceived by mechanistic philosophy are not suitable subject-terms for true propositions.[31] Instead, apparently material facts about composite objects must be reducible to facts about simple beings (Leibniz 1991, 213/*Mon.* § 2), which exhibit in reality the kind of syntactic relation that a true proposition has, roughly the relation of accidents inhering in substances. Since true propositions are explained by the relation of the predicate to the subject term, there must be objects with a suitably rich relation to their predicates to support all worldly facts.[32] Leibniz supposes that his "simple substances" or

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[31] There is certainly more to the story. Russell (1900) famously claimed, much in the spirit of my remarks, that much of Leibniz's metaphysics can be explained by adherence to certain logical principles. Wilson (1989) has shown historically that some of Leibniz's doctrines were developed (apparently) independently of some of these logical doctrines. For example, Leibniz' pursuit of a metaphysics of simple beings is also a response to the "continuum" problem in mathematics (ibid., 74-77). Despite this, the "predicate-in-subject" explanation of truth is clearly a case where a logical doctrine has metaphysical consequences, and that is my main concern here.

[32] As Mates (1986, 178) explains, "If the real world consists exclusively of individual substances-with-accidents, it is natural to suppose that it could in principle be completely described by a set of propositions of '*A* is$_t$ *B*' form, where *A* is the complete individual concept of a given substance, and *B* is a concept under which

"monads" fit the bill. They are simple beings, so they cannot be broken down into something more ultimate, yet they "contain" the whole series of facts about them, just like a concept contains a predicate in a true proposition.

Leibniz's theory of truth puts all its weight on the relation between the subject and predicate concepts in a judgment, rather than on the external relation between concepts and things. The ground of truth is in the judgment itself, rather than an extra-judgmental correspondence. But this amplifies the importance of understanding the proper relation between concepts. The quotation above states that the truth of a judgment obtains when its predicate term is "contained in some way" in the subject term. After Kant, our immediate reference point for the containment relation is analytic judgments, since Kant himself often defines an analytic judgment as one in which the subject concept contains the predicate (A 6/B 10). Of course, Kant himself introduces the analytic-synthetic distinction precisely to carve out a class of non-analytic judgments.[33] Since Leibniz uses the containment relation to cover all true judgments, he has to explain how it applies also to those post-Kantians would call "synthetic." Leibniz sees containment as a more general logical relation than what Kant defines as analytic.[34] In one place, Leibniz defines containment (here, "inclusion") as follows: "That A includes [*includere*] B, or, that B is included in A, is that B, the predicate is 'affirmed universally' of A, the subject. For example, 'The wise man includes the just man', that is,

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the substance falls at *t* by virtue of one or more of its accidents." This is a perfect description of the Leibnizian version of Conceptual Transparency.

[33] Kant argues vociferously against the neo-Leibnizian J.A. Eberhard in defense of the novelty of this view in his "On a Discovery Whereby Any New Critique of Pure Reason Is to Be Made Superfluous by an Older One" (in Kant 2002 [1790]).

[34] A comparison between the two views is treated extensively in Anderson (2015, Ch. 1 and 2). One difficulty for the comparison lies in the fact that Kant often explains analyticity psychologically or epistemologically ("For I do not need to go outside the concept that I combine with the word 'body' in order to find that extension is connected with it, but rather … become conscious of the manifold that I always think in it…" [A7/B 11].), whereas Leibniz attempts to give a purely logical definition. Anderson argues that Kant's own view can be given a purely logical reading as well.

'Every wise man is just" (G VII, 208/1966, 112). This definition seems question-begging if it

is also used to explain what truth is: for to "affirm" something is just to take it to be true, so

we must already know what is true when we describe a concept as included or contained in

another. But this illustrates how broadly Leibniz construes the notion. More illuminating

perhaps is how containment is related to identity. If a statement A is B is true, this does not

mean that A is identical to B, but that B is identical to part of A: fully elucidated, the

statement would read A(B) is B.[35] Hence, if every wise man is just, this is a suppressed way

of saying that every wise (and therefore just) man is just. Leibniz sees containment as

grounded in a conceptual identity, however hidden.

In order to make Leibniz's syntactic conception of truth work universally, he has to

use the same kind of explanation for supposedly contingent and empirical synthetic truths,

like "Judas sins." Fully understanding <*Judas*> is just to reveal the concept <*Judas, sins* [at

t]>.[36] But as Leibniz's correspondent Arnauld worried, if all truths are reducible to

conceptual identities, which are in some way true by definition, then all truths, even those

about Judas or Adam, turn out to be necessary.[37] Though this consequence may be

unwelcome on its own (not to mention its apparently deleterious effects for human freedom

and responsibility), for our purposes, what is significant is that Leibniz thinks the essential

conceptual relation found in analytic truths is maintained in apparently contingent truths,

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[35] This is confirmed by a definition elsewhere, "*Definition 3*. That A 'is in' L, or, that L 'contains' A, is the same as that L is assumed to be coincident with several terms taken together, among which is A" (Leibniz G VII, 237/1966, 132). In other words, L must represent a complex of contents, which if fully explicated would include A.

[36] Leibniz specifically speaks of "deducing" the predicates from the subject. Cf. Leibniz 2016, 75 ("Remarks on a Letter of Arnauld," June 1686).

[37] Arnauld writes, "If this is so [sc., that the individual concept contains everything that happens to something], then God was not free to create or not to create Adam, but supposing that he did will to create him, everything that has happened since then, and will ever happen, to humankind must have happened or must happen by a necessity that is more than fatal" ("Arnauld to Ernst for Leibniz," 13 March 1686; in Leibniz 2016, 9).

even if the proof of this relation cannot be carried out.[38] The relation between a subject and predicate in a "contingent" proposition is equally necessary,[39] but necessary on the assumption of the existence of a world ("hypothetically necessary").[40] Given the creation of our world, the proposition that *Judas sins* is necessary, since the concept *<Judas>* contains his *<sinning>*. But since this world did not have to be created, Judas' choice is not necessary in itself. Many still find it difficult to see how Judas can be blamed in these circumstances – *that Judas would sin* was already true from the day he was born – , but Leibniz does not revise his theory of truth to accommodate this apparent problem. It remains the case that all truths *follow necessarily* from the "notion of their subject." All truths are conceptual truths.

However, Leibniz recognizes an additional difference between claims about Judas and those less controversially described as analytic, such as "triangles have three sides." It may seem that what distinguishes Judas from pure triangles is that while the latter are purely ideal and thus admit a clear conceptual definition, the former has extra-conceptual existence and hence cannot be reduced to a concept: essential truths of a triangle *are* purely conceptual in a way that facts about Judas are *not*. Leibniz takes a different tack, however: instead of Judas having something extra-conceptual that pure triangles do not, Leibniz attributes greater (indeed infinite) *logical* complexity to Judas (and other individuals), which pure triangles lack. He writes, "For example, 'man' or 'any man' means any individual who

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[38] Cf. Wilson (1989, 91 ff.). "A true contingent proposition cannot be reduced to identical propositions, but is proved by showing that if the analysis is continued further and further, it constantly approaches identical propositions, but never reaches them. Therefore it is God alone, who grasps the entire infinite in his mind, who knows all contingent truths with certainty" (Leibniz *C* 388/1966, 77).

[39] It appears that Leibniz countenances contingent facts as a valid category for human knowledge, when the containment relation cannot be proven (Leibniz frequently cites the infinite approximation to a value in calculus as an analogy). But this factor does not seem to track a metaphysical class of contingent facts (i.e., how they would be to God). As Mates (1986, 119) writes, for Leibniz "the hypothetically necessary propositions coincide with the contingently true propositions."

[40] Cf. Leibniz (1989 [1697], 150): "For the present world is physically or hypothetically necessary, but not absolutely or metaphysically necessary. That is, given that it was once such and such, it follows that such and such things will arise in the future."

participates in human nature; but a certain individual is *this* one, whom I designate either by pointing or by <u>adding additional marks</u>" (*C* 360/1966, 51; underline added).[41] In other words, demonstrative or existential statements differ only in the degree of complexity of their component concepts from abstract ones. Ultimately, nothing is actual until it is logically *complete* – there are no gaps in its entire predicative history. This helps Leibniz distinguish fictional claims from real ones as well: even if it is true analytically that unicorns have one horn, there is a metaphysical lack of facts about individual unicorns – date of birth, nature of magical powers, etc. – which shows that they are merely possible. The opposite is true of real individuals: they are "completely determined," so that any predicate does or does not apply to them.[42] Reality is *logically* complete in a way that fictions are not. Thus, in cases where an object does exist, say, a horse, the truth of statements beyond those conceptual truths grounded in its type (i.e., "is a mammal") are still grounded in a concept, but in one of infinitely greater complexity (i.e., <*that horse*>). Even with infinitely complex empirical objects, Leibniz attempts to explain truth without appealing to the relation of the conceptual to the non-conceptual, but instead appealing to mere conceptual relations.

1.2.2. Complete Determination in the Wolffian Tradition

The implications of Leibniz's view of truth for metaphysics are staggering. The view implies that *being something* is nothing else than *having a fully determinate concept*: there is a complete isomorphism between concept and substance. Though there is a clear difference

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[41] With reference to contemporary philosophy of language, Leibniz might be characterized as a "hyperdescriptivist" when it comes to proper names. It is not that the "sense" of names can determine the reference with a few essential marks ('Aristotle was the teacher of Alexander and student of Plato'), but that reference can be determined with the full statement of the individual predicates (which is not, of course, something individual speakers can do).

[42] Complete determination is discussed in more detail in the following section 1.2.2.

between concepts *qua* abstract and reality *qua* concrete, the difference lies only in the degree

of completeness of concepts themselves (correlating to the idea in the divine mind), not in a

fundamental difference between the conceptual and non-conceptual. As we will see,

existence "supervenes on" conceptual completeness.

Putting aside Leibniz's specific views on the matter, the doctrine that all "being" can

be conceptually determined came to be a cornerstone in Wolffian rationalism. Wolff himself

was apparently ambivalent on Leibnizian monadology (cf. Schönfeld 2002), but his ontology

is based on Leibniz's insights about conceptual determination. As Kant and Hegel both

suggest, Wolff's ontology nearly elides the distinction between (Leibnizian) concepts and

"being." This is because Wolff defines "being" (*ens*) or "a thing" (*Ding*) as what is possible,

and what is possible as anything that lacks a contradiction. As he writes,

> Whatever can exist is possible (§ 133); what is possible is a being (§ 134). (*WO* § 35)

> From which we can see further that something is **possible** which does not contain anything contradictory within it [*in sich*], that is, [which] not only can exist besides other things which are or can be, but also only contains those within itself that exist besides each other, e.g. a wooden plate. (*DM* § 12)

> Everything that can be, whether it be actual or not, we call a **thing**. (*DM* § 16)

Wolff avoids speaking about concepts non-psychologically (as Leibniz does), but Wolffian

"being" is basically a logical category, comparable to Leibnizian "concepts" or "notions."[43]

Wolff's conception of being gives him a neutral starting point between possibility

and actuality. Actuality or existence will share at least the freedom from contradiction that

marks mere being. But the Wolffian tradition, especially Baumgarten, developed further the

Leibnizian insight mentioned above. For them, a possible thing can be distinguished from an

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[43] Cf. Beck (1969, 263-64), "There is a parallelism between, if not an identity of, a concept a thing and the essence or possibility of a thing; if we can have a distinct concept of it, then it is possible. Whatever can be given a definition is possible, and if it is possible it can be defined or have a corresponding concept."

actual one by the *incomplete determination* of the former vis-à-vis the latter.[44] To be *completely*

determined, by contrast, is to have a concept that is determined with respect to every

possible pair of contradictory predicates. This principle, later employed by Mendelssohn[45]

and Kant as well (cf. A 572/B 600), can be derived the conjunction of two definitions in

Baumgarten:

> What is either posited to be A, or posited not to be A, is DETERMINED. What is however only posited either to be either A or not-A, is UNDETERMINED.[46] (*BM* § 34)

> The collection of all determinations compossible in a being is its COMPLETE DETERMINATION. Hence, a being [*ens*] is either completely determined or not (§ 10). (*BM* § 148)

Thus:

> **Complete Determination:** *s* is completely determined iff, for every possible pair of
>
> contradictory predicates φ and ¬ φ, either *s* (φ) or ¬ *s* (φ) is true.

Complete determination, according to the rationalists, is what is necessary for actual

existence.[47] Anything incompletely determined, by contrast, and hence merely possible, will

be undecided with respect to one pair of contradictory opposites.[48]

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[44] This doctrine certainly goes back to Wolff as well: "Namely, everything that we meet in singular things is determined in every way: and precisely in this way does something become a singular thing, because it is determined as well in all that it has in itself as in what falls external to it with respect to other things" (*DL* § 27).

[45] See section 1.2.4. below.

[46] According to *BM* § 10, it is also possible to be *neither* A nor not-A.

[47] Prior to the definition of complete determination, Baumgarten anticipates: "Aside from essence (§ 53), something possible with regard to all the affections that are also compossible in it, or not (§ 34, 10). The former is an ACTUAL BEING […]" (*BM* § 54). "EXISTENCE (act, cf. 210, actuality) is the collection of affections that are compossible in something; i.e., the complement of essence or internal possibility, insofar as an essence is considered only as a collection of determinations (§ 40)" (*BM* § 55).

[48] Cf. Mendelssohn (1997, 283): "Each individual proposition is either true or false or indeterminate." Given that complete determination does not hold for *possibilia*, the rationalists appear to be committed to denying the Principle of the Excluded Middle (PEM) for them, and perhaps even the Principle of Bivalence. Whereas the first claims that if a statement *p* is false, its opposite, ~ *p*, is true, the second states only that every statement is either true or false, but allows that *p* and ~ *p* could *both* be false (denied by the PEM). See M. Wolff (2009) for the distinction between these two principles.

Not only does the theory of complete determination provide a criterion for the distinction between actuality and possibility, it serves for the distinction between universal and singular as well. Just as "*ens*" or "*Ding*" is in itself neutral between possible and actual, so can they designate singulars and universals without distinction. Yet the rationalists suggested that a purely logical distinction could be made between the two. As Baumgarten writes,

> [A] being is either completely determined or not (§ 10). The former is SINGULAR (an individual), and the latter is UNIVERSAL. (*BM* § 148)

> Singular beings are internally entirely determined (§ 148), and hence are actual (§ 54). (*BM* § 152)

This reveals an interesting conception of what it means for a universal (general concept) to be instantiated. The singular instantiation of a concept, for the rationalists, is a modification of the general concept through the process of determination until it reaches an individual (on the model of a Porphyrian tree).[49] On the other hand, as we saw above, we can tell that abstract universals like <*human*> do not exist as such simply because they are not determinable in every respect: was it born in June? Is it over 5 feet tall? etc.[50] Thus, though the theory of complete determination allows for a difference between singular/universal, actual/possible, it makes that difference one of degree, namely, the degree of logical complexity. A singular and actual thing is like a universal that has been further detailed. Take just one detail (or determination) away, and that thing is merely a possible, complex, though

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[49] Cf. Anderson (2015, 54-60). In other words, each genus is determined by lower species, which in turn are determined by lower species, until an individual is met. This ensures that each individual being will have the *exact* general properties of which they are a further determination (i.e., since every human being is a further determination of <*human being*>, they will all be perfect exemplars of that concept). This is countenanced by Leibniz when he discusses apparent "monsters" (i.e., beings which do not appear to fit the normal case of a concept). Though we may not know the inner character of a monster, Leibniz says, "[O]ur uncertainty does not affect the nature of things: if there is such a common inner nature, the monster either has it or lacks it, whether or not we know which. And if the monster does not have the inner nature of any species, it can be a species of its own" (1981, 311).

[50] Cf. Meier (*MM* 103, § 59): "One thinks of a human being which was never born and never will be born; is he a German, or not? Is he a scholar, or not? Is he virtuous, or not? And cannot one raise hundreds of thousands and infinitely many such questions which must still be left undetermined as long as the man is not actual?"

non-instantiated universal. The principle of complete determination enshrines the *continuity*

of the logical and the real, since it makes the real a product of complete logical complexity.

1.2.3. Concepts and Essences in Wolffian Rationalism

In the rationalist tradition, "determination" is used so indifferently as a logical and

metaphysical notion – as referring to a predicate subordinate to a concept or to a property of

a substance – that it is difficult to articulate the theory of complete determination without

blurring the distinction between logic and metaphysics entirely. That, of course, is part of

what constitutes Conceptual Transparency for the rationalists. And indeed, the very fact that

metaphysical possibility is determined on grounds of logical compossibility (or non-

contradictoriness), it seems right to think of the ground level of reality as *conceptual* in

Wolffian rationalism. Once we add the role of God's mind to the picture, this is the picture

that comes into view. As Anderson summarizes, for these rationalists,

> [A]dequate concepts from the true hierarchy would be fully transparent in both
> content and logical structure, and would correspond to the deep metaphysical
> structure of the world, precisely because they do approximate the concepts of
> possible essences, resident in God's intellect, which He realized to create the world.
> (Anderson 2015, 128)

But this does not mean that German rationalists could not see the difference between

concepts and things, especially "our" (often imperfect) concepts and the things they

represent. Though the rationalists affirm Conceptual Transparency as always a metaphysical

possibility, it is a well-known aspect of their thought that they draw a number of type-

distinctions of concepts to clarify the human epistemological situation. Most famously,

rationalists held that sensations give us only "obscure" or "confused" (*dunckel*) concepts.[51] Concept-types ascend in quality as they become increasingly "clear" (*klarer*) and "distinct" (*deutlicher*) following the Cartesian designation. Finally, they become "adequate" (or complete: *vollstandiger*) when not only the concept itself is clear and distinct, but its constituent concepts are clear and distinct as well. An adequate concept of an individual, then, is a mirror of its complete determination, for it contains a record of all its component concepts. What is striking in the account of these graduated type-distinctions is that they do not involve grades of comparison between "mind" and "world" ("from sideways on"),[52] but grades of the *internal* (both psychological and logical) perfection of the concepts themselves. Perhaps because of their metaphysical notion of complete determination, which entails that everything that is consists in a complete logical account, Wolffians assume that when all is right "from the inside" with our concepts, they represent things as they are "on the outside."[53] But only with an adequate concept can we have perfectly transparent knowledge of objects.

Rationalists admitted that we humans do not possess adequate concepts of individuals, whose concepts would be too complex for a finite mind to grasp. Thankfully, however, we do not need such concepts to have essential knowledge. For this reason, their additional notion of a "first concept" may be more apposite for Conceptual Transparency as defined above. What Wolffians called the "first concept" of something is that which

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[51] The following types are detailed in Leibniz's published work, "Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas" (1684), in Leibniz (1989, 23-35). They are taken up and expanded especially in Wolff's *DL*, §§ 9-23.

[52] Cf. McDowell (1994, 35 *et passim*).

[53] This feature of rationalist thought elicited criticism from Hegel and is discussed further in section 1.3.2. below.

corresponds to its essence (cf. *BM* §§ 40, 816).[54] The later Wolffian G.F. Meier[55] here offers

a striking account of the relation of a "first concept" to essences:

> Often scholars call the essence the first concept which one makes of a thing.
> Namely, when one wants to treat something thoroughly, e.g., virtue, then one cannot
> think and say everything all at once that must be explained about it. Hence one
> makes before anything else a concept of virtue through which one distinguishes it
> from all other things, and from which one derives everything else that can be said of
> virtue. Now *because this concept has a similarity with the essence*, because *it is and supplies in
> the whole of our cognition precisely what the essence in the thing is and supplies*, many call it the
> essence of the thing, and indeed the logical essence. Only it is apparent that this
> concept cannot *be* the essence of the thing; because otherwise the essence would
> have to be present outside of the thing, as a concept [is] in the understanding of a
> thinking being. Thus, this first concept either in fact presents to us the essence of
> the thing, or not [*oder was anders*]. If it is the first, then it is a presentation of the
> essence, but not the essence itself; if it is not, then it is not even the presentation of
> the essence, much less the essence itself. (*MM* 93, § 51; emphasis added)

The first concept of something, what "presents to us the essence of the thing," is that which

distinguishes it from anything else in thought. In terms of *content*, the first concept is identical

to the essence of something: "it is and supplies … precisely what the essence in the thing is

and supplies." Contrary, however, to a concern raised above, Meier does not simply confuse

concepts and essences. The two are not, as it were, *numerically* identical *in situ*, for a concept is

"in the understanding," while the essence is *in res*. But apart from this distinction, there is no

effort here (as we find in Locke) to distinguish the "logical essence" (correlated with the

concept) from the "real essence."[56] The logical essence, if genuine, expresses the real

essence; it is distinct from the concept only in "location," not in content. This follows from

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[54] Wolff himself practically reversed the relationship: "…*essentia primum est, quod de ente concipitur, nec sine ea ens esse potest*" (*PPO* § 144). Essence is defined as what is first conceived in something.

[55] Meier was an ardent follower of Wolff and a student of Alexander Baumgarten. He was responsible for translating the latter's *Metaphysica* into German, the version of the work owned by Hegel (cf. GW 31/1, 17). Meier's own *Metaphysik* (*MM*) is essentially a commentary on Baumgarten's and follows the structure of Baumgarten's work. Thus, Meier often provides valuable elucidations of typically sparse rationalist texts and related concepts.

[56] Indeed, since Meier identifies the logical essence with the concept, he rejects the distinction between logical and real essences, commenting, "Some conceptual divisions sound very learned and profound, but when one considers them more precisely, they say nothing" (*MM* 93, § 51).

what we have observed above: what things genuinely are is contained in their complete determination, utterly transparent to their ideal, complete concept. Even if we cannot attain the *complete* concept of something, Wolffian rationalists are confident that we can often attain the "first concept," and thus gain knowledge of the essence of things. Hence, Conceptual Transparency applies to human knowledge even where we lack strictly adequate concepts of things.

Finally, it is worth nothing that attaining the first concept of something is closely related to considering something "in itself," or apart from its relations to other things with which it is con-fused.[57] As Baumgarten writes, "Whatever is considered, but not in a nexus with those other things that are posited externally to it, IS CONSIDERED IN ITSELF. … Whatever is possible when considered in itself is POSSIBLE IN ITSELF (intrinsically, absolutely, *per se*, simply)" (*BM* § 15).[58] But it is just such "absolute determinations" that constitute the essence of something (§ 37). Thus, being able to attain the first concept of something, corresponding to its essence, depends on considering things "in themselves."[59] This consideration does not deliver knowledge of things as they concretely (and confusedly) are, but rather knowledge of their essential pre-conditions: it merely rules out certain conceptual combinations. For example, a wooden plate "in itself" (as such) cannot be made of iron, since in any context wood cannot be iron. Conversely, some things have properties

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[57] As Beck reminds, the notion that empirical concepts are "confused" is not a pejorative one for the rationalists (1969, 285 n. 23). It is just the case that we do not perceive things in isolation, but "fused together" with many other things.

[58] Meier, as usual, is more illustrative: "Now when one considers something, but not in connection with other things outside of it, or if one does not draw at all on its grounds and consequences, which can be found outside of it, **then one considers it for itself.** What is the human being considered in and for itself [*an und vor sich betrachtet*]? When I think about one human being, and nothing further. When I as it were think that apart from this human being, nothing else is around [*gar nichts vorhanden sei*]; when I restrict myself merely to its scope" (*MM* 49, § 29).

[59] The question whether this corresponds to what Kant had in mind with things in themselves (a claim put forward by Prauss 1974) is not a controversy I will enter here. Whatever the case for Kant, however, Baumgarten's usage seems to be close to what Hegel has in mind in several places. Cf. 1.4.4. below.

"in themselves" that they do not display in the actual world (though they logically could).

Meier, for one, despite his own belief in the immortality of the soul, writes approvingly,

> Thus, intellectuals say that in and for itself it is possible that the soul would die. For when one considers the soul not in connection with the wisdom and goodness of God, and with the whole of the world, then its life and actuality is something accidental, which can be lost to it, and that means: it is in itself possible that the human soul would die. (*MM* 49, § 29)

The soul, then, has some properties in and for itself (i.e., mortality) that it does not have in the actual world. This is because immortality is not one of the "absolutely" necessary features of being a soul.

Hence, for rationalists, things "in themselves," that is, things determined only by their essences (which depend in turn only on logical possibilities), are not, then, identical to things as they actually are. But beginning from things as they are, it is possible to reduce our knowledge of things to a "first concept," which gives us the essence.

1.2.4. Methodological Dogmatism

Before concluding this account of the rationalists' theory of Conceptual Transparency, we should take note of the way it influenced their conception of philosophical method, for methodological consequences are significant for the Kantian critique and Hegelian appropriation of German rationalism (see 1.4.3. below) . Recall what Kant says about dogmatism and the dogmatic procedure in the Preface to the B-edition of the first *Critique*:

> Criticism is not opposed to the **dogmatic procedure** of reason in its pure cognition as science (for science must always be dogmatic, i.e., it must prove its conclusion strictly *a priori* from secure principles); rather, it is opposed only to dogmatism, i.e., to the presumption of getting on solely with pure cognition from (philosophical) concepts according to principles, which reason has been using for a long time without first inquiring in what way and by what right it has obtained them.

> Dogmatism is therefore the dogmatic procedure of pure reason, **without an antecedent critique of its own capacity**. (B xxxv)

Hence, methodological dogmatism is simply the reliance on *a priori* conceptual thought that is not subject to a critique of reason. By this conception, of course, a large swath of pre-Kantian philosophy, and the metaphysical enterprise in particular, would qualify as dogmatism. Still, the German rationalists seem to evince the approach to an unparalleled degree. Wolffian philosophy could even ground its dogmatism on its rationalistic conception of creation. As Anderson writes,

> [A] conformity between our concepts and the logically ordered essences of the divine intellect is the ultimate ground of Wolff's assertions that the system of philosophy can be brought to approximate mathematics in presenting incontrovertible and 'unrevisable,' essentially logical, proofs of its results. (Anderson 2015, 129)

Since creation itself was seen to be a logical system, whose *a priori* ground is the concepts in the divine mind, it seemed appropriate to suppose that, even if humanly unattainable, all empirical truths could be translated into a system of *a priori* truths,[60] correlated to the true conceptual hierarchy. Since, in addition, the rationalists detected no reason to "critique" the deliveries of concepts *per se*, their metaphysical and epistemological convictions amounted to methodological dogmatism.

One of the best statements on method from the Wolffian tradition (especially influential for Kant[61]) is Moses Mendelssohn's *Abhandlung über die Evidenz in metaphysischen*

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[60] It may sound odd to say that empirical truths can be translated into *a priori* truths, given the common conception of an *a priori* truth as independent of experience by definition. However, as Hogan (2009, 361) has reminded, the traditional definition of an *a priori* truth is one that is "through the ground." Since for rationalists, the ground of empirical objects is given in their concepts, all empirical truths can be represented as *a priori*. As Leibniz writes, "The possibility of a thing is known *a priori* when we resolve a notion into its requisites, that is, into other notions known to be possible, and we know that there is nothing incompatible among them" (1989, 26). So, for example, the empirical truth that Judas sins can be understood as an *a priori* truth if, by analysis, I discover why the complex concept <*Judas*> contains <*sins* [at *t*]> (perhaps as a necessary consequence of some other property). It was Kant's Humean conviction that any such causal connection will lack epistemic necessary that led him to suggest that *a priori* truths must be independent from experience. Pre-Kantians (in general) did not exclude experiential facts from *a priori* knowledge.

[61] Mendelssohn's essay was the prize winner for a competition to which Kant also submitted. Hegel does not appear to have owned a copy of this work (cf. GW 31/1, 206-10), though he cites a number of other works

Wissenschaften (*Essay on Evidence in Metaphysical Sciences*, 1764; in Mendelssohn 2008/1997). It is

here that we find a rationalist affirm in clearest terms what Kant called "dogmatism," the

belief that the truth about things can be obtained just through an analysis of concepts

(without admitting the method as "worm-eaten," of course).[62] Especially striking is

Mendelssohn's suggestion that conceptual analysis is initially unconstrained by "actuality,"

and depends only on finding coherence among our concepts:

> Just as there is a purely theoretical mathematics which is not based upon any
> experiential proposition or actual existence and merely shows the coherence of
> concepts of quantity with one another, so there is a part of philosophy which, *all*
> *actuality having been set aside, merely unpacks our concepts of the qualities of things and teaches us*
> *how to see their intrinsic coherence.* All our concepts are like the seeds of grain of dying
> plants which, as bad as they look, are nonetheless full of inner virtue and conceal
> forests of beauty in their husks. … Who, then, would want to deny that the concepts
> of the qualities of things are linked with one another and with other sorts of
> knowledge and that the latter can be unpacked and derived from the former through
> undeniable inferences? … There is, therefore, a purely speculative part of philosophy
> in which, as was demonstrated above for pure mathematics, *attention is directed solely at*
> *the combination of concepts and their coherence.* (Mendelssohn 1997, 271-72; emphasis
> added)

Mendelssohn makes clear here that philosophical method consists, at least initially, in

clarifying concepts, which amounts to discerning the genuine "seeds" in our otherwise

unbeautiful cogitations. He even gives an example analysis of <*justice*>, and, having reduced

a previous definition to "benevolence administered with wisdom," says immediately, "From

this, however, it also follows that justice is a reality and that the Supreme Being must possess

it to the highest degree…" (274). Presumably, there are some steps missing in this inference:

perhaps Mendelssohn assumes that since benevolence and wisdom have been proven

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of Mendelssohn including works where similar methodological ideas are present (esp. the *Morgenstunden*; cf. W
17: 530, W 20: 316).

    [62] It is striking how much Mendelssohn's "dogmatism" resembles the program of classical analytical
philosophy, especially in the "logicist" phase of Frege and Russell. The comparison holds down to
Mendelssohn's conception of the close analogy between mathematics and philosophy: the former is an *a priori*
consideration of *quantitative* properties, while the latter is an *a priori* consideration of *qualities* or *constitutions* (cf.
Mendelssohn 1997, 269ff.), but quantitative knowledge depends on the qualitative.

(elsewhere) or assumed to be realities, a definition of justice that combines them thereby merits the status of a reality concomitantly; and since a prior definition of God treats him as the sum of all realities, he can then infer that God is supremely just. Still, Mendelssohn evidently thinks that a perspicacious and coherent analysis of a concept can provide an indication of its "reality" and draws from this some weighty metaphysical claims.

Fascinating as it would be to think of a pre-Kantian metaphysician like Mendelssohn as a coherentist *avant la lettre*, however, he later demands that the metaphysician go on to show the actuality of his coherent concepts:

> Moreover, if the philosophy has survived all these difficulties, then he has still discovered nothing but certain kinships among concepts. At this point, however, the important step into the realm of actuality must take place. He must show that the object of his basic concepts, from which he infers his truths, is actually to be encountered, so that he can infer from those truths the actual existence of the consequences. (274)

Mendelssohn admits that a conceptual analysis will not be sufficient in every case – but he remains a faithful Wolffian on this score. Whereas Kant would add, at this point, that the actuality of a concept must be demonstrated by appealing to a sensible intuition that displays the concept,[63] Mendelssohn shows how the principle of complete determination can be used as a guide to claims of existence or actuality:

> One might simply recall, from the first principles of metaphysics, that a subject matter actually exists as soon as everything determinable in it is in fact determined, that is to say, as soon as it is established for each concept that A can just as well be part of the thing as not, whether the concept is part of the thing or not. Herein lies the characteristic difference between general possible concepts and individual real concepts. … In the case of individual real things, by contrast, the affirmation or negation of everything that can be affirmed or denied must be established and decided […]. (282)

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[63] Mendelssohn does admit that experiential evidence can hold, so long as it is not a mere "appearance" (1997, 275).

Though no rationalist denied the practical importance of the contribution of experience to our knowledge, Mendelssohn shows here that the principle of complete determination suggests that metaphysics can proceed, at least ideally, purely dogmatically, since actuality is secured by the *completeness* of conceptual thought in a given case, not ultimately in an appeal to the extra-conceptual.[64]

Mendelssohn's methodological views express what was often only implicit in Wolffian metaphysics: that not only the finely analyzed concepts of the divine mind, but also the humanly accessible concepts of philosophy can be transparent. Already in Wolff's treatment of <*being*> as co-extensive with the logically possible, he ensures that the categories of his ontology map perfectly onto the basic elements of the world. Mendelssohn shows that the same assumptions hold in the case of more concrete concepts, like <*justice*>. Even here, there was no ultimate gap between what could be demonstrated conceptually and what was actual. The methodological dogmatism that results from this conviction can be described as a principled complacency. Since reality is structured conceptually (assuming God's intelligent creation), even humanly accessible concepts had a presumptive transparency.[65] Recall that the essence of something was discovered not as an *addition* to what was known, but by a *subtraction* or reduction of accidental and relational properties. Hence, when we know something at all we are likely to have the "seeds" of essential truth in our cognition *already*. We can thus rely on conceptual analysis to lead us to a transparent knowledge of the essence things.[66]

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[64] Such proofs of actuality, however, would seem only to be required by *special* metaphysical claims about God, the soul, etc., since as putative singulars, they would have to be completely determined. It does not seem that general concepts like <*justice*> could be completely determined (since it is an abstract and non-individual concept), and thus the analysis could be sufficiently determined when it reaches a clear and distinct definition.

[65] See 1.3.2. below for more on the theological background to this presumption.

[66] I do not mean to downplay the significant role that experiential knowledge plays in Wolffian rationalism (cf. Anderson 2015, Ch. 3.3.). Even so, Wolff uses experience as an aid for the reconstruction of conceptual hierarchy: "[T]he prominent role of experience within the Wolffian paradigm does not mark any retreat from

1.3. Hegel's Encounter with German Rationalism

The above description of some core features of Wolffian rationalism helps explain

why, when he discusses the view of thought as immediately objective, Hegel regards "the

metaphysics of the recent past, the way it was constituted among us before the Kantian

philosophy" as the "most determinate development" of that view (*EL* 93/65, § 27).

Moreover, given Hegel's contention that the central conviction of this tradition, that

conceptual thought can express the "in itself" or essence of things, was precisely what is

robbed by Kantian critique, it seems reasonable to expect that Wolffian rationalism would

continue to provide a positive model for Hegel. Thus, in this section, I would like to give an

account of the kind of influence this tradition exercised on Hegel, as well as of some key

points of Hegel's divergence, which led him to reject Conceptual Transparency in its

universal form.

1.3.1. The Wolffian Influence on Hegel

Compared to his interaction with Kant, Aristotle, and Spinoza, for example, Hegel's

citation of German rationalist authors is relatively rare.[67] However, German rationalism

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the idea that truth is ultimately logico-conceptual. Experience may give us many of our concepts, but the basic structure of science is not guided by empirical information" (ibid., 89). Moreover, experience itself could not provide the counterfactual knowledge of what things are "in themselves," or in their essence, even if it provides such knowledge *of* things of experience.

[67] Less rare, of course, if Leibniz is also considered. One should notice, however, that in Hegel's primary philosophical writing, such as the *Phenomenology*, the main text of the *Logic*, and the numbered paragraphs of the *Encyclopedia*, conscious effort is made on his part to avoid direct reference to other philosophers (the text of the *Phenomenology* is, notoriously, almost completely void of such references). Thus, one cannot draw too much based on the frequency of citation. Even philosophers with more obvious influence on Hegel, such as Aristotle, are not as often cited as one might expect (apart from the *VGP*).

provides an important background for interpreting Hegel for a few reasons. As indicated above, Hegel compares the pre-Kantian metaphysical tradition (of which Wolffian rationalism was for him the culmination) favorably with Kant himself for its conviction about the efficacy of thought to reveal reality. When Hegel takes Kant to task for the latter's supposed subjectivism, he promotes the pre-Kantian tradition for its greater adherence the basic commitment of common sense to the value of thought. Without a doubt, Hegel takes Kant's thinking as a landmark and on many points wouldn't dream of reverting to a rationalist position.[68] But he also believes that a certain understanding of Kant threatens some central philosophical institutions – like metaphysics itself – with skepticism, despite Kant's own intentions. For this reason, much of Hegel's own thinking is in effect a re-working of key themes in Wolffian rationalism.[69]

The systematically most prominent connection for Hegel's work is shown in his characterization of the "Objective Logic," constituting Books I and II of the *WL*. He writes,

> The objective logic thus takes the place [*tritt…an die Stelle*] rather of the former *metaphysics* which was supposed to be the scientific edifice of the world as constructed by *thoughts* alone. – If we look at the final shape in the elaboration of this science, then it is *ontology* which objective logic most directly replaces in the first instance, that is, that part of metaphysics intended to investigate the nature of *ens* in general (and *ens* comprises within itself both *being* [*Sein*] and *essence* [*Wesen*], a distinction for which the German language has fortunately preserved different expressions.) (*WL* 5: 61/42).

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[68] Witness Hegel's 1812 description of what he calls the "complete transformation of that the ways of philosophical thought have undergone among us in the past twenty-five odd years" (*WL* I: 13/7): "What was hitherto called 'metaphysics' has been, so to speak, extirpated root and branch, and has vanished from the ranks of the sciences. Where are the voices still to be heard of the ontology of former times, of the rational psychology, the cosmology, or indeed, even of the natural theology of the past, or where are they allowed to be heard? Inquiries, for instance, into the immateriality of the soul, into mechanical and final causes – where is interest in them still to be found? … The fact is that interest, whether in the content or in the form of the former metaphysics, or in both together, has been lost." (ibid.)

[69] Regarding the concepts he treats in the *Logic,* Hegel writes: "Nevertheless, the received material, the known thought-forms, must be regarded as an extremely important fund, even a necessary condition, a presupposition to be gratefully acknowledged even though what it offers here and there is only a bare thread, the dead bones of a skeleton thrown together in a disorderly heap" (*WL* I: 19/12). J.E. Erdmann writes, "[T]here is hardly a single category to be found [in Hegel's *Logic*] which Wolff had not discussed – in his own way, of course – in his Ontology" (quoted and translated from Honnefelder 1990, 298; orig. 1932).

Hegel thus models a significant portion of the *Science of Logic* on the Wolffian project of ontology. He is quick to add, of course, that the Objective Logic pursues this project differently, namely by a critical investigation of the relevant determinations or concepts themselves, before they are assumed to be determinations of "the thing in itself … or more precisely, of the rational" (ibid.). Nevertheless, Hegel reveals that he does not wish to dismiss but to correct Wolffian metaphysics.[70]

Perhaps more significant than his direct engagement with rationalist texts, however, is Hegel's understanding of the way that German rationalism provided German culture with a philosophical lexicon and grammar. R.G. Collingwood (1940) has argued, under broadly Hegelian inspiration, that a culture's metaphysics is its articulation of its basic presuppositions, what must be taken for granted for any claim to make sense. If this is correct, the comparison of metaphysics to a kind of cultural grammar or lexicon is not far from the truth.[71] But whatever the case generally, Hegel himself attributes an achievement of this order to Christian Wolff and his generation:

> Now in philosophy Wolff rendered excellent service in relation to German general formation; and he above all may be called the teacher of the Germans. One can say that Wolff first made philosophizing indigenous to Germany. Tschirnhausen and Thomasius took part in this merit at the same time – by which they acquired an immortal merit for having written philosophy in the German language. (*VGP* III: 258)

He goes on to suggest the philosophical importance of this achievement:

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[70] According to de Boer (2011; 2015), in this aspect of Hegel's thought, he is only completing a project that Kant himself had often suggested but could not complete himself, namely, developing the "system of pure reason." By de Boer's lights, the Kantian version of this project would have revealed him to be much closer to the Wolffian system from which he is so often divorced (2015, 282-84). If this view is correct, Hegel's "completion" of Kant would take a much different shape than interpreters like Pippin predict, as these tend to assume that Hegel gains an *empirical* not a metaphysical orientation from Kant. Though I find de Boer's a welcome and fascinating proposal, I still find the prospects of Kant's version of a system of pure reason severely limited by what I call his "Aesthetic Constraint" on conceptual content (see 1.4.1. below).

[71] This conception of metaphysics has a close tie to Wittgenstein's thought as well. Cf. Hacker (1987, Ch. VII).

> [A] science can only belong to a people when they possess it in their own language; and this is most necessary of all in philosophy. For thought has in this moment self-consciousness belonging to it, or its own proper being; [when terms are] expressed in its own language, e.g. *Bestimmtheit* instead of *Determination*, *Wesen* rather than *Essenz*, etc., it is immediate to consciousness that these concepts are its very own, with which it always deals, rather than something alien. (*VGP* III: 259)

Though histories of philosophy typically harp on Wolff's derivative philosophical stature (especially vis-à-vis Leibniz), this linguistic and conceptual achievement of the Wolffian tradition is often overlooked.[72] It certainly distinguishes Wolff from Leibniz himself, who published only in Latin and French. Hegel clearly appreciates this aspect of the Wolffian tradition,[73] and it suggests a large implicit influence on his thought, since the very terms that are both operative and reflective in his philosophy received their founding conception in Wolff's thought.

Accordingly, Hegel's notion of common knowledge about a certain concept is oftentimes nearly identical with the Wolffian account. This is not usually a product of explicit citation, but perhaps simply cultural saturation.[74] This can be seen by a sample of passages where Hegel mentions what people "usually" think, and a Wolffian view is closely echoed:

Hegel: In <u>the usual definition</u> of judgment, that it is the *combination* [*Verbindung*] *of two concepts*, we may indeed accept the vague expression of "combination" for the external *copula*, and also accept that the terms combined are at least *meant* to be concepts. (*WL* II: 305-6/553)	**Wolff:** Therefore, when we judge, we connect two concepts with each other, or separate them from each other … E.g., when I judge: this house is beautiful, I combine [*verbinde*] the concept of beauty with the concept of the house. (*DL* 156-57, Ch. 3, § 2)
Hegel: The definition of magnitude given in mathematics has likewise to do with	**Wolff:** We call a magnitude [*eine Grösse*] everything that can increase or decrease insofar as it can increase or decrease.

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[72] Beck (1969, 260-61) and Bowman (2013, 62-63) emphasize this aspect of Wolff's importance as well. Ironically, despite Hegel's appreciation for Wolff, he contributed to the idea that Wolff was merely a systematizer of Leibniz (cf. Honnefelder 1990, 297).

[73] Hegel famously aspired to "teach philosophy to speak German," and often complained about the use of foreign terminology in philosophy (cf. "Introduction" to Hegel 1991 [*EL*], xv-xvii).

[74] In his own case, Hegel reportedly had Wolff's *Deutsche Logik* virtually memorized as a child (cf. Rosenkranz 1844, 26; cited in Bowman 2013, 68 n. 11).

quantum. A magnitude [*Grösse*] <u>is normally defined as</u> something that allows for increase or decrease. (*WL* I: 211/153)	(1973 [1750], 1550, § 6)
Hegel: But if the contradiction is exhibited and recognised in any object or concept whatever, then the conclusion that <u>is usually drawn</u> is: "Therefore this object is nothing." (*EL* 194/145, § 89R)	**Wolff:** Because nothing can be and not be at the same time (§ 10), one can know that something is impossible when it contradicts something we already about it that is or can be… (*DM*, 7, § 12).[75]
Hegel: [T]he rule for [possibility] is only that something shall not inwardly contradict itself…[76] (*EL* 282/215, § 143R)	**Wolff:** [W]hat contains nothing contradictory in itself … is possible. (*DM* 7, § 12)
Hegel: When people speak of "purpose" [*Zweck*] <u>they usually have</u> only external purposiveness <u>in mind</u>. From this point of view things are held not to bear their determination within themselves, but to count merely as means [*Mittel*], which are used and used up in the realisation of a purpose that lies outside them. (*EL* 362/282, § 205Z)	**Wolff:** Accordingly, because [God] also so directs his purposes [*Absichten*][77] so that one is the means [*Mittel*] to the other, but altogether all finite [purposes] are regarded as a means to his main purpose (§ 1034, 1044); thus he has the most perfect wisdom of all (§ 920). (*DM* 664, § 1048)

My aim in offering these comparisons is not to suggest that every reference to the common understanding of some concept in Hegel has Wolff hiding in the background (nor Wolff's texts *exclusively*). But I do wish to suggest that the impact of Wolffian rationalism on Hegel is more pervasive than would be evinced by explicit textual references. It is safe to assume that Hegel had well-assimilated German rationalism, and that he continued to take it seriously (if not always approvingly), even after the Kantian critique.

1.3.2. Hegel's Critique of Wolffian Rationalism

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[75] Baumgarten is perhaps closer to Hegel here: "What is both A and not-A is not something (§ 8) and hence it is nothing and something contradictory … or, whatever both is and is not, is nothing. A + not-A=0" (*BM* § 9).

[76] Hegel goes on to say (in keeping with the pattern I've tracked), "It is *usually said* that possibility consists generally in thinkability" (*EL* 283/216, § 143Z; emphasis added).

[77] Though Hegel does not use the same term for Wolff's "*Absichten*" (which has the more subjective connotation of "intention"), his term "*Zweck*" ("end" or "purpose") is closely related. Cf. *EL* 365/283, § 209Z.

I have suggested above that Hegel's philosophy attempts to recover a notion of Conceptual Transparency accepted by the German rationalists, but strongly rejected by Kant and many early post-Kantians. Despite Hegel's affinity for this view, however, and despite the significant way German rationalism informed Hegel's philosophical background, Hegel's comments on this tradition, especially in its conception of metaphysics, are often critical. A key feature of Hegel's critique of Wolffian rationalism is his rejection of its attempt to establish an unrestricted version of Conceptual Transparency (for present purposes, I will bracket Hegel's critique of rationalist special metaphysics). What I wish to show, however, is that Hegel's evaluation of the rationalists does not entail his rejecting, as Pippin (2017, 202) asserts, the rationalist belief that "thought [is] transparent to the conceptual structure of the real."[78] Indeed, it is Kant's wholesale rejection of that view that Hegel finds intolerable.

I want to focus on a single aspect of Hegel's critique of the Wolffian tradition, which I will call the "happy coincidence" critique.[79] The happy coincidence critique states that two aspects of the Wolffian view cannot be maintained without maintaining an illicit coincidence between thought and the world (which can only be guaranteed by a *deus ex machina*). These two views are the following:

> **(1) Universal Conceptual Transparency:** For every object, there is exactly one
>
> transparent concept corresponding to it. (Cf. 1.1. above)

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[78] Indeed, Hegel writes that "what was good about [former metaphysics] was the consciousness that thought alone constitutes the essentiality of what is" (*EL* 106/76, § 36Z).

[79] Robert Stern mentions in similar terms an objection that could be raised against Hegel himself: "[F]or [Hegel] takes what idealism tells us about the metaphysics of the world, namely that it is conceptually structured, and uses this to ground his confidence in our ability to comprehend it, while at the same time his idealist claims are themselves based on his faith in the power of thought—where ultimately this alignment he claims between the mind and world can be taken as *no more than a happy accident*, if we reject the idealistic metaphysics that supposedly explains and underlies it" (2017, 379; emphasis added). See also Lukács (1978, 51), with critical reference to Hegel: "A coincidence between ontological connections and logical hierarchy has in itself nothing to do with the ontological condition that creates real relationships between realities. A coincidence between ontological connections and logical hierarchy can in the best case be only a fortunate accident…"

(2) Semantic Givenness: The system of transparent concepts is given (though incompletely) in an analysis of ordinary thought and language.

While these two views are not incompatible, together they imply an all-too-convenient epistemic situation. Hegel notes the problem with such a conjunction in his discussion of rationalist ontology in the *EL*'s *Vorbegriff*. He writes,

> In its orderly shape, this metaphysics had, as its *first part*, *Ontology*, the doctrine of the *abstract determinations of essence*. In their manifoldness and finite validity, these determinations lack a principle they must therefore be enumerated *empirically* and *contingently*, and their more precise *content* can only be based upon *representation*, [i.e.,] based upon the *assurance* that by one word one thinks precisely this, or perhaps also upon the word's etymology. <u>What can be at issue in this context is merely the *correctness* of the analysis as it corresponds with the usage of language</u>, and the empirical *exhaustiveness*, not the *truth* and *necessity* of these determinations in and for themselves. (*EL* 99-100/70, § 33; underline added)

Much as we saw in Mendelssohn's account of method in metaphysics, Hegel understands the rationalists to get the *material* for ontology, the investigation of the "abstract determinations of essence," from the use of terms in ordinary language.[80] But our reception of a linguistic tradition, and the store of abstract determinations we find, seems to be a matter of contingency. How, then, could assume to have inherited *necessary* knowledge, which is just what ontology purports to provide? Moreover, the *aim* of rationalist ontology, arguably, was to use abstract general determinations of thought to draw specific conclusions about God,

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[80] A similar complaint is made in Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*: "What lies at the basis of this content [in Wolff's philosophy] are our representations. We know whether the definitions are correct only by tracing representations back to their simple thoughts. Our usual representations are therefore translates into the empty form of thought" (*VGP* III: 263). See also Hegel's preference of this Wolffian approach to Locke's, mentioned at ibid., 222. In a similar passage, Hegel calls out Mendelssohn specifically: "There was also [at the time of Kant] still in vogue a rational metaphysics of the Wolffian kind, as illustrated, for instance, by Mendelssohn. This rational metaphysics maintained itself in distinction from the merely empirical procedure, but its main activity consisted in taking as basic the categories [*Gedankenbestimmungen*] of the understanding, such as possibility, actuality, and so on, and with them devising rational arguments about God and the like" (2009, 218-19). As Houlgate writes, summarizing Hegel's view, "Leibniz, Wolff, and others are to be considered metaphysicians to the extent that they aim to understand the true nature of objects through pure concepts (such as "substance" and "cause") and believe that their judgments tell us *about* a separate reality" (2006, 121).

the soul, and the world as a whole.[81] But the necessary truths *inferred* in special metaphysics depend on the necessary truths of general ontology.[82] Hence, these special truths would be at risk if their inferential basis were the contingent store of linguistic truths.

However, it would involve an equivocation to invoke an inconsistency at this point: my way of *discovering* a necessary truth may be contingent – I may have seen a correct mathematical equation on a billboard, for example – but that does not make the (putative) truth itself contingent. However, that is not Hegel's objection here. He points out that even *justificatory standard* of the supposedly necessary truths of rationalist metaphysics relies on a contingent basis. It is not just that we have happened upon necessary truths through our inheritance or invention of a linguistic tradition, but that we convince ourselves of these truths on the basis of an appeal to Semantic Givenness, which first involves, as Hegel puts it, "the *assurance* that by one word one thinks precisely this, or perhaps also upon the word's etymology," and then for its justification, "merely the *correctness* of the analysis as it corresponds with the usage of language, and [its] empirical *exhaustiveness*." That is, when one finds a semantic determinacy that agrees with ordinary usage, one has found the correct analysis of a concept. And *then* one takes this concept to contain a necessary truth about "the abstract determination of essence." This is not like accepting a mathematical assertion that happens to be on a billboard; it is like accepting it *because* it is on a billboard.

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[81] The rationalist aim to use ontology to extend knowledge from ordinary objects "in themselves" to transcendent objects is also stressed by de Boer (2014). Honnefelder provides a quotation from Wolff's autobiography in which he speaks of his attempt "to bring theology to irresistible certainty [*unwiderstehliche Gewißheit*]" (1990, 295).

[82] When Meier exclaims, "We see therefore from what we have learned that ontology puts us in position to know something about all possible things; and thus up to now ontology has been a science of all possible things without exception" (*MM*, § 102), the idea that ontology gives theological and cosmological insights cannot be far from his mind ("without exception"). Hegel sees that ontology was designed for such purposes: "But this metaphysics took [the objects of special metaphysics: the soul, the world, and God] from *representation*, and when it applied the determinations-of-the-understanding [i.e., general ontological predicates] to them, it grounded itself upon them, as *ready-made or given subjects*, and its only *criterion* of whether the predicates fitted, and were satisfactory or not, was that representation" (*EL* 97/68, § 30).

Again, it is not impossible that a procedure that appeals only to contingent criteria of adequacy will *thereby* discover necessary truths, but it can do so only by counting on a happy coincidence. One coincidence the rationalists seemed to count on, pointed out by Hegel, is connected to their acceptance of the Doctrine of Complete Determination (DCD).[83] As we saw above, DCD relies on the fact that real beings are fully determinate with respect to all predicates. This means that if a predicate A does not apply to a being, then its opposite not-A, does. From Hegel's perspective, however, DCD takes for granted the adequacy of the predicates we happen to have in currency. To use his example, we have in our language, prior to reflection, opposed predicates like "finite" and "infinite" (= *not*-finite). DCD requires that anything that is not finite is infinite (*EL* 98-99/70, § 32Z). But can we be sure just because there *is* an opposition between these predicates that such a contrast extends relevantly to all things?[84] Must we admit that either "Green is finite" or "green is infinite" is true?[85] This example may be harmless, but the rationalists often used DCD with significant metaphysical ambitions. If it is contradictory that God is composite, for example, then we can conclude that God is simple, for <*simple*> and <*composite*> are contradictory opposites, and thus demand application through the DCD (assuming God exists).[86] We can draw weighty conclusions from the existence of potentially arbitrary, or at least incomplete,

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[83] More specifically, Hegel complains about the use of the Principle of Excluded Middle (PEM), or in his words: "[This metaphysics became *dogmatism* because, given the nature of finite determinations, it had to assume that of *two opposed assertions* (of the kind that those propositions were) one must be *true*, and the other *false*" (*EL* 98/69, § 32). The DCD is akin to a domain-specific application of the PEM, so that Hegel's object seems still to apply to the use of the DCD in ontology as if it were the PEM.

[84] Hegel specifically calls such predicates "restricted" (*EL* § 29), which seems to imply that they cannot have universal application (such that everything is either, e.g., infinite or not). And if a predicate does not have unrestricted application, then one cannot use it to conclude truths about objects who are not known to be within the predicates scope (God, soul, the world, for a start).

[85] This example is perhaps unfair, since the rationalists would not take <*green*> as completely determined. Still, the existence of a real infinite has been debated in science and philosophy at least since Aristotle; clearly, we cannot conclude just from the contrast that the concept has an extension.

[86] This is a condensed rendering of reasoning Baumgarten gives in *BM* § 840.

oppositions. From Hegel's perspective, this exploits the contingent store of available

predicates for the sake of conclusions that require necessity.

By way of a response, the rationalists could appeal to what Wolff called "natural

logic," or the innate tendency for the human mind to come to the truth, especially regarding

the first principles of knowledge (cf. Corr 1972, 328-29).[87] In other words, it is not an

accident that the clear and distinct notions that can be discerned within our minds

correspond to the way things are, since these respond to our own minds natural tendency

toward the truth. But this explanation, clearly, goes only so far, since this natural tendency

itself is something to be explained. And indeed, the explanation is not difficult to find:

"…these rules *prescribed to the understanding by God* and the natural ability to deal with them

constitutes natural logic, and the latter especially makes up so-called mother wit [*Mutter-*

Witz]" (*DL* 244, Ch. 16, § 3; emphasis added).[88] "Mother wit" bears the truth only thanks to

('Father') God.

Though the "natural logic" Wolff discusses here is of course connected primarily to

the laws of understanding dealt with in formal logic, his theological explanation generalizes.[89]

For he inherits the conception, rooted in Descartes but as developed by Leibniz, that the

possible correlation of our ideas and the world is rooted in God. For the Leibnizian

tradition, this correlation is justified as a particular instance of "universal pre-established

harmony" (PEH), or the non-causal ordering of all entities in the greatest arrangement

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[87] This can be correlated with Leibniz's dispositional account of innate ideas in the *New Essays* (1981, Bk. I, ch. I).

[88] Citation and translation from Corr (1972, 329 n.17).

[89] Wolff has a parallel notion of "natural ontology" in the *Ontologia*: "*Notiones ontologicae confusae vulgares constituunt quondam Ontologiae naturalis speciem. Unde (§ 19) Ontologia naturalis definiri potest per complexicum notionum confusarum terminis abstractis, quibus generalia de ente judica exprimumus, respondentium, communi facultatum mentis usu acquisitarum*" (*WO* § 21). Wolff then suggests that "artificial ontology," of which his book is an example, is only an effort to make the concepts of natural ontology distinct (§§ 23-24).

possible.[90] Since, according to PEH, individual minds are among the entities so arranged, it

follows that individual minds contain a relation to all other entities, in the form of

representations (however obscure and indistinct).[91] So knowledge is not attained by gaining a

new representation *ab initio* but clarifying and distinguishing the representations one already

implicitly has (often *using* experience to do so). But this suggests that the non-empirical

principles of knowledge, since they cannot be gained by new empirical contact, will be ideally

gained by an internal process of clarification of the implicit representational content of one's

individual mind.

Hegel, like many others, does not so much offer a refutation of PEH as balk at its

sheer niceness. It is explanatory only by excusing itself from explanation. As Hegel writes in

the *Logic*, "To project the reciprocal influence of substances into a predetermined harmony

means nothing more than to make it a presupposition, in effect to remove it from the scope

of the concept" (*WL* II: 414/634). In his lectures on the history of philosophy, he claims

that theological explanations are generally abused in modern philosophy, but in the

Leibnizian tradition in particular.[92] For any "contradiction" met with in philosophy, God

could be invoked for its solution:

> Thus, now came the demand to comprehend in God precisely that unity which
> previously fell asunder; God alone has the privilege to be burdened with what cannot
> be comprehended. … Hence God plays a much greater role in modern philosophy
> than in the older kind. In the modern, the main demand of comprehending the
> absolute antithesis of thinking and being prevails. … *God is thus as it were the gutter into*
> *which all contradictions converge.* (*VGP* III 254/347-48; modified and emphasized)

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[90] Cf. *DM* §§ 60ff. for Wolff's acknowledgement of Leibniz's views here. Wolff is unsure about Leibniz's explanation for universal harmony, but accepts the basic picture. Baumgarten became an especially adamant supporter of the view. Cf. *BM* §§ 459-63.

[91] "From any given monad of any given world, every part of the world to which it belongs can be known (§ 400), and therefore every mundane alteration as well (§ 354, 115)" (*BM* § 463).

[92] Hegel includes the Wolffian tradition of metaphysics in this judgment (cf. Hegel 2009, 159-60).

Hegel sees Leibnizian monadology as a particular failure to annul the contradiction between mind (or "representation") and the world (what he calls the "separation in the concept"), since through PEH it does so only by turning world itself into a collection of representations (*VGP* III: 252-53/345-47).

Whether the rationalists' "principled complacency" rests on an overextension of DCD, an appeal to natural logic, on PEH, or a gradated combination of each, Hegel seems rightly concerned about the role of happy coincidences in German rationalism. Without a better explanation of how a system of concepts relates to the world, rationalist dogmatism is nothing but coherentism "on stilts" (to parrot Jeremy Bentham). Hence, to the extent that Hegel accepts a version of the rationalist conceptual theory, he is bound to offer a different (and hopefully better) explanation of why a system of concepts could be transparent at all.

1.4. Conceptual Transparency in Kantian Strictures

It may seem that the happy coincidence critique would remain a challenge to any version of Conceptual Transparency: why should we be so lucky that the conceptual mind and the extra-conceptual world 'line up' in perfect coordination? It may seem more realistic, and perhaps more epistemically humble, to suppose that human concepts are always at best a mere approximation of the reality they are supposed to represent. Before turning to Hegel's positive effort to counter such a suggestion, we must first understand something of Kant's global rejection of Conceptual Transparency, at least insofar as it concerns Hegel's later reaction. By seeing Kant's attempt to restrict the legitimacy of conceptual content to a

limited sphere, we will be able to better understand what Hegel wanted to recover from the

rationalist tradition.[93]

1.4.1. The Aesthetic Constraint on Conceptual Content

The feature of Kant's thought I would like to clarify in this space, central for Hegel's

engagement with Kant, is Kant's conception of the cognitive-semantic significance of

sensibility. Namely, Kant believes that sensibility is necessary for concepts to have "content"

(*Inhalt*). Prior to any distinction between empirical and pure concepts, Kant repeatedly insists

that unless concepts contain a relation to sensibility – the "aesthetic"[94] pre-conditions of

experience, space and time – they do not have some feature that cognitively significant

concepts ought to have – if not "content," then "sense" (*Sinn*), "significance" (*Bedeutung*), or

a "relation to objects" (*Beziehung auf Objekte*). This is what he claims in the following

passages:

> Transcendental logic, on the contrary, has a manifold of sensibility that lies before it
> *a priori*, which the transcendental aesthetic has offered to it, in order to provide the
> pure concepts of the understanding with a matter, without which they would be
> without any content [*ohne allen Inhalt*], thus completely empty. (A 76-77/B 102)
>
> Thus the schemata of the concepts of pure understanding are the true and sole
> conditions for providing them with a relation to objects, thus with **significance**
> [*Bedeutung*], and hence the categories are in the end of none but a possible empirical
> use, since they merely serve to subject appearances to general rules of synthesis …

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[93] In this space, I will not be able to do justice to Kant's entire conceptual theory, which is foundational for all his thought. Instead, I will only attempt to elucidate a feature that plays a key positive role in Kant's thought and which was especially significant for Hegel's departure from Kantian thinking.

[94] In what follows, I will always use "aesthetic" in the sense Kant establishes in the Transcendental Aesthetic (related to the Greek *aisthesis*), pertaining to the spatio-temporal forms of sensibility (cf. A 21/B 35), rather than to the sense related to the "critique of taste" or works of art. I use "aesthetic" rather than "sensible" to emphasize the character of content, rather than its relation to human subjects. For example, "Circles are round" or "Grass is green," though both statements that require sensibility to be known by human beings, also express aesthetic content. The difference is merely functional, but pertinent.

and thereby make them fit for a thoroughgoing connection in one experience. (A 145-46/B 185)

If cognition is to have objective reality, i.e., to be related to an object, and is to have significance and sense in that object, the object must be able to given in some way. Without that the concepts are empty, and through them one has, to be sure, thought but not in fact cognized anything through this thinking, but rather merely played with representations. … [A]nd thus it is with all concepts without distinction. (A 155-56/B 194-95)

For every concept there is requisite, first, the logical form of a concept (of thinking) in general, and then, second, the possibility of giving it an object to which it is to be related. Without this latter it has no sense, and is entirely empty of content, even though it may still contain the logical function for making a concept out of whatever sort of *data* there are. … Thus all concepts and with them all principles, however *a priori* they may be, are nevertheless related to empirical intuitions, i.e., to *data* for possible experience. (A 239/B 298) [95]

While these passages do not suggest that concepts are nothing at all apart from a relation to

sensibility – they preserve a place for "thought" even as a mere play of representations, and a

"logical form" that exists apart from content – on the whole, they suggest a bold conception

of the semantic significance of sensibility: the logical "matter" of any concept, its

intentionality or aboutness, what we would normally call *conceptual content*, depends as a

necessary condition on a relation to spatio-temporal appearances. I call this Kant's

"Aesthetic Constraint" on conceptual content:

> **Aesthetic Constraint:** Concepts do not have cognitively significant content apart
>
> from a relation to spatio-temporal appearances.

Kant seems to suggest the foundation of the Aesthetic Constraint when he argues that space

and time as necessary conditions of any representation: "Now space and time contain a

manifold of *a priori* intuition, but belong nevertheless among the conditions of the receptivity

of our mind, under which alone it can receive representations of objects, and thus they must

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[95] See also A 240/B300, A 248/B 305, A 256/B 311, A 696/B 724. Some of these quotations are used by Strawson as evidence for what he calls Kant's "principle of significance" (1966, 16 *et passim*). I am agreement at least with the spirit of Strawson in holding Kant to the stringent semantic standards he sometimes endorses.

also always affect the concept of these objects" (A 77/B 102). If space and time are a

necessary condition of representation as such, then *a fortiori* they are a necessary condition of

conceptual representation.[96]

Given the plausibility of an aesthetic constraint on *empirical* concepts, Kant seems to

reason that any additional source of conceptual content will have to shoulder the additional

burden of proof. This appears to be Kant's claim already in the *Dreams of a Spirt-Seer* essay,

where he confronts the problem of claims made about physically inaccessible entities

("spirits"). He notes the contrast such cases present with ordinary empirical concepts:

> If the concept of a spirit had been derived by abstraction from our own empirical
> concepts, the procedure for rendering the concept distinct would be easy: *one would
> simply have to indicate the characteristic marks which are revealed by the senses* as belonging to
> this type of being, and by means of which we distinguish such beings from material
> beings. However, people talk of spirits even when there is some doubt as to whether
> such beings exist at all. It follows that the concept of the spirit-nature cannot be
> treated as if it were a concept derived by abstraction from experience. (Ak. 2:
> 321/308; emphasis added)

Kant clearly takes the *sensory* nature of the marks of empirical concepts as the explanation for

their possible distinctness. Without this sensory constraint, we have nothing to test in

experience or by means of rational argument: "We may, accordingly, accept the possibility of

immaterial beings without any fear that we shall be refuted, though there is no hope either of

our ever being able to establish the possibility by means of rational argument" (2: 323/311).

Unless the spirit-seers give us an additional criteria for sematic significance that extends to

ghosts, their claims are vacuous.

Hence, already in this early work, Kant evinces his typical insistence that all our

concepts be traced back to justificatory sources, the demand he later calls "deduction" (A

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[96] Despite this element of justification, it should be noted that the Transcendental Aesthetic does not amount to an argument for the Aesthetic Constraint, since it relies on the assumption that the mind depends on receptivity (A 19/B 33). I am in accord with Allison when he writes that Kant generally argues "from rather than for" this view (2004, 13).

84/B 116). As in the earlier work, in the first *Critique* Kant suggests that we are uncontroversially entitled to empirical concepts from sensory experience: "[we] take ourselves to be justified in granting them a sense and a supposed signification even without any deduction, because we always have experience ready at hand to prove their objective reality" (ibid.). This is what presents a special challenge for the class of concepts Kant calls "categories" or "pure concepts of the understanding," since they are, *ex hypothesi, a priori* and hence non-empirical.[97] The categories cannot be readily verified as empirical concepts are, since concepts like <*cause*> and <*substance*> do not obviously (or, post Hume, obviously do not) refer to sensible qualities of objects (A 85-86/B 118). Moreover, Kant holds that concepts alone, apart from intuition, do not lead to a cognition: "With us **understanding** and **sensibility** can determine an object **only in combination**" (A 258/B 314). Hence, it is not open to Kant to offer a "purely intelligible" meaning to categories, without a reliance on sensibility. Instead, Kant famously justifies the objective validity of these concepts not by vindicating their appearance *in* experience, but thanks to their role in making experience possible (A 92/B 124-25). Most of the passages quoted *en bloc* above concern precisely the problem of explaining the way the categories continue to respect the Aesthetic Constraint even if not in the same way normal empirical concepts do.

Kant tries to show how the categories do not constitute exceptions to the Aesthetic Constraint in "On the Schematism of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding" (A 137ff./B 176ff.). There Kant raises the seemingly paradoxical issue of how a concept that is purely intellectual can be related to purely sensible appearances: "Now how is the **subsumption** of [intuitions] under [pure concepts of the understanding], then the **application** of the category to appearances possible, since no one would say that the category, e.g., causality, could also

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[97] Cf. Longuenesse (1998, 121).

be intuited through the senses and is contained in the appearance?" (A 137-38/B 176-77).

Kant argues that a pure concept can do this only in the same way as any other concept: if the

concept is "homogenous" with the object it subsumes, namely, if there is a sameness of

representation between them. He thinks this homogeneity is easily ascribed to ordinary

empirical concepts: "Thus the empirical concept of a **plate** has homogeneity with the pure

geometrical concept of a **circle**, for the roundness that is thought in the former can be

intuited in the latter" (A 137/B 176). The representation of a plate has a sameness relation to

the representation of a circle. In such a case, the geometrical (or, in general, the aesthetic)

feature of the concept that makes it homogenous with its objects is not added to the

concept, but must be contained in the concept itself.

Though Kant thinks that empirical concepts are fitted automatically with

homogeneity with their objects, pure categories must contain a mediating representation[98] to

achieve it. This is what Kant calls a "schema," a rule produced by the imagination to

determine sensibility in accordance with a concept (cf. A 142/B 181). Homogeneity is clearly

– and necessarily – an *aesthetic* notion (in the Kantian sense). Given that concepts do not

receive any matter other than sensory matter from objects, the feature that is homogenous

between concepts and objects must be an aesthetic or spatio-temporal feature. And Kant

immediately reminds us, with a concise argument, that this must be the case:

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[98] It is sometimes unclear whether Kant thinks a category *as such* contains a schema, or whether a schema must be "added" to a pure category for it have application. I am inclined to agree with de Boer in thinking that the idea of "pure category" that is *only* a logical function is an abstraction from Kant's true notion of a category, which already contains a schema. This seems essential to the definition of a category as more than a mere logical function, and accords with Kant's *Erklärung* ("explanation" but also "real definition") of categories as "concepts of an object in general, *by means of which its intuition is regarded as* **determined** with regard to one of the **logical functions** for judgments" (B 128; italics added). I highlight the fact that the determination of intuition (and hence sensibility) is built into Kant's full conception of a category (Cf. also Longuenesse 1998, 78-79: "[J]udgments may have no relation to a sensible intuition. *In such a case no category is involved.*"). This suggests that a category proper contains a schema without addition. However, given that a category must contain a schema in some way to have objective significance, deciding this issue is not essential to my claim.

> For we have seen [in the Transcendental Deduction] that concepts are entirely impossible, and cannot have any significance, where an object is not given … , consequently they cannot pertain to things in themselves (without regard to how and whether they may be given to us) at all; that, further, modification of our sensibility is the only way in which objects are given to us; and, finally, that pure concepts *a priori*, in addition to the function of the understanding in the category, must also contain *a priori* formal conditions of sensibility (namely of the inner sense) that contain the general condition under which alone the category can be applied to any object. (A 139-40/B 178-79)

It is important to note that Kant sees the generic basis of the schematism as already provided in the fact that pure concepts must contain "formal conditions of sensibility," which had only been left unspecified in the preceding Deduction. In short, because of the need for *any* cognition to be related to sensibility, pure concepts can be no exception. They have determinate sense[99] only by way of a relation to sensibility.

Hence, though schemata are "rules" of a sort, and may thus seem to be of an intellectual character, they create rules *for* the aesthetic conformity of concepts (most importantly pure concepts) with empirical objects.[100] Kant's later discussion of categories such as <*substance*> within the Analytic of Principles confirms the centrality of the schema for delimiting the valid use of a category: "these analogies [of experience] have their sole significance and validity … merely as principles of its empirical use, hence they can be proven as such; consequently the appearances must not be subsumed under the categories per se, but only under their schemata" (A 180-81/B 223). In short, the schema is the "key"

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[99] It is true that Kant grants an important and necessary role to the "function of the understanding" or "logical function" that belongs to the category in its pure form. But he also argues that this function specifies nothing objectively about the sense of these concepts. This is because, as he argues, we can learn nothing about an object by the fact that it serves as, say, the subject of judgment (cf. A 242-43/B 300-301). One reason for this is that the same judgments can be converted into other logical forms (i.e., categorical into hypothetical), while referring to the same objects. Cf. Longuenesse 1998, 100-106.

[100] Hence, Kant says that when we think of a triangle we are "conscious of the composition of three straight lines in accordance with a rule according to which such an intuition can always be exhibited" (A 105). The rule is one for aesthetic conformity (cf. Longuenesse 1998, 48-52). Though the specific form schemata take is not our concern here, Kant says each category has a *temporal* schema. Thus, for example, the schema of substance is "the persistence of the real in time" (A 144/B 183). Kant had, incidentally, already defined the schema for "reality" as "a being (in time)."

to the use of any category – precisely because Kant's Aesthetic Constraint on conceptual content must be satisfied.[101]

1.4.2. *Conceptual Opacity in Transcendental Idealism*

In discussing the Aesthetic Constraint on conceptual content, I have in effect done nothing else than to state in new terms one of the most famous propositions of Kant's philosophy: that we know only "appearances" and not "things in themselves." This is taken to be the main claim of Kant's transcendental idealism (A 369).[102] However, I have tried to give some specificity to the implications of transcendental idealism for the content of our concepts, both empirical and pure. The Aesthetic Constraint is not a minor feature of Kant's thought, and it demands a very revisionary conception of what an objectively valid concept can be. I now wish to show how the negative consequence of the Aesthetic Constraint, Kant's denial of our knowledge of things in themselves, entails Kant's rejection of the essentialist premise of Conceptual Transparency. Though Kant's main target in the *Critique* is the *ontological* use of Conceptual Transparency to infer from common notions about beings in general conclusions about objects that transcend experience, his strategy for undermining this rationalist approach excludes ordinary essentialist claims as well. To see this, we have to explore some implications of Kant's view of things in themselves.[103]

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[101] Though I do not intend to discuss them in detail here (see 5.2.1. below), it is important to note that the higher-level concepts Kant calls "transcendental ideas" also adhere to the Aesthetic Constraint, despite the fact that they cannot be *directly* exemplified by any intuition. This is because they do not subsume appearances but the use of the understanding itself (they are derived from the form of syllogisms, rather than judgments). But in this case as well, the content of transcendental ideas comes from their universal subsumption of the empirical use of the understanding: they "determine the use of the understanding according to principles in the whole of an entire experience" (A 321/B 378).

[102] Cf. Allison (2004, 3).

[103] In what follows, I aim to put forth a textually plausible reading of Kant that helps make sense of a criticism Hegel makes. Interpretive exhaustiveness is beyond my scope here.

Kant offers both a positive and negative conception of a thing in itself, or noumenon.[104] The negative conception is merely a leftover from Kant's notion of an appearance; if appearances are what we do know, a thing in itself in a negative sense is things as we do not know them: something insofar as it is not an object of sensory cognition (B 307).[105] We need such a negative conception so that we do not over-boldly assume that everything that is can be discovered through our limited cognitive capacities. The positive conception of a thing in itself, on the other hand, refers to an object of non-sensible cognition (ibid.).[106] Though Kant produces a notion of such an object, some argue that Kant need not be (theoretically) committed to positive noumena at all.[107] We only cannot rule them out, since "one cannot assert of sensibility that it is the only possible kind of intuition" (A 254/B 310).

Since the positive conception of a thing in itself includes matter additional to sensibility, a concept involving such additional matter would violate the Aesthetic Constraint on conceptual content. This does not prevent us from thinking of such a thing, at least in terms of its logical possibility. But we have no such thing as (cognitively relevant) "noumenal" conceptual content. When Kant imagines a procedure that would strip away the content from an intuition, he notes that all that remains is the generic "form of thinking"

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[104] Though there may be good reasons to distinguish these terms in matters of detail, for my purpose, I see no need to do so, so long as the "positive" and "negative" senses of things in themselves are disambiguated.

[105] See Allais' general characterization of the issue: "Since we can cognize only aspects of things that they have in relation to us, all we are left with in terms of the idea of things as they are in themselves is the idea of things as they are apart from the way we cognize them. We are committed to there being a way things are as they are in themselves, but we have no determinate representation of this way things are, so we have a merely negative characterization" (2015, 89).

[106] The difference can be put in logical terms Kant uses elsewhere: the negative version involves a negative judgment, the positive conception converts the negative predicate to an affirmative one, and hence involves an "infinite" judgment (compare: "the soul is not mortal" and "the soul is non-mortal (= immortal)"; cf. A 71-72/B 97).

[107] Cf. Allais (2015, Ch. 3).

found in a category (A 254/B 309), and this is no new objective content.[108] Still, on several

occasions, Kant suggests that other philosophers have attempted to consider things in just

this noumenal sense. When he discusses Leibniz's views on what he calls "the concepts of

reflection," Kant accuses Leibniz of treating sensory objects *as if* they were objects of the

intellect alone, and hence as "things in themselves":

> He [Leibniz] compared all things with each other solely through concepts, and
> found, naturally no other differences than those through which the understanding
> distinguishes its pure concepts from each other. … [F]or him appearance was the
> representation **of the thing in itself**, although distinguished from cognition through
> the understanding in its logical form… (A 270/B 326)

Because (Kant's) Leibniz does not take sensibility and understanding in conjunction, but

treats the understanding alone as the proper faculty for apprehending empirical objects, he

uses principles that hold only for the comparison of concepts for objects of sensory

intuition:

> Since [Leibniz] therefore had before his eyes solely their concepts, and not their
> position in intuition in which alone the objects can be given … it could not have
> turned out otherwise but that he extended his principle of indiscernibles, which
> holds merely of concepts of things in general, to the objects of the senses (*mundus
> phaenomenon*), and thereby believed himself to have made no little advance in the
> cognition of nature. (A 271-72/B 327-28; underlined)

Leibniz attempted to understanding nature, as we saw above (1.2.1.), as tacitly conforming to

the "predicate in subject" model of judgements. For that model to hold of everything, it was

necessary that every object was conceived as an abiding subject comprised of many

predicates. But since the truth of every judgment was to be explained in the same way,

spatial and temporal propositions, too, had to be conceived as either containing intrinsic

spatio-temporal predicates or as reducible to "intelligible" (non-phenomenal) truths of their

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[108] As Allison writes, "[A] consideration of things by means of pure categories [i.e., "in themselves"] … is capable of yielding analytic judgments concerning the implications of the concepts of things so considered, but not synthetic *a priori* knowledge of the things themselves" (2004, 17).

subjects. The latter is typically taken to be Leibniz's strategy,[109] and this interpretation is the

basis of Kant's suggestion here that Leibniz did not consider the necessary role that

sensibility plays in our knowledge.

What is of interest here, however, is Kant's association of Leibniz's attempt to view

the world purely conceptually[110] and the latter's putative conception of the objects of

knowledge as "things in themselves." It should be noted that this connection is far from

obvious, especially on the common definition of things in themselves as "mind-independent

reality."[111] It would be odd, to say the least, to affirm that viewing the world *purely conceptually*

is precisely equivalent to gaining a view of the world *mind-independently*, but this is what the

common definition seems to imply. Though human mind-independence may indeed be

involved in Kant's use of "things in themselves" here, that is not sufficient to explain his

diagnosis of Leibniz. Kant repeatedly asserts, beyond this, that viewing appearances as things

in themselves is an attempt to see the world in purely intelligible terms, namely a world of

noumena in the positive sense.[112] And his explanation of Leibniz's acceptance of positive

noumena relies precisely on this over-conceptualizing tendency: "nothing conceded to the

thing except what is contained in its concept" (A 281/B 338).

Why should the attempt to reduce things to their concepts amount to attempt to

know them "in themselves," given the ordinary conception of things in themselves as mere

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[109] Cf. Mates (1986), Ch. XIII.

[110] Kant suggests that "Leibniz's entire intellectual system is really built" on a principle that denies that particular concepts contain anything more than general concepts (A 281/B 337).

[111] Cf. Allais (2015, 42, 82, 93) and Hogan (2009, 356-58 and *passim*).

[112] E.g., "Nevertheless, if we call certain objects, as appearances, being of sense (*phaenomena*), because we distinguish the way in which we intuit them from their constitution in itself, then it already follows from our concept that to these we as it were oppose, as objects thought merely through the understanding…" (B 306). "The concept of a **noumenon**, i.e., of a thing that is not to be thought as an object of the senses but rather as a thing in itself (solely through a pure understanding)…" (A 254/B 310). "…[A]ppearances cannot be comprehended among the objects of pure understanding as things in themselves…" (A 279/B 335). "[N]othing is left for us but the analogy by which we utilize concepts of experience in making some sort of concept of intelligible things, with which we have not the least acquaintance as they are in themselves" (A 566/B 594). Underlining added throughout.

"things without the mind," as Gareth Evans put it? This feature of Kant's talk of things in themselves is perhaps helpfully illuminated by the point we noted above in discussing rationalist essentialism (cf. 1.2.3.). As we saw there, for Wolffian rationalists, a thing (considered)[113] "in itself" had the specific meaning of a thing considered "absolutely," or in terms of its essence apart from all relations. In the chapter "On the Transcendental Ideas," Kant himself says much the same, acknowledging it as common philosophical usage:

> The word **absolute** is now more often used merely to indicate that something is valid of a thing considered **in itself** and thus **internally.** In this meaning, "absolutely possible" would signify what is possible in itself (internally), which is in fact that **least** one can say of an object. On the contrary, however, it is also sometimes used to indicate that something is valid in every relation … which is again the **most** that I can say about the possibility of a thing. (A 324/B 381)

Thus, Kant and his predecessors frequently understood considering something "in itself" as an absolute or non-relational consideration of something, which yielded knowledge of that thing's internal possibility, and thus its essence or first concept. It seems likely that this conception of the "in itself" lies behind Kant's equation of Leibniz's conceptualist view of the world with a noumenal one.

Now I am not attempting to claim that the rationalist background suggest a full re-interpretation of Kant's conception of things in themselves. What we are after, however, is an indication of why Kant's denial of our knowledge of things in themselves amounts to a denial of the world as purely "conceptual" in a Leibnizian sense – a connection that goes beyond a reading of things in themselves merely as mind-independent reality. The Wolffian background helps indicate, I believe, how the positive notion of a thing in itself involves the idea of something purely intelligible, something reduced to its logical essentials – and hence

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[113] As Gerold Prauss (1974, 13-23) has corrected noted, among Kant's contemporaries, "*an sich*" primarily modifies "*betrachtet*" ("considered"), so that what was meant by a "thing in itself" was typically a thing *considered* in itself. Prauss argues that Kant often elides this qualification, even where it lies in the background. This suggestion plays a large role in the account of Allision (2004).

to its mere *concept*.[114] For the consideration of something in itself, since it yields the bare

logical possibility of a thing, just as such yields the concept of something (specifically, its

"first concept"). Perhaps more to the point, viewing the experiential world as a world of

things in themselves seems to lead to seeing natural objects as being con-fused instantiations

of pure concepts, the essential features of which can be only partly distilled from experience.

This connection seems to make good sense of Kant's critique of Leibniz in the

Amphiboly. Attempting to follow the path of thinking that led to Leibniz to his own

monadology, Kant writes:

> Now it seems as if it follows from this [sc. the result of abstracting from all outer
> relations of something] that in every thing (substance) there is something that is
> absolutely internal and precedes all outer determinations, first making them possible,
> thus that this substratum is something that contains no mere outer relations in itself,
> consequently that it is **simple** … and since we are not acquainted with any absolutely
> inner determinations except through our inner sense, this substratum would be not
> only simple, but also … determined through **representations**, i.e., all things would
> really be **monads**, or simple beings endowed with representations. *And this would all
> be correct, were it not that something more than the concept of a thing in general belongs to the
> conditions under which alone objects of outer intuition can be given to us, and from which the pure
> concept abstracts.* (A 283/B 339; italics added)

Kant suggests that Leibniz's monadological metaphysics follows (with an additional premise

about the capacity for representations) from his attempt to consider the basic substances of

the world as reducible to their simple, non-relational properties. In other words, Leibnizian

metaphysics of "things in themselves" follows from a purely conceptual view of the world.

However, an ambiguity can arise here, since one may think that Kant, though

prohibited from a "purely" conceptual view of the world, would not differ much from

Leibniz on this point, given his insistence on the cooperation of the understanding (the

faculty of concepts) with sensibility in experience. This ambiguity is resolved when one takes

account of how the Aesthetic Constraint has transformed Kant's view of conceptual

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[114] Cf. de Boer (2014, 239-47).

content. Unlike the rationalist view that assumes that a fully articulate concept contains the inner possibility of something, Kant takes a decidedly "subjective" approach to conceptual content. He often explains even the analytic content of a concept by appealing to "the manifold that I always think in it" (B 11).[115] And since this manifold is always and necessarily something sensible, the analysis of a concept (where possible) will always reveal only sensible marks.[116] Conceptual content is built from "aesthetic" primitives.[117] Kant's account of conceptual content allows us to conclude from our concepts only possibility in the sense he expounds in the Analytic of Principles, that the objects pertaining to our concepts "agree with the formal conditions (in accordance with intuition and concepts)" (A 218/B 265). Hence, we cannot move from an acquaintance with sensible concepts to the inference to the possibility of things in the robust sense Leibniz suggests.[118] Though we can infer from concepts possibility in the new sense Kant endorses, we are not entitled to infer anything about the intelligible nature of the objects of experience.[119]

Thus, the sense in which Kant acknowledges the world as "conceptual" must be radically different from that of Leibniz and Wolff. Whereas the rationalist view of concepts entails that we have obscured access to the essence of things, Kant's does not, since concepts have merely phenomenal content (and, like Leibniz, Kant does not think phenomena alone can constitute the nature of something). Kant could hardly be clearer on

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[115] Cf. also, from the *Blomberg Logik*, "But in the case of empirical concepts I do not define the object but instead only the concept that one thinks in the case of the thing. Marks of experience are thus changeable, and serve only for nominal definition" (24: 270-71/1992b, 217).

[116] This may help explain why there is no definition or analysis possible for categories (cf. A 240-41/B 300) – precisely because there are no "marks" available to distinguish them, since each is always involved in any and every experience.

[117] As the above section shows, this holds indirectly for categories as well, inasmuch as the content of the categories comes from their schematic rules for application in possible experience.

[118] "[O]uter sense can also contain in its representation only the relation of an object to the subject, and not that which is internal to the object in itself. It is exactly the same in the case of inner sense" (B 67).

[119] As Kant reminds us, this presents no problem for the empirical sciences, whose attention is fixed on appearances themselves and hence on their nature as objects of sensibility; any putative thing in itself "is also never asked after in experience" (A 30/B 45).

this point: "the things that we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them to be, nor are their relations so constituted in themselves as they appear to us" (A 42/B 59). What I have tried to emphasize in this section is that Kant's "noumenal ignorance" is not *merely* an ignorance about the nature of mind-independent reality, but an ignorance of reality specifically characterized according to the rationalist theory of intelligibility, which pictures a thorough conformity between concepts and things. While Kant helps to strengthen the bond of human concepts with the empirical world, he does so only on the admission that the bond between concepts and essences is broken. Rejecting the connection between human cognition and things in themselves entails, correlatively, rejecting that concepts express the essences of things.

1.4.3. Kant's Metaphilosophical Dilemma

Presented on its own terms, Kant's conception of conceptual content may seem a modest restriction on the kind of things we can know as beings endowed with sensibility. Certainly, in the examples Kant presents of noumenal objects (and the way the notion has been presented by mainstream interpreters), the greater concern for us today may not be that Kant imputes noumenal ignorance to us, but that he considers the noumenal at all, let alone accepts it.[120] In other words, it may seem that the problem is not Kant's empiricist tendencies, but only their half-heartedness. If Kant's main achievement is to secure the rational basis of empirical knowledge, the unknown noumenal need be mentioned as the

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[120] Cf. Strawson (1966, 38-42 *et passim*). McDowell (1994, 41-44) makes a similar complaint, calling this feature of Kant's thinking "profoundly unsatisfactory" (43).

unwanted remainder. Indeed, few have been eager to offer an apology on behalf of the

noumenal realm he helped condemn to oblivion.[121]

However, despite one's willingness to concede to Kant our noumenal ignorance, it is

easy to miss the radical nature of his positive conception of conceptual content. This

positive conception is in many respects coincidental with a narrow form of empiricism,

which requires that conceptual primitives be derived from sensations alone.[122] While Kant's

modified version of empiricism, since it allows for concepts that are exceptions to the

empiricist rule, may avoid some standard problems with empiricism, still it threatens to

undermine some of what it is meant to uphold. Namely, Kant's Aesthetic Constraint seems

to undermine the objective status of Kant's own philosophical thought.

In other words, the Aesthetic Constraint proves too much: it places a requirement on

conceptual content intended for "first order" discourse which seems to undermine the

"second order" claims of the theory itself. Kant's view may explain why "snow is white" can

be an expression of genuine cognition in a way that "the soul is simple" cannot, but by its

own hypothesis it cannot explain why "cognition must be sensible" is itself a cognitively

significant claim. For, at least *prima facie*, <*cognition*> itself does not satisfy the Aesthetic

Constraint on conceptual content in the way that <*snow*> or <*white*> may do. For cognition

cannot be reduced to specific spatio-temporal occurrences or qualities. If Kant means his

Aesthetic Constraint to be taken in the full generality in which it is expressed, it seems to

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[121] See Allais (2015, Ch. 3) for the view that Kant can be committed to things in themselves without noumena. Ameriks (e.g., 1982; 1992b) is a contemporary reader who sees Kant as retaining commitment to positive noumena. Others seem to take "noumenal" more generally as reality independent of our sensibility, and hence affirm the noumenal as the touchstone for "scientific realism." Cf. Sellars (1968).

[122] See Longuenesse (1998, 119-22) for discriminating remarks viz. Kant and British empiricists. The distinctions offered by Longuenesse do not overturn the considerable common principles suggested here, however.

entail that traditionally philosophical concepts and judgments – even his own – have no objective content.

Whether or not Kant's views are in fact susceptible to this problem (see 5.2.1. for further consideration), it is on this point that Hegel frequently intervenes, and it is worth tracing Hegel's critique to help us understand a key problem his own views are meant to tackle. Hegel's challenge comes from a context made possible by Kant himself, where philosophy as an increasingly autonomous discipline had to account for its unifying principle.[123] Indeed, it may be correct to see the German 1790s, the years of Hegel's scholarly formation, as the *locus classicus* for metaphilosophical debate. In any case, a concern for the status of philosophy itself in the wake of Kant's thought is a prominent theme in Hegel's work at the start of his philosophical career.[124] Already in *Faith and Knowledge* (1802), Hegel emphasizes what I have called the Aesthetic Constraint as the key error in Kant and Fichte:

> Thus, although these philosophies do battle with the empirical, they have remained directly within its sphere. The Kantian and Fichtean philosophies were able to raise themselves to the concept certainly, but not to the Idea, and the pure concept is absolute ideality and emptiness. It gets its content and dimensions quite exclusively in, and hence through, its connection with the empirical. (W 2: 296-97/63)

Later in the essay, Hegel suggests that this amounts to a confession of philosophy's emptiness:

> The emptiness of philosophical knowledge [*Wissen*][125] becomes the principle of advance; for it is something radically deficient, and hence immediately in need of something other than itself, which becomes the point of attachment for the other

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[123] On the "identity crisis" in philosophy in the wake of Kantian philosophy (especially due to the challenge of F.H. Jacobi), see especially Beiser (1987, ch. 2).

[124] Apart from *Glauben und Wissen*, quoted just below, works such as the so-called *Differenzschrift* (1801) and several of Hegel's reviews from the *Kritische Journal der Philosophie* (1802-3), co-edited with Schelling, are suffused with metaphilosophical interest (cf. W 2). Several of these works are translated in di Giovanni and Harris (1985).

[125] The translator adds "philosophical" as a modifier to *Wissen* here, which is not in the original. The immediate context confirms Hegel's metaphilosophical intentions, however, as the previous paragraph speaks directly of philosophical "truth and certainty."

> that is its condition. The objective world supervenes upon pure knowledge as something alien that completes it. (W 2: 399/158-59)

In effect, Kant and Fichte allow empirical knowledge to set the standard for knowledge in general, and hence knowledge as such is supposed to be characterized as a relation to something "other" or opposed to the knowing subject (the Kantian "given" or the Fichtean "non-I"). But this, Hegel says, rules out knowledge which is not alien to the subject – knowledge which, according to Hegel, constitutes the aim and nature of philosophy.[126]

Though Hegel's views on Kant and Fichte undergo some revision up to the time of the first mature version of his *Begriffslehre* (1816),[127] he maintains throughout a metaphilosophically oriented critique of the Kantian view of concepts. In the introductory section of that work, "Of the Concept in General," Hegel enters into a long excursus on the Kantian view of concepts, centered on Kant's idea that concepts without intuition (hence, aesthetic content) are "empty":

> The understanding is in this way an inherently empty *form* which, on the one hand, obtains reality only by virtue of that *given* content, and, on the other hand, *abstracts* from it, that is to say, *discards it* as something useless, but useless only for the concept. In both operations, the concept is not the one which is independent, is not what is essential and true about the presupposed material; rather, this material is the reality in and for itself, a reality that cannot be extracted from the concept. (*WL* II: 258/518)

Though the accuracy of Hegel's interpretation is not my main concern here, it is worth noting that Hegel's remarks seem to be corroborated by Kant's texts. Hegel's point is that concepts, for Kant, are doubly derivative in terms of content. First, concepts add *form* to given matter, but this form itself is mere universality. Kant says this several times.[128] The

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[126] In another early work, he writes, "In philosophy, Reason comes to know itself and deals only with itself so that its whole work and activity are grounded in itself…" (W 2: 17/87).

[127] The idea that Hegel's thought underwent a turn favorable to Kant, and especially to Fichte, in the Jena years prior to his writing of the *Phenomenology* is suggested by Hyppolite (1974, 5-8) and Bristow (2007).

[128] "With every concept we are to distinguish *matter* and *form*. The matter of concepts is the *object*, their form is *universality*" (Ak. 9: 91/1992b, 589). Then: "An empirical concept arises from the senses through comparison of objects of experience and *attains through the understanding merely the form of universality*" (ibid.,

only necessary difference between a concept and an intuition is that a concept applies

potentially to several objects, while an intuition applies at most to one. Concepts do not add

some new type of content to experience. Second, being that the conceptual addition of

content is merely generality, conceptual content is always a subtraction of content (hence the

concept "discards" the "presupposed material"). The concept unifies what is given in several

intuitions only by isolating a sensible mark (*Merkmal*), abstracting *from* the many other

features given in the intuition.[129] Hence, not only do concepts give us nothing contentful

apart from intuitions, they really give us *less* than intuitions.

Hegel acknowledges that, in addition to concepts, Kant posits what he calls "ideas,"

or "concepts of reason" which do not refer directly to intuitions, but serve instead to unify

reason itself (*WL* II: 261-62/520). However, by Kant's own lights (according to Hegel),

since these concepts of reason do not *constitute* the objects of our experience, they do not

serve to provide us *truth*:

> The concepts of reason, in which we would have expected a higher power and a
> deeper content, no longer possess anything *constitutive* [*nichts Konstitutives*] as still do
> the categories; they are *mere* ideas which we are of course *quite at liberty* to use,
> provided that by these intelligible entities in which all *truth* was to be revealed we
> mean nothing more than *hypotheses* to which it would be the height of arbitrariness
> and recklessness to ascribe absolute truth, for they – *cannot be found in any experience*.
> (262/521).

Kant interest in disallowing the inferences of special metaphysics, it seems, forced him to an

implausible view of the content of rational concepts. Hegel then asks: "Would anyone ever

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92/590; emphasis added). We can trace this "form of universality" to the form of universal categorical
judgments, which are the functional expression for the category of unity (cf. A 70/B 95; A 80/B 106).

    [129] This is a point Kant himself makes very explicitly in his *Vienna Logik*: "In logic it is a misuse for one to
retain the expression *to abstract* so that one says *aliquidre abstrahe* ["to abstract something"]. E.g., as if, in order to
have the concept of a tree, I took the concept of the leaves and of the trunk in particular, and abstracted from
all differences among trees, and said that what has a trunk and leaves is a tree. No, I do not abstract the leaves
and the trunk; rather, I retain them, and I separate them from everything else. I have to pay heed to that which
a cognition has that is common, and *abstract from that* which it has that is different [,] e.g., from the magnitude or
smallness of the tree" (Ak. 24: 907/1992b, 351).

have thought that philosophy would deny truth to intelligible entities on the ground that they

lack the spatial and temporal material of the senses?" (ibid.)

We see here the close link between Hegel's rejection of Kant's Aesthetic Constraint

on objective conceptual content and the (to him) disastrous metaphilosophical consequences

of Kant's views. For Hegel, it is *prime facie* constitutive of philosophy (and has been, he

argues, even since the pre-Socratics)[130] that the truth is to be discovered by disregarding the

material of the senses. If so, Kant's view of conceptual content simply rules out the kind of

truth that philosophy aims at:

> But now, to regard the given material of intuition and the manifold of representation
> as the real, in contrast to what is thought and the concept, is precisely the view that
> must be given up as the condition of philosophizing, and that religion, moreover,
> presupposes as having already been given up. … But it is philosophy that yield the
> *conceptually comprehended* insight into the reality of the status of the reality of sensuous
> being. Philosophy assumes indeed that the stages of feeling, intuition, sense
> consciousness, and so forth, are prior to the understanding … only in the sense that
> the concept results *from their dialectic* and *their nothingness* and not because it is
> conditioned by their *reality*. Abstractive thought … is rather the sublation and
> reduction of that material as mere *appearance* to the *essential*, which is manifested only
> *in the concept*. (259/518-19)

Not only is philosophy not restricted to material from sensation, Hegel here claims,

philosophy begins precisely where the material of the senses is "sublated" and shown to be

nothing in itself. As he says just later, in a concept "the subject matter is reduced to its non-

contingent essentiality," precisely what we do not find, Hegel says, in an aesthetically

conditioned appearance (263/521).

Hegel's lesson is quite clear: while Kant's views may be suitably tailored to explain

how *empirical* concepts have content, if he means the account to be completely general, as an

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[130] "The principles of ancient as well as more recent philosophies –whether 'water,' 'matter,' or 'atoms,' –
are universals, idealizations, not things as given immediately, that is, in sensuous singularity. Not even the
'water' of Thales is that, for, although also empirical water, it is besides that the *in-itself* or *essence* of all other
things […]" (*WL* I: 172/124).

account of conceptual content *tout court*, the Aesthetic Constraint proves too much: it seems even to rule out the content that philosophical concepts themselves are supposed to have.

Accordingly, Hegel occasionally suggests not that Kant is simply wrong, but that he cannot really mean what he says. For example, Hegel realizes that Kant's deduction attempts to show that we *do* have objective knowledge in the unity of a concept: "The *objectivity of thought* [*Denken*] is here, therefore, specifically defined: it is an identity of concept and thing which is *the truth*" (262/521). But, Hegel adds, given that Kant also requires that such unity of concept and object is found only in the manifold of intuition, "the aforesaid truth…is in fact only appearance, again on the ground now that the content is only the manifold of intuition" (ibid.). Likewise, when Kant says that concepts without intuition are "empty," Hegel says that Kant cannot mean they have *no* content, since "the concept is said to be a synthesis *a priori*; as such, it surely contains determinateness and differentiation within itself" (261/520). Though there is a danger of equivocation on "content" here – we will look at this passage in more detail in the next chapter (see 2.2.2.) – Hegel is clearly trying to *offer* Kant a view that does not make Kant's claims disqualify his best insights. Even for a concept to *differ* from another, Hegel says, there must be something in the concept (and not just in its sensuous object) that grounds the difference from its conceptual neighbors. So Kant cannot be serious if he believes concepts without sensuous intuitions are empty (in an absolute sense).

There is some evidence that Kant himself was at least as much complacent as inconsistent on this issue, however. One case is particularly illuminating. In attempting to illustrate the difference between understanding and reason, Kant points out that purely conceptual principles – the domain of reason – do not yield synthetic cognition. However,

he then brings up what seems to be an exception to this proposal, only to pass over it immediately:

> It is an ancient wish … that in place of the endless manifold of civil laws, their principles may be sought out; for in this alone can consist the secret, as one says, of simplifying legislation. But here the laws are only limitations of our freedom to condition under which it agrees thoroughly with itself; hence they apply to something that is wholly our work, and of which we can be the cause through that concept. But that objects in themselves, as well as the nature of things, should stand under principles and be determined according to mere concepts is something that, if not impossible, is at least very paradoxical in what it demands. (A 301-302/B 358).

As I interpret this passage, Kant seems to realize that when he denies the cognitive value of "principles," he will seem to deny the "ancient wish" that we can discern an orderly system of principles for civil laws. His retort is simply to clarify that, whatever sense of "principle" is at work in the system of civil laws, that kind of cognition would not apply to the rationalist attempt to cognize *everything* under principles. This is a fair reply. But it should be noted that in making this reply, Kant does not make use of what he elsewhere insists is the *only* condition under which our concepts can have objective significance: their reference to spatio-temporal objects. Instead, here he suggests that we can understand the significance of civil principles because "they apply to something that is wholly our work, and of which we can be the cause through that concept." Apparently, in this case, no restriction to aesthetic conditions of intuition is needed.[131]

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[131] Elsewhere, too, Kant seems to relax his standards for what it takes to verify a concept in intuition. For example, he writes in the *Vienna Logik*, "This [*conceptus*] *purus* can either arise from the understanding, and in fact if its ground is merely in the understanding, its object can still be represented *in concreto*. E.g., cause and effect [are concepts] of the understanding. One can distinguish the things in sense, [can] sense what the talk is about in the case of effect, cause, etc., but the concept of causality lies merely in the understanding. Now the question arises, Can one encounter in experience the objects of this, his concept of the understanding? [Response.] Yes. This happens through examples. An example of causality is: fire destroys wood" (24: 905-906/1992b, 349). Granted that we can take examples of pure concepts from experience, it is still not correct that these pure concepts are verified specifically by *sensing* them. Moreover, if mere *aisthesis* could verify a pure concept like <*cause*>, Kant's transcendental deduction would be pointless.

Making this concession to civil laws does not do much damage to Kant's anti-

rationalist ambitions in first *Critique*. For rationalists would not certainly have claimed that all

reality was "wholly our work," or that we could "be [its] cause through [our] concept[s]."

They could not build off this exception to justify their metaphysics anew. So Kant's brief

concession to the reality of "practical" concepts[132] does not demand that he concede the

rationalists' view of Conceptual Transparency. But it does seem to demand that he reject the

universality of the Aesthetic Constraint, in favor of a more liberal principle. Perhaps the

following:

> **Aesthetic Constraint (2):** A concept has objective content only if it refers to spatio-
>
> temporal appearances, or if the object of the concept is a product of the concept
>
> itself.

The problem with this (as with any) disjunctive definition is that, with the introduction of

the first disjunct, we wonder what stops us making a second, and so on. There is no obvious

principle that connects the first and second conditions of the definition, and so no hint as to

'how to go on in the same way'. Moreover, a failure to circumscribe a principle for

conceptual content is more disruptive for Kant's project that he might like to admit. If Kant

allows exceptions to his strong formulations of the Aesthetic Constraint, how can it perform

the exclusionary function it is so clearly supposed to do in cases of supposedly

"transcendent" or "transcendental" use of concepts?[133]

However, if Kant's Aesthetic Constraint is not to be taken in its full generality,

Hegel's suspicions that Kant cannot really mean what he says, and thus that the

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[132] Though I am concentrating on the semantic principle Kant sets up (with supposed universality) in his
theoretical philosophy, since that is the source of Hegel's main objections, it would be useful to consider
whether a new semantic principle is at work in Kant's practical writings. I will return to this suggestion in 5.5.2.
below, though not systematically.

[133] The terms are of course not synonymous, but both transcendent principles and the transcendental use
of categories are supposed to be excluded. Cf. A 295-96/B 352-53.

metaphilosophically damaging consequences of his work could be avoided, may be justified. Moreover, Kant already offers (unwittingly, it seems) a cryptic suggestion for an alternative semantic principle that could have a more liberal allowance for philosophical concepts: namely, the "radical primacy of the practical" (Ameriks 2000), which became a prominent theme in the post-Kantian reception of Kant's philosophy. Perhaps conceptual content can be explained apart from the givenness of intuition when the object of the concept is involved in our "doing" in some way. This is indeed partly the strategy that Hegel himself takes, as I will argue later on (see chapter 5). But Hegel sees that in accepting this alternative construal of conceptual content, he is no longer so far from the rationalism Kant tried to abandon.

1.5. Conclusion

I have so far attempted to provide a closer look at the view behind Hegel's appreciation of the pre-Kantian German rationalist tradition, which I have labeled Conceptual Transparency. The Wolffian tradition constructed a metaphysical picture in which the essential structure of the world was the mirror of a conceptual structure. Moreover, since the rationalists believed that human minds have an innate connection to the rational structure of the world, a naïve form of conceptual analysis was seen by them to provide an accurate view into this structure. In a number of ways, the German rationalists carry out a project like twentieth-century conceptual analysis to the extreme, while trying to provide it a metaphysical foundation. We have seen that both Hegel and Kant reject the fully unrestricted form of Conceptual Transparency, but whereas Hegel's concerns about a metaphysical "happy coincidence" leaves open the prospect of a variant on rationalist views,

Kant cuts off Conceptual Transparency at its roots. The heart of Kant's critique is his Aesthetic Constraint on conceptual content, which rules out any direct relation between conceptual analysis and the essence of things. But Kant's critique leads to metaphilosophical inconsistency: it rules out Kant's own conceptual apparatus and thus proves too much. Still, in order for Hegel to resurrect some of the conceptual confidence he admires in the German rationalists, he has to show how concepts can have legitimate content in a way Kant disallows. The next chapter will show how Hegel attempts to free conceptual content from such Kantian strictures.

Chapter 2: Hegel's Theory of Conceptual Content

2.1. Hegel as a Conceptual Theorist

As the preceding chapter has already shown, a rationalist theory of concepts depends, at least negatively, on a notion of conceptual content, of what is expressed by a concept. At the very least, the rationalist view requires that a certain theory of concepts *not* obtain. In particular, a rationalist theory of conceptual content must find some basis other than mere sense content if it is to maintain Conceptual Transparency. Kant espoused the Aesthetic Constraint to avoid the rationalist extension of concepts to contexts supposedly outside the bounds of human knowledge; but in so doing he made unintelligible how concepts express things that manifestly *are* within such bounds. Hegel's return to aspects of rationalist metaphysics must make intelligible how concepts have content outside such Kantian constraints.

The focus of this chapter, then, is on the question about what Hegel thinks a concept is at the level of its logical and semantic content. The response to Kant cannot be completed at this abstract level, but this level provides the foundation for an adequate response. Even so, it is not easy to determine how a "formal" dimension of Hegel's conceptual theory could be distilled. The issue is made unusually difficult because of Hegel's extraordinary use of the German term for "concept" (*Begriff*). Despite recent interest in Hegel as a conceptual thinker, this has often occurred *despite* rather than because of Hegel's talk of "the concept." For Hegel often doesn't seem to be talking about concepts in any ordinary sense. For example, Hegel writes in the *Phenomenology*,

> This simple infinity, or the absolute concept, is to be called the simple essence of life, the soul of the world, the universal bloodstream, which is omnipresent, neither dulled nor interrupted by any difference, which is instead itself both every difference as well as their sublatedness… (*PG* 132/98, § 162)

Or again in the *EL*,

> Instead, the concept is what truly comes first, and things are what they are through the activity of the concept that dwells in them and reveals itself in them [*die Tätigkeit des ihnen innewohnenden und in ihnen sich offenbarenden Begriffs*]. … [T]hought and, more precisely, the concept is the infinite form, or the free, creative activity that does not need material at hand outside it in order to realize itself. (*EL* 313/241, § 163Z(2)).

Indeed, considering such passages, it is not implausible when Hegel interpreters read the term as a pure term of art or even some kind of metaphysical ruse.[1] Nevertheless, I think they are wrong, and often their error comes from simply ignoring what Hegel says about the formal dimension of the concept,[2] or failing to connect what is said there with the use Hegel to which later puts his term "*Begriff*."[3] Instead, it is reasonable to suppose that Hegel's use of the term is closer to an ordinary philosophical one than might first appear. Uniqueness in Hegel's use of the term comes primarily at the level of his *theory* of concepts, rather than the *meaning* of the term. Hegel offers us a not a new subject matter for a philosophy, but a new philosophical account of a very old one, the nature of conceptuality. This chapter will clarify,

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[1] See section 2.1.3. below for references and discussion.

[2] In particular, the work of Kreines (2004; 2015; 2017), one of the more influential recent interpreters of Hegel's *Doctrine of the Concept* and a touchstone for much of what follows, has rehabilitated a metaphysical Hegel with a realist view of concepts, without engaging substantially with the first half of that work, a portion that I will argue is essential to understand Hegel's conception of conceptual objectivity. Kreines bemoans a "semantics first" (2015, 14) approach to Hegel's *Logic*, despite the fact that this is how Hegel himself begins the *Begriffslogik*. I will argue in chapter 3 that since the *Begriffslogik* provides the foundation for the rest of the work, one can rightly see the whole of the *Logic* as "semantics first."

[3] I would lay this charge against a number of heavily exegetical readings of the *Doctrine of the Concept*. That text on its own is open to a number of interpretations, but Hegel continues to employ "*der Begriff*" in other (*realphilosophische*) contexts in his work, and an adequate interpretation of the *Logic* texts, in my view, should show how these subsequent uses are connected to what we find in the (systematically, though not always historically) earlier text. Winfield (2006) and Zambrana (2015), e.g., comment on the *Begriffslogik* primarily in a self-contained way, which makes it difficult to see how Hegel's theory of concepts could touch the ground (as it does) in other of his works.

both systematically and interpretatively, how it is that Hegel's use of "the concept" relates to conceptuality in a philosophically relevant sense.

2.1.1. Core Conditions on Conceptuality

Only with Hegel's *Doctrine of the Concept* (or "*Begriffslogik*"), first published in 1816 as Book III of the *Science of Logic*, does the subject matter treated in the work begin to resemble what has traditionally been called logic.[4] Indeed, works by predecessors and contemporaries designated as logics from the period include the same basic topical division of "Concept," "Judgment," and "Syllogism" that we find in the first sub-section of this Book.[5] Hegel admits as much in the Foreword to the *Doctrine of the Concept*, where he writes that in contrast to the material he has treated so far in the "Objective Logic,"[6] "there already exists for the logic of the *concept* a fully ready and well-entrenched, one may even say ossified, material […]." Rather than the wholly innovative work undertaken in the first Books, then, here "the task is to make [sc. this old material] fluid again, to revive the concept in such a dead matter" (*WL* II: 243/507). This disclaimer may lead us to underestimate the significance, as well as the novelty, of what follows, but it is not wholly misleading.

These opening remarks serve as a useful reminder that, despite appearances, Hegel does not take his *Doctrine of the Concept* to undertake a wholly *sui generis* project. For despite their deficiencies in Hegel's view, he admits that there are already 'logics' of the concept available. Nevertheless, for those familiar with Hegel's writings, this may seem

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[4] For accounts emphasizing the connection between Hegel's logic and traditional logics, see Hanna 1986, Redding 2014.

[5] Of course, Hegel follows none of them exactly. But common to virtually all is the division into a treatment of "Concepts," "Judgments," and "Syllogisms." See, e..g, Kant's *Jäsche Logik* (Ak. 9), Wolff's *DL*, and Fries 1811.

[6] See *WL* I: 61-62/42-43 for a general discussion of the distinction of the Objective and Subjective Logics.

disingenuous; not because there are no logics that share a subject nominally with Hegel's, but because some may suggest that the transition to Hegel's logic of the concept involves a change in subject matter vis-à-vis its predecessors. For, standardly in the interpretation of Hegel's thought, his use of "the concept" is thought to refer to something else than the traditional philosophical use of the term would suggest.[7] In this view, the Hegelian "Concept" or "Notion" (often capitalized in translation to add to the effect) is at least a term of art, but even likely *equivocal* as against the usage of "concept" in the writings of other philosophers. Thus, before I can interpret Hegel's treatment of "the concept" *as* a theory of concepts, I must show that this theory shares a common object with its competitors.[8]

In order to make my view testable, I want to first establish some minimal criteria for a non-equivocal usage of "concept" that I take Hegel's view to satisfy just as well as its predecessors (see the references below in the footnotes). I will call these the *core conditions* on concepts. I take these criteria only to mark out a domain of a shared subject matter,[9] rather than being sufficient for any particular theory of concepts. Even so, they were accepted, as I show in the footnotes, by Hegel's predecessors and contemporaries (I provide evidence for

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[7] See McTaggart (1910, 190): "And when we examine the categories which have the titles of Notion, Judgment, and Syllogism, it is evident that, in spite of their names, they do not apply only to the states of our minds, but to all reality." McTaggart's error seems to be in the false choice of a *mentalistic* or *ontological* treatment of conceptual form; the possibility of a non-psychologistic consideration of semantic form does not seem to occur to him.

[8] In Wolf (2017), I have attempted to show from a historical perspective how Hegel's early use of "the concept" comes out of his own early *critique* of concepts (from the period of his stay in Bern in the late 1790s), as inspired by his friend Friedrich Hölderlin. The continuity of this critique with Hegel's near reversal of his anti-conceptual position around the turn of the century (1801-2), when he was publishing his first philosophical works, corroborates the general expectation that Hegel's usage of *der Begriff* is continuous with his competitors. The style (if not always the content) of Hegel's usage remains continuous at least from the essay on *Naturrecht* (1802-3) up to the *Phenomenology* (1807) and beyond.

[9] This list of core conditions may be broad enough to match common conceptions of concepts both from the post-Leibnizian period and our own, though for my claim, it is only necessary that this conception would be recognizable to Hegel's contemporaries. As we will see, the "standard model" of concepts (as I will call it) included *more* conditions that Hegel will dispute, some of which bring the view closer to the use of "concept" in contemporary psychology or cognitive science more broadly. Nevertheless, I am not here concerned to compare Hegel's usage with this contemporary version.

Wolff, Kant, and Hegel's opponent J.F. Fries).[10] Let us say that in any non-equivocal usage

of "concept," these conditions must be satisfied:

Core Conditions on Concepts:

(CC 1): *Concepts are contents of thought.*[11] To attribute a concept to something means at

least to say that thing can think. Inanimate objects (even the material signs

comprising language) cannot 'be' concepts. Commonly, concepts are seen as

involved in the thoughts expressed by subject or predicate terms in declarative

propositions.

(CC 2): *Concepts are involved in language.*[12] Using concepts is involved in speaking a

language. The extent of the involvement we will leave undefined. In many views, for

example, proper names and "syncategoremic" expressions (e.g., "and") should not

be seen as expressing concepts. Nevertheless, every communicable language should

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[10] The latter's *Logik* appeared in 1811, a year prior to the first volume of Hegel's. However, Hegel refers to it in the first edition of the *WL*, though apparently only to justify not having to read it: "The shallowness of the representation or opinion on which it is based … dispenses me form the trouble of taking any notice of this insignificant publication" (*WL* I: 47/31). This comment was redacted in later editions.

[11] Cf. **Wolff:** "I call a concept any representation of something in our thought" (*DL* § 1.4**). Kant:** "Thinking is cognition through concepts" (A 69/B 94); cf. B 132-34. **Fries:** "The first aid of the understanding in thinking are concepts" (1811, 102, § 20). **Hegel:** "This concept is not intuited by the senses, is not represented in imagination; it is only subject matter, the product and content of *thought*, the fact that exists in and for itself […]" (*WL* I: 30/19).

[12] Cf. **Wolff:** "Accordingly, a certain concept must be connected with each word, and consequently there must be something which is indicated by the word" (*DL* § 2.3); "Without the use of language the use of reason is hardly possible" (Quoted in Baumann 1910, 30). **Kant:** "For we cannot understand anything except that which has something corresponding to our words in intuition" (A 277/B 333; cf. A 312-13/B 369-70); "When the *logici* say, however, that a proposition is a judgment clothed in words, that means nothing, and this definition is worth nothing at all. For how will they be able to think judgments without words?" (Ak. 24: 934/374); "As soon as I make use of words, the representation is an individual concept" (ibid., 754/487); "Actually there are no synonyms in any language. For when words were invented one certainly wanted to signify with each of them a particular concept, which one will always find on more exact investigation of the word. …[E]ach brings with it a particular concept" (ibid., 783/515). **Fries:** "With the word 'human being', e.g., I think of a concept which as a mark or sub-representation [*Teilvorstellung*] applies to all individual human beings, Europeans, Asians, etc. […]" (1811, 103, § 20). **Hegel:** "It is the privilege of philosophy to choose such expressions from the language of ordinary life, which is made from the world of imaginary representations, as *seem to approximate* the determinations of the concept" (*WL* II: 407/628).

contain 'concept words' or 'concept expressions'. Inversely, the use of a concept should be (at least ideally) expressible in language.

    (CC 3): *Concepts have some definite, necessary content*.[13] For any concept, at least one explicative phrase (itself containing concepts) should be seen as expressing content that is necessary to distinguish that concept from others. This does not mean all concepts should have necessary and sufficient conditions, but that there is at least one 'analytically' necessary condition.[14] If the necessary conditions on a concept change, then that concept changes.

For Hegel's treatment of "the concept" to be a theory of concepts, then, and especially as one that rivals other views, let us stipulate that it must satisfy at least these core conditions. Otherwise, I do not know why the term "concept" should apply. At the same time, the present list helps to ensure sameness of subject matter: anyone talking about something that meets the above conditions, is likely to be talking about concepts (or something co-extensive with them). Nevertheless, it should be clear that the list I have provided is by no means a trivial one as it concerns the interpretation of Hegel. It is possible to find commentators who would challenge each of these conditions as applicable to Hegel.[15] Indeed, perhaps the most

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[13] Cf. **Wolff:** "But one applies oneself toward general concepts because thereby the limits of our cognition are greatly expanded. For what is derived from a general concept applies to all things that are contained under it, e.g., what is derived from the concept of the right triangle [applies] to all right triangles …" (*DL* § 1.29). **Kant:** "[Analytic judgments]…only break [the concept] up by means of analysis into its component concepts, which were already thought in it (though confusedly)" (A 7/B 11). **Fries:** "The sub-representations which belong within a concept constitute its *content* or its *intensive magnitude* […]" (1811, 103, § 20). **Hegel:** "[A]ny statement or definition of a concept expressly requires, besides the genus which in fact is already itself more than just abstract universality, also a *specific determinateness*" (*WL* II: 260/519); "[T]he whole course of philosophizing, being methodical, i.e., *necessary*, is nothing else but the mere *positing* of what is already contained in a concept" (*EL* 188/141/§ 88R).

[14] An exception could be made in the case of "primitive" concepts (if they exist), though these, too, have necessary content in the form of self-identity; it is just not further specifiable. Cf. Leibniz (1989, 24): "Also, one has distinct knowledge of an indefinable notion, since it is *primitive*, or its own mark, that is, since it is irresolvable and is understood only through itself and therefore lacks requites."

[15] Bowman, for example, would not deny that concepts are thought-contents, but he would deny that they belong to "finite cognizers" with which he (mistakenly) identifies our own (2013, 115). Wartenberg (1993) identifies concepts with things, which is a rejection of CC 1. Any monistic reading (discussed in 2.1.3. below), like Taylor's (1970), Bowman's (op. cit.), Hostmann's, or Beiser's (2008), inevitably severs the concept's

common reading of Hegel's *Begriff* would not think it necessary even to ask about such conditions. If, for example, Hegel uses *Begriff* to refer to God,[16] or to a kind of metaphysical ground for natural kinds,[17] or even only to the spontaneous structure of human subjectivity,[18] then he is unlikely to refer to concepts under the above conditions.

I will address these concerns negatively for now; first, by discussing passages where Hegel offers criticisms of concepts that may seem to distance him from the core conditions (2.1.2); second, by providing a re-interpretation of the singular use of "the concept" that distinguishes Hegel's from an ordinary use of the term (2.1.3); third, by arguing from Hegel's engagement with historical philosophers for a commonality of usage (2.1.4).

2.1.2. Critique of the Standard Model of Concepts

Before addressing the common interpretation that Hegel's "concept" differs wholly (in terms of its reference) from the ordinary use of the term, I will give voice to some of Hegel's *criticisms* of the traditional understanding of concepts, which may be taken to be so sweeping as to constitute a total break with the typical understanding, and thus to distinguish

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connection with language, given that it reduces the diversity of the concept. (CC 2). A rejection of the first two core conditions then entails a rejection of the third, insofar as the kind of content in question is linguistically expressible thought.

[16] Thus could Düsing's position be taken: "The Concept is namely for him the one substance in the manner of self-thinking and freedom. … [T]he Concept or Subjectivity *has for him the significance of the highest being and all being*" (1976, 232; emphasis added). Such a theological analogy is of course often suggested by Hegel (cf. *EL* § 163 Z(2)), though subject to general controversy concerning the interpretation of Hegel's religious language.

[17] "So Hegel argues that it is best to posit from the beginning immanent concepts in virtue of which things do what they do, as a primitive case of reason in the world, before even beginning on a regress to external grounds in unobservable forces, or a timeless realm of laws, and so on" (Kreines 2015, 50). I have difficulty seeing how Kreines' "concepts" are different from "unobservable forces" in anything but name.

[18] Thus, even Pippin's (1989 et al.) deflationary view of the concept seems to require that we understand it somewhat equivocally (see the discussion below at 2.1.3.). Nevertheless, I am less concerned that the singular use of "the concept" be immediately recognizable as common usage than that references to the individual concepts that comprise "the concept" are non-equivocal.

the Hegelian *Begriff* as a technical term. Here is a sample of some standard criticisms Hegel

makes, which occur intermittently throughout his *Logic* texts:

> What is usually understood by "concepts" are *determinations* of the *understanding*, or even just general *notions* [*Vorstellungen*]; hence such "concepts" are always *finite* determinations (cf. § 62). (*EL* 310/239, § 162 R)

> What are also called concepts, and, to be sure, determinate concepts, e.g. human being, house, animal, and so forth, are simple determinations and abstract representations [*Vorstellungen*], – abstractions that, taking only the moment of universality from the concept, … are thus not developed in themselves and accordingly abstract precisely from the concept. (*EL* 314-15/242, § 164 R)

> The *distinct* concept is supposed to be one whose *mark* [sic. *Merkmale*] can be given. But then it is, strictly speaking, the *determinate concept*. The mark, when taken in its strict signification, is nothing else than the *determinateness* or the simple *content* of the concept in so far as the latter is distinguished from the form of universality. But the *mark* does not quite have at first this more precise meaning; it is generally taken as only a determination by which a *third party* takes note [*merkt*] of a subject matter or of the concept […]. (*WL* II: 290/541-42)

> If we stop at white, red, as representations *of the senses*, then we call concept what is only a determination of pictorial representation [*Vorstellungsbestimmung*]. This is common practice. (*WL* II: 321-22/564)

> [O]n the superficial view of what the concept is all manifoldness falls *outside it*, and only the form of abstract universality or of empty reflective identity stays with it […]. (*WL* II: 260/519)

Some scholars have concluded from such passages that Hegel's "concept" has nothing to do

with concepts in any ordinary sense.[19] However, despite the variety of remarks Hegel makes

in criticism of concepts as traditionally understood, we can isolate a theory of concepts that

seems to lie in the background; I'll call it the *standard model of concepts*. Once we see that

Hegel's criticisms are directed only at a contingent portion of a common but not necessary

view of conceptuality (and thus not at the *core conditions* I stated above), we can see that they

are not critical without remainder.

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[19] Cf. Bowman (2013, 32); Horstmann (2017, 133-34).

In addition to CCs 1-3 (which it must accept as well), what I am calling the standard
model makes several additional assumptions about concepts:

Standard Model of Concepts

(SC 1): *Any general representation is a concept.*[20] Even if a singular concept is considered

possible, a general mental representation is necessarily a concept. If a representation

is sufficient to re-identify something, or identify several things of a type, it is a

concept.

(SC 2): *The content of concepts is a sensible mark or characteristic of several individuals.*[21]

Concepts are classifications that unify sensible material. They are essentially *abstract* in

that they *omit* a number of secondary characteristics of the individuals they classify.

(SC 3): *Conceptual content can be reduced to atomistic primitives.*[22] Concepts derive their

content from the individual marks of the objects they classify, so any relation

between concepts is reducible.

Though Hegel himself complains that authors are often not explicit in their understanding of

concepts,[23] the standard model of concepts can be detected in the same the figures used to

illustrate the core conditions. It is clear from the quotations above that Hegel largely

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[20] See Kant's *Jäsche Logik*, § 1 (Ak. 9: 91), Wolff's *DL*, §§ 28-29, Fries 1811, § 19. In the Leibnizian
tradition, of course, all general representations are concepts *a fortiori*, since all singular representations are
concepts as well.

[21] See Kant 1992, 590 (Ak. 9: 92); A 68/B 93; B 33. See Wolff's characterization in the *Deutsche Logik*, § 4:
"I have a concept of the sun, e.g., when I can represent it in my thought, *either through an image* … or through
mere words by which I can understand *what I perceive of the sun*" (*DL* 123; emphasis added). Wolff gives a basic
account of abstraction in terms of commonality and distinction in *DM* § 286.

[22] This view is explicit in Leibniz (see note 14 above), though it is arguably implicit in Kant's abstraction
theory of concept formation. It also seems implicit in Kant's argument for a special class of "relational"
concepts ("concepts of reflection") in the "Amphiboly" chapter of the first *Critique*. Fries largely adopts Kant's
understanding of the dependence of concepts on intuitions, though intuitions arguably play an even clearer
'foundational' role for Fries, as "immediate representation[s] that are clear on [their] own" (1811, § 5). Clear
intuitions could play the role of primitives for Fries.

[23] "[I]t is not easy to ascertain what others have said about [the concept's] nature. For in general they do
not bother at all enquiring about it but presuppose that everyone already understands what the concept means
when speaking of it." *WL* II: 252/514.

(entirely, I will argue) rejects the special conditions of the standard model of concepts, though this does not entail his rejection of any of the core conditions. Here, I will only try to demonstrate *that* he rejects these additional conditions, without providing a full account of why (since this will depend on working out his alternative).

Hegel's rejection of SC 1, that a concept is *any* general representation, requires the most care. The common interpretation of Hegel's "conceptualism" in light of the influential challenge to "Sense Certainty" in the *Phenomenology* seems to entail that the generality of a meaning or representation is *eo ipso* conceptual. That is, interpreters often gloss Hegel's suggestion that we cannot receive material purely from the senses without the mediating role of general terms like "here," "now," "this," etc., as a claim that sense experience is thoroughly conceptual.[24] Yet this view implies that a general term in thought is alone sufficient to be a concept. Yet as the quotations above indicate, Hegel frequently refuses to consider universals as concepts. He disputes the common practice of designating as concepts any representation that is common to several things: "What are also called concepts, and indeed determinate concepts, for instance, man, house, animal, etc., are simple determinations and abstract representations" (*EL* 324-15/242, § 164R). By "abstract" here, Hegel refers to the fact that the general representation is acquired by *omitting* features found in singular cases of a term (*WL* II: 258/518). A concept is then available, on this view, in any case such a selective omission can be performed with at least two objects. In that case, concepts are both plentiful (since they depend only on perceptible similarities between things) and, in terms of content, superfluous, however useful they may be for keeping track

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[24] DeVries claims, "[I]n the 'Sense-Certainty' chapter of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel gives us an argument to show that we cannot avoid the *this-such*. Every *this* is, in fact, already (if only implicitly) a *this-such*. And thus every *this* is conceptual in a fairly straightforward way" (2008, 68; underline added). I show why this view should be rejected in my (2019), "The Myth of the Taken: Why Hegel is Not a Conceptualist."

of things. For the content of abstract general representations, if not connected with anything additional, are reducible to the content of singular representations. By contrast, Hegel thinks the notion of a concept should be reserved for something that differs in content from what is available in singular intuition. To have a concept of something in addition to a mere representation of something is an achievement of understanding or *comprehending* (*Begreifen*).[25] To have a concept, for Hegel, is to *know* something, not just to possess a reliable ability to classify objects of a certain kind. If so, then our use of concepts is not as common as our thoughts containing general representations, nor our use of words.[26] For this reason, though it is a necessary condition that concepts are universal representations, it is in no way sufficient. Concepts, as achievements of understanding, are rarer in our thought than the standard model permits. Hegel even says that "ordinary life has no concepts, only representations of the imagination [*Vorstellungen*]…" (*WL* II: 406/628).[27] Thus, it is significant to note that Hegel is not attempting to use his concept theory to provide, say, a theory of linguistic meaning or even the involvement of linguistic or representational capacities in ordinary perception.[28]

Assuming SC 1, SC 2 is the most common explanation for what a general representation is: a sensible mark common to several objects. Once Hegel gives up SC 1

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[25] "But the objects of consciousness ought not to remain so simple, ought not to remain representations or abstract thought determinations, but should rather become *conceptualized* [*begriffen*], that is, their simplicity should be determined together with their inner difference" (*WL* II: 291/542). Interestingly, Kant credits only a certain class of concepts, "concepts of reason," with comprehension (*Begreifen*) in contrast to the concepts of understanding (*Verstehen*) involved in mere perception (see A 311/B 367).

[26] The converse relation holds, however: "It is the privilege of philosophy to choose such expressions from the language of ordinary life, which is made for the world of imaginary representations, as *seem to approximate* the determinations of the concept" (*WL* II: 406/628).

[27] See *WL* II: 282-3/536, for an explicit statement of the greater diversity of natural species and the diversity of concepts.

[28] This, of course, points to a problem with readings of Hegel as a "conceptualist" in the philosophy of perception, *à la* John McDowell, who maintains that color terms, for example, correspond to concepts (Hegel rejects this at *WL* II: 320-21/564). From a different angle, Robert Brandom's (1994; 2002) inferentialism proliferates concepts beyond Hegel's allowance by attempting to derive a general theory of linguistic meaning from Hegel. See Hösle (2010) for a similar criticism.

from the standard model, it is clear he does not need SC 2 for its explanation. But Hegel's

rejection of the second special condition goes further than this: Hegel tries to sever the

connection between sensibility and conceptual content at its roots. This is a significant

departure from the standard model, which, even in its non-empiricist versions, tends to

assume that the senses are the starting point for conceptuality. It is, for example, precisely

because of the *anomaly* of their non-sensuous content that Kant has to provide a special

"deduction" for the pure categories of the understanding (even despite their sensuous

application conditions). One of the most unique features of Hegel's theory of conceptuality,

by contrast, is his denial that sensibility has *any direct relation* to conceptual content.[29] Given

that he seems to think generic (non-conceptual) mental representations are sufficient to

represent abstract contents of sense,[30] he thinks concepts proper must, in every case, have

further content than such sense contents.

Along with his rejection of the notion that concepts represent abstract sense-

contents is his rejection of concepts as nominal definitions.[31] Since Locke, nominal

definitions are regarded as classificatory principles that are sufficient to pick out objects

designated by a given name. Nominal definitions are what must be attached to mere words

so they can qualify as concepts under CC 3. Nevertheless, since nominal definitions only

provide criteria to pick out objects that fall under a name, they retain the abstractness

criticized above. Hegel points out that the "marks" (*Merkmale*) given in a nominal definition

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[29] A key word being "direct" because of the circuitous connection between *Vorstellungen* (representations tied to sensibility) and *Begriffe* (cf. *EL* § 1), which allows Hegel to allow (irenically, it seems to me) the doctrine that nothing is in the intellect that is not first in the senses (*EL* § 8R). He characteristically reverses the dictum in the same context, however, emphasizing just as well the priority of the intellect over the sensible. See section 2.3.2. below for discussion.

[30] In logic lectures of 1810/11, Hegel refuses to call apprehension by means of sensation "thinking" (for him a still weaker act than comprehending): "To the extent that we apprehend the sensory manifold, we do not yet think, but rather only the relating of that manifold is thinking. We call the immediate apprehending of the manifold feeling or sensing" (W 4: 163).

[31] See *WL* II: 511-19/706-13 for a systematic context.

are at best only *subjectively sufficient* characteristics for an individual to recognize an object;[32]

they say nothing about that object's nature or essence.[33] Moreover, nominal definitions taken

thus subjectively should consistently differ on the basis of the psychological constitution

required for the object's recognition; with a nominal definition "it is a mere accident, a

historical fact, what is understood by a name" (*WL* II: 303/551). A blind person's "concept"

of a cactus will deal primarily with its prickly and hazardous texture, while mine may also

include its typically green color. Hegel likes to joke that the concept of a human could, *qua*

nominal definition, contain the condition of having ear lobes (e.g., *WL* II: 516/711), since

that is sufficient for us to subjectively distinguish humans from other animals. Such

conditions tell us more about our epistemic needs than they do about the objects falling

under the concept.

Hegel would not, of course, deny that humans possess mental representations

serving just such subjective functions,[34] nor does he deny that sensations are genetically prior

to concepts *per se*. In fact, he admits this specifically:

> Intuition or being are no doubt first in the order of nature, or are the condition for
> the concept, but they are not for all that the unconditioned in and for itself […]. If it
> is not the *truth* which is at issue but only *narration*, as it is the case in pictorial and
> phenomenal thinking, then we might as well stay with the story that we begin with
> feelings and intuitions, and that the understanding then extracts a universal or an
> abstraction from their manifold […]. (*WL* II: 260/519)

There are several purposes a theory of "concepts" might serve. One would be, as Hegel here

intimates, the explanation of cognitive development in *homo sapiens*. While Hegel does not

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[32] "In this view, to abstract means to select from a concrete material *this or that mark, but only for our subjective purposes…*" (*WL* II: 258/518).

[33] This is why Kant can admit that we have nominal definitions yet no "real definitions" (at least of empirical objects), which would represent the nature or essence of something. See Kant 1992b, 634/Ak. 9: 143-44. Significantly, in the same context, Kant affirms that we should "strive" for real definitions concerning morality.

[34] Indeed, he devotes §§ 387-482 ("Subjective Mind") of his *Encyclopedia* to just such issues. See section 2.3.2. below.

deny the value of developing such "narration," he claims that it does little to address an additional purpose a theory of concepts may serve, namely an explanation of the *truth* of cognition. For this purpose, Hegel suggests, the involvement of sense-content in concepts has little to add. Thus, Hegel denies that sensations play a role in conceptual content in terms of its veridical significance.

The final condition (SC 3) added in the standard model claims that conceptual content is built up of primitives that do not involve further conceptual relations. This view is again implicit in the idea that concepts are formed by a process of abstraction from singular, non-conceptual individuals. Hegel criticizes this view when he alludes to the (for him) mistaken view that the content of a concept is always something "outside" it. But more notoriously, Hegel accepts a *holistic* view of conceptual content. Upon rejecting the 'extensional' foundation of conceptual content in mere abstraction, so that all differences in concepts could be reduced to differences in objects, Hegel is barred from an atomistic conception of conceptual content. This, I trust, would not be denied by any reader of Hegel. What remains, then, is form of conceptual holism – a view according to which the content of a concept is at least partly determined by its relation to other concepts. Though it is not easy to define the precise nature of Hegel's holism, it is hard to deny its presence in his thought: "To be sure, any determinate concept is *empty* in so far as it does not contain the totality, but only a one-sided determinateness" (*WL* II: 285/538). Indeed, Hegel suggests that part of what it means to see something *as* conceptual is to be able to connect its abstract form to a more universal unity: "the abstract determinate is posited as one with universality and, for this reason, *not for itself* (for it would then be only a determinate), but, on the contrary, only as the unity of itself and the universal, that is, as concept" (287/540; emphasis added). Thus, it is clear that Hegel's position on conceptuality demands at the very least that

concepts stand in relations to each other, and that these relations are significant for conceptual content – not merely for our ability, say, to *discriminate* conceptual content. By contrast, though the standard model can certainly allow conceptual relations, the content that originally constitutes these concepts must be found in object-based qualities, not in relations. At best, a proponent of the standard model could admit that concepts have 'subjectively contrastive' relations to each other: by this, one might maintain that someone is subjectively unable to have a concept <*white*> (an example Hegel, for one, would not recognize as conceptual) unless one has another term or terms, say <*black*> or <*orange*>, which can be contrasted with it. But this does not mean that the latter terms are involved in the *content* of <*white*>, since that content remains an abstraction of just those individuals it classifies. On this view, relations would be contingent and subjectively useful features of concepts that play no positive role in giving them content. Instead, Hegel will claim that part of what makes some term a concept is the way that it is related to other concepts. This claim is involved in the central Hegelian notion of "negativity," as we will see below.

I have argued that Hegel rejects *all* the special conditions from the standard model of conceptuality.[35] Yet this does not yet entail a rejection of any of the core conditions on concepts. Hegel's critical comments about common treatments of concepts should not be thought to entail a lack of interest in concepts *per se*, as specified in the core conditions.

It is worth noting, however, that it is often unclear which model of concepts Hegel has in mind when he makes critical remarks using certain *concept words*. For example, while in

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[35] It is worth noting that, in rejecting these special conditions, Hegel's theory of concepts looks much closer to Frege's than many of his contemporaries and predecessors. Though in his allowing any predicate to express a concept Frege's view of concepts is still more general than Hegel's, the two share an interest in suspending any psychological issues in speaking of concepts. Frege's view also has no need to refer to abstraction of qualities from objects, since it begins at the level of the sentence. See especially "Thought" in Frege (1997). See Pippin (2018, 69-72; 129-34) for some differences between Hegel's and Frege's view.

some contexts, Hegel can refer to concepts like <*human being*> and <*animal*> as mere

abstract representations (e.g, *EL*, § 164 R), he can elsewhere treat them as genuine

components of his conceptual system of philosophy (cf. *EG* § 387R; *EN* § 350).[36] This

linguistic ambiguity is regrettable but not blameworthy. For if Hegel rejects the notion that

all general representations are concepts, then being a common noun, for example, won't

suffice to qualify a term as a concept, *even if its proper content would do so*. In short, since a term

is a concept in virtue of how it is *understood*, it is natural that some words would signify

genuine concepts in some contexts and not in others. For this reason, we should not

conclude from Hegel's occasional dismissive remarks about certain general representations

that they cannot designate genuine concepts in other contexts, unless we find a principled

reason for doing so (as we do, for example, when it comes to color words). Nor should we

conclude from Hegel's rejection of the standard model that he is uninterested in concepts in

a manner consistent with the core conditions.

2.1.3. The Concept or Concepts?

The preceding section provides negative evidence to support the claim that Hegel's

work is concerned with concepts in a recognizable sense,[37] given that his criticisms of

concepts do not touch the core conditions. Yet there is a more notorious obstacle in the way

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[36] Hegel shows that he does not wish to confine the relevance of the concept and other logical terms to what is discussed explicitly in the *Logic* when he writes, "Philosophical thinking in general still deals with concrete subject matters, with God, Nature, Spirit; but logic occupies itself exclusively with these thoughts as thought, in complete abstraction by themselves" (*WL* I: 23/14).

[37] One criteria to bear in mind in assessing whether a term is functioning as a term of art or technical term is whether its user evinces *disagreement* with other users of the term on its meaning (sense or reference). If I am merely *stipulating* a usage, I do not have to criticize your usage of the same word token, just remind you that our usage differs. The weight of evidence, which will be explored below, suggests that Hegel *disagrees* with Kant and other interlocuters about concepts. If so, then this weighs against a consideration (perhaps decisively) of his usage as technical term. I discuss this issue further below in 2.1.4.

of my interpretation. For Hegel more frequently speaks of "*the* concept" rather than

"concepts," and his manner of doing so has led many to suppose that this usage differs in

reference quite significantly. We already saw that such a view can recommend itself from

Hegel's texts in passages like the following:

> Instead, the concept is what truly comes first, and things are what they are through the activity of the concept that dwells in them and reveals itself in them [*die Tätigkeit des ihnen innewohnenden und in ihnen sich offenbarenden Begriffs*]…[T]hought and, more precisely, the concept, is the infinite form or the free, creative activity that does not in need a material at hand outside it in order to realize itself. (*EL* 313/241/§ 163 Z2)

The context of this passage includes an analogy to divine creation as well, strengthening its

other-worldly impression. Such passages have led commentators like Charles Taylor (1977,

300) to say things like the following about Hegel's *Begriff*:

> Our basic ontological vision is that the Concept underlies everything as the inner necessity that deploys the world, and that our conceptual knowledge is derivative from this. We are the vehicles whereby this underlying necessity comes to its equally necessary self-consciousness. Hence the concept in our subjective awareness is the instrument of the self-awareness of the Concept as the source and basis of all, as cosmic necessity. But if this is so, then the concept in our minds must on closer examination turn out to function like the Concept at the root of reality.

If we compare Taylor's description here with what we find just above, we can admit that

Taylor does not present a textually implausible interpretation. There are apparently some

good textual reasons to suspect that Hegel's use of "concept" (*Begriff*) is equivocal vis-à-vis

standard usage in philosophical German, which satisfies the core conditions.[38] The

impression made by such texts can be so strong that to dissolve it completely will require the

remainder of this dissertation.

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[38] The alternative, closer to the reading I endorse, which sees "the concept" as standing for something like the whole conceptual framework, the totality of concepts, etc. is rarely *argued for* against its rival views (See, for example, McDowell (2009, 86)). Other proponents of this not (or not fully technical) reading include Hartmann (1999, 293), "…the conception [of the concept] can and must contain [*erfassen*] what is normally meant by 'concept.'" However, some, especially Brandom (2002), take the ordinariness of the Hegelian concept too far and do not take his criticisms of the standard model (discussed above) seriously enough. For a critique of such a position (which in my view goes too far in a different direction), see Hösle (2010).

At this time, I will only mention the metaphysical weight placed on the singular use, as we can already see in an interpretation like Taylor's. Indeed, many interpreters detect behind Hegel's singular use a title for the object of a monistic metaphysics. Though Hegel may also speak of this "One" as "the absolute," or "spirit," or "God," on this reading, he also uses "the concept" to express, they would say, the logical structure behind the metaphysical One, which realizes itself in actuality.[39] As Bowman writes, "'Concept' denotes a *singulare tantum*, the unique 'entity' whose various modifications and degrees of manifestation constitute the whole of reality. Thus, Hegel is clearly not using the term 'Concept' to mean what we ordinarily mean by it…" (2013, 32). Such "metaphysical" readings tend to read Hegel's discussion of the concept as the introduction of a subjective or logical element into a metaphysical theory that otherwise looks much like Spinoza's or Schelling's.[40] In Hegel's own words (which this reading is likely to take literally), the concept would be something like the logical structure of God "*as he is in his eternal essence*" prior to material creation (*WL* I: 44/29).[41] As Taylor said, the concept "underlies everything as the inner necessity that deploys the world." The Concept is the logical "subject" behind the absolute "substance."

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[39] For example, Mure's (1974, 4) description is basically the same as Taylor's given above, except it substitutes "Absolute Spirit" for "concept": "[T]he universe is the single dialectical activity of Absolute Spirit, and the individual thinker is an integral element, a constituent phase, of its self-developing activity. It constitutes him, and he goes to constitute it. … [The individual's] philosophizing will not be a comment *ab extra* on the universe but a pulse of its activity."

[40] See Beiser (2005, 55-79) for a prominent recent exposition of Hegel's metaphysics along these lines. For example: "Yet, for Hegel, there was no choice but to transform Spinoza's substance into a living organism…" (95). Beiser does not, however, place much stress on the concept in his account, which he interprets simply as the "formal-final cause" of things (ibid., 67; 81). See also Limnatis (2008, 265), "In Hegel's system, reality is the Concept in itself."

[41] How one reads this passage is indeed an acid test of one's whole approach to Hegel's *Logic*. It should always be bore in mind, however, that Hegel prefaces this remark with "*Man kann sich deswegen ausdrücken…*" ("One can therefore express it…"), indicating, plausibly, that he means this as an optional mode of expression (Glockner (1924, 52 n. 2), for one, states that the remark "should in fact not be taken literally." Hegel often notes the inter-translatability of conceptual and pictorial language: it is likely that he is offering a pictorial version of the abstract expression preceding the phrase "truth as it is in and for itself" (*WL* I: 44/29). Nevertheless, nothing can be settled by such passages on their own, independent of one's overall interpretation of the *Logic*.

Such readings are not likely to be based primarily on what Hegel says in the "formal" portion of the *Doctrine of the Concept* (where, I venture, they would garner little support), but rather from placing suggestive remarks about "the concept" into a more general framework for Hegel's metaphysics accepted from elsewhere. Doing so requires, of course, a comprehensive re-interpretation of Hegel's ordinary-sounding terminology of "concept," "judgment," and "syllogism."[42] Yet despite Hegel's notorious obscurity as a writer, his intention was always to draw his vocabulary from ordinary German (as we saw in 1.3.1.). Speaking of the philosophical value of German (and ordinary language in general), he writes, "Philosophy, therefore, stands in no need of special terminology" (*WL* I: 21/12). Though Hegel is not faithful to this practice in every case,[43] metaphysical readings of "the Concept" would have hard time admitting evidence of any continuity between Hegel's and a core conception of concepts. But Hegel frequently affirms such continuity in this case specifically: "[T]he concept as deduced here should in principle be recognized in whatever else is adduced as such a concept" (*WL* II: 252/514). And: "[H]owever great the distance between the concept of formal logic and the speculative concept may be, a more careful consideration will still show that the deeper significance of the concept is in no way so alien to general linguistic usage as it might seem to be at first sight" (*EL* 308/237, § 160Z). While I will not attempt to directly refute the above metaphysical approaches to the concept, the failure of such approaches to accommodate remarks of this kind seems serious evidence against them.

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[42] Cf. again McTaggart (1910, 190): "And when we examine the categories which have the titles of Notion, Judgment, and Syllogism, it is evident that, in spite of their names, they do not apply only to the states of our minds, but to all reality."

[43] For example, Hegel admits that he uses "*Idee*" (as Kant and Schelling did) differently than ordinary usage, so his rule is not without exceptions. Cf. *WL* II: 463/671.

However, it is true that the metaphysically monist reading of "the concept" is reassured by the term's apparent linguistic role as a *singulare tantum*.[44] That is, it looks as if Hegel uses "the concept" in such a way that it cannot be pluralized without a change in meaning. Sometimes, this appears to be the case only because Hegel uses "the concept" as a *generic*, like the word "the horse" in the sentence "the horse is a four-legged mammal."[45] In such contexts, the singular forms stands in for the plural. This usage often sounds antiquated today, but it was common practice in Hegel's German. Still, this explanation does not work in many cases. There are indeed a few clear references that indicate that Hegel sees *der Begriff* as functioning as uniquely singular. For example, in the preface to the second edition of the *WL* he writes, "But *a* concept is also, first of all, *the* concept, and this concept is only one concept, the substantial foundation…" (*WL* I: 29-30/19; underlined).[46] This passage confirms the relevance of the singular use of "the" concept in as strong terms as can be hoped.

What most concerns the present interpretation is whether such a singular usage *excludes* relevance to concepts in the plural. That would contravene my claim that Hegel respects the "core conditions" on concepts. In fact, the quotation just provided indicates the opposite. For it *identifies* "*a* concept" (and presumably *each* concept) with "*the* concept," rather than *eliminating* (or ignoring) the former vis-à-vis the latter. Hegel speaks here of "the concept" as the foundation for concepts in the plural without suggesting that the two uses

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[44] A *singulare tantum* is a noun without a plural form, à la "the air" or the Marxian use of "*das Kapital*." Cf. Fulda (1978, 132): "…am Ende der ganzen Untersuchung metaphysicher Grundbegriffe werde der ontologische Anspruch nur noch in Bezug auf einen *einzigen Gegenstand* [sc. der Begriff/das Subjekt]… aufrecht erhalten;…" Emphasis added. Sans (2004, 25): "Die eigentliche Hürde für das Verständnis der Rede vom formellen Begriff bildet die durchgängige Verwendung des Ausdrucks im Singular."

[45] As in the following passage, where Kant is discussed: "One should that expect in reason…the concept would lose the conditionality with which is still appears at the stage of the understanding […]" (*WL* II: 261/520)

[46] Cf. also, "On the contrary, it is false to speak of concepts of diverse sorts, for the concept as such, although concrete, is still essentially one…" (*EL* 317/245, § 166Z).

differ wholly in reference. Whatever Hegel means by "the" concept does not preclude his interest in concepts.

What, then, is "the concept"? I will state my interpretative conclusions baldly for now; they will be developed in more detail in section (2.2.). When Hegel speaks of the concept he refers to the active and evasive power of thought which is the source of any specific concept.[47] "The concept" is a name given metonymically to this power – it names the whole by means of the part; in this case, the product of the 'power' in question, namely particular concepts. I call this power "evasive" in the sense that Hegel often speaks of negativity: the concept is the aspect of thought that refuses to be bound to what is given.[48] This is the reason that Hegel introduced his special usage – in an initially *critical* gesture to Kant and Fichte – as the "absolute concept."[49] If thought contains a component that is not bound to the given, then it is "negative" with respect to the given, and so unconditioned by it – hence the "negative Absolute" (W 2: 470/83). Though this power is unified and singular, it is also the power at work in *any* deliverance of conceptual content, insofar as such content is similarly unconditioned by what is given.[50] Hence, when he refers to this power in the singular as "the concept", this does not discount that particular ("determinate") exercises of

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[47] Cf. "The universal is therefore *free* power [*Macht*]" (*WL* II: 277/532). The universal, I will argue below, is sometimes used as equivalent to the singular concept, e.g., "the concept, the universal which is thought itself…" (*WL* I: 26/17)

[48] In my view, what Hegel calls "the concept" (in particular its "universal" moment) is *both* the "understanding" and "reason." Understanding uses the creative and free power of thought to *fix* conceptual distinctions – something Hegel sees as necessary – while reason for Hegel is the free use of thought to move and disrupt such distinctions once made. Cf. *WL* II: 287/539-40, where this view is laid out rather clearly.

[49] "Now if the unity of practical reason were not this positive unity of perception, but had only the negative meaning of annihilating anything specific, it would then simply express *the essence of negative reason or of infinity, or the absolute Concept*" (W 2: 468/82; emphasis added). Cf. Wolf (2017) for further discussion of Hegel's early view of the concept, as well as 5.3.1. below.

[50] To this extent, the significance of this passage seems compatible with the philosophical upshot of McDowell (1994). What I will go on to reject in McDowell's approach, and Pippin's therewith, is the notion that any such contentful uptake from experience should count as conceptual in Hegel's precise sense. See, however, 4.2. below for my way of accommodating the insights of the McDowell/Pippin approach.

this synthesis merit the name "concept" in the proper sense.[51] Each particular concept "is"

this singular power. Moreover, to avoid any confusion, the unity or sameness of this power

is analogous to the way that "metabolism" is a single or unified force: there is "one"

metabolism in terms of type, not number. It would be creepy and misleading to speak of a

single metabolism being "deployed" in a plurality of organic bodies, as if bodies were 'hosts'

of a singular force. Similarly, the "same" singular concept is not "deployed" through the

plurality of concept-users.

On my view, then, Hegel's "concept" satisfies CC 1 – concepts as contents of *thought*

– to the upmost degree, since this metonymical usage is Hegel's very way of speaking of

thought's most proper activity.[52] In doing so, of course, Hegel turns away from the merely

passive and abstractive view of concepts in the standard model, which would make them

dependent on the given. In this, my view may seem to verge on the Kantian interpretation of

the Hegelian concept, especially that offered by Robert Pippin (1989ff.). Pippin's work was

revolutionary for its emphasis on the connection Hegel himself draws between his

"concept" and the Kantian "transcendental unity of apperception." The Hegelian concept

was the same power of "synthesis" that Kant claimed was responsible for the "analytical

unity" of any concept (B 133-44). In a quotation from the Introduction to the *Doctrine of the

Concept* (which has, thanks to Pippin, become virtually anthemic), Hegel writes:

> It is one of the profoundest and truest insights to be found in the Critique of Reason
> that the *unity* which constitutes the *essence of the concept* is recognized as the *original
> synthetic* unity *of apperception*, the unity of the "*I think*" or of self-consciousness. (*WL*
> II: 254/515)

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[51] This issue converges on Hegel's distinction between understanding (*Verstand*) and reason (*Vernunft*).
Hegel insights that the two cannot be separated. The understanding is material for reason, and reason is the
living unit of this material: "The understanding is taken to be the faculty of the *determinate* concept which is held
fixed *for itself* by virtue of abstraction and the form of universality. But in reason the *determinate* concepts are
posited in their *totality* and *unity*" (*WL* II:../588).

[52] Cf., "the concept which is the highest form of thought [*das Höchste des Denkens*]" (*WL* II: 253/514).

Hegel thus seems to identify his "concept" with the synthetic unity of apperception; he says as much explicitly just prior: "True, I *have* concepts, that is, determinate concepts; but the 'I' is the pure concept itself, the concept that has come into *determinate existence*" (*WL* II: 253/514).

Pippin's take on these passages, however, leads him to separate Hegelian "Notions" from philosophical concepts more than the present interpretation will allow. Though he is not as explicit on this as one may like, Pippin seems to reserve "Notion" for the specific concepts discussed in the *WL* itself: concepts such as *<becoming>*, *<essence>*, and *<life>*.[53] These he understands as similar to Kantian categories as conditions for possible judgments, and hence any empirical uptake. Only Hegelian "Notions" differ in that they are not static, and they are defined mutually.[54] We can see how closely Pippin conceives the Hegelian to the Kantian project in a passage such as the following:

> And, as I have been stressing, Notions have this [sc. empirically unrevisable] status for basically Kantian reasons, because for Hegel, the issue of the "determinations of any possible object" (the classical Aristotelian category issue) has been critically transformed into the issue of the "determinations of any object of a possibly self-conscious judgment." (Pippin 1989, 250)

Pippin maintains the Kantian orientation toward empirical knowledge, but he thinks Hegel's revision involves denying the concept-intuition distinction, so that the conceptual involvement with experience is completely saturated.

Pippin allows, as I do, that Hegel uses "*Begriff*" both for the single synthetic power of thought as well as for some particular concepts, but his orientation lies significantly in the "formal" dimension of "conditions for the possibility" of objects of judgment, rather than

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[53] McDowell (2009, 85) similarly criticizes Pippin for the close proximity between his view of Hegelian "Notions" and Kantian categories.

[54] "[Be]ing able to understand and being able to argue plausibly for the legitimacy of some putatively absolute, isolated 'Notional' candidate can be shown to fail unless that original Notion is supplemented and expanded in some way by the understanding of another such Notion […]" (Pippin 1989, 233).

the object-oriented approach to Hegel's concepts I will later advocate. In contrast to my own

approach, Pippin's struggles (as does the metaphysical approach) to explain how Hegel can

think his use of "concept" is "recognized in whatever else is adduced as such a concept"

(*WL* II: 252/514). Why restrict the term only to the bare syntax of experience, rather than

free it to the realm of content it embraces in philosophy, where we speak of the concepts of

law, *knowledge*, and *mind*? Insofar as Pippin admits that "Notions" are contents of thought

represented by language, his interpretation satisfies the core conditions I have set down, but

he cannot account for the fully-blooded use that Hegel himself makes of the term.[55]

2.1.4. Historical Disputes about Conceptuality

Before moving on to discuss Hegel's positive view of conceptual content, it will be

useful to give one further and somewhat independent line of confirmation that his usage of

the concept is non-equivocal vis-à-vis the core conditions on conceptuality. This line of

thought concerns Hegel's interaction with his philosophical predecessors on concepts. It

seems to me that commentators who have been willing to set apart Hegel's usage of "the

concept" have not sufficiently realized that the introduction of a term as a technical term

should involve no dispute with those who use the term differently; yet Hegel frequently

disputes the understanding of his philosophical predecessors when it comes to concepts. If

Hegel was using "the concept" to refer, say, to God's mind or the logical structure of the

world, this would not involve the conflict we see in his engagement with other philosophers,

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[55] Non-metaphysical readings of Hegel in general have been accused of being inadequate on textual grounds. Pippin's in particular is criticized on this score by Ameriks (1992), Siep (1991), Pinkard (1990), and Stern (2008, 2009). Pippin's (2015; 2018) recent attempt to deal with the apparently neo-Platonic "self-productive" connotations of the Hegelian *Begriff* merely in terms of his supposed denial of the concept-intuition dualism continues to be highly unsatisfying. See 4.4. below for my own solution.

since these philosophers (at least the ones I am considering) did not use the term in any such way. The fact that he does dispute with them suggests that he considers their views to engage with a common subject matter. These disputes do not undermine but rather confirm my thesis that Hegel uses the term consistently with the core conditions.

An illuminating context to illustrate this point comes from Hegel's discussion of Francis Bacon in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. The reference is not as obscure as it may seem. For it was Bacon, as the father of modern empiricism, who attempted to rid natural philosophy as much as possible of "notions" which merely anticipated sense-experience but inevitably misrepresented it.[56] Depicting Bacon's view, Hegel writes:

> Knowledge from experience, reasoning from it, stands in opposition to knowledge from the concept, from the speculative; and the opposition is apprehended in so acute a manner that the knowledge from the concept is ashamed of the knowledge from experience, while the latter is turned against the knowledge through the concept. (*VGP* III: 78/175; modified)

Hegel sees Bacon as attempting to articulate a consistent empiricism that would not be founded on anything outside sense-data. Were that to be possible, Bacon would be right to conclude that true empirical knowledge would demand suspension of all concepts, since the conceptual brings in "anticipations" not purely present is sensory experience. To a degree, Hegel and Bacon agree that concepts are non-sensory or non-aesthetic (in Kant's sense); the difference, of course, is that while Bacon therefore disqualifies concepts for acting as the foundation of empirical science, Hegel does not. Even still, Hegel can seamlessly use his own term "the concept," consistent with its use in the *Logic*, to stand in for what Bacon meant by "notions."

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[56] As he writes in the *Great Instauration*: "[T]he primary notions of things which the mind readily and passively imbibes, stores up, and accumulates (and it from them that all the rest flow) are false, confused, and over hastily abstracted from the facts. Nor are the secondary and subsequent notions less arbitrary and inconstant." Bacon (1999 [1620]), 66. In the *New Organon* (the main part of the same work), he writes bluntly: "There is no soundness in our notions whether logical or physical. … All are fantastical and ill defined." (ibid., 91, Book I, Aphorism 15).

Hegel's criticism leaves Bacon's understanding of "notions" largely intact but adds that Bacon is wrong to have assumed (as Hegel understands him) that empirical science can get on without its non-sensory conceptual apparatus. Interestingly, he does not, like some contemporary Hegelians, harp on conceptuality as a mere necessary condition for the kind of pure sensory experience Bacon wants to make this point;[57] he appeals rather to the role of concepts in producing the scientific framework that makes observation intelligible. As Hegel continues,

> The empirical approach [*Empirie*] is not merely an observing, hearing, feeling, etc., a perception of the singular; for it essentially sets out to find the species, the universal, to discover laws. And since it produces such things, it coincides with the territory of the concept – it generates what belongs to the soil of the idea, of the concept… (79/176; modified)[58]

Though Hegel would not fully endorse Bacon's specific understanding of "notions," his own understanding of concepts is meant precisely to *correct* Bacon's view, in order to defend the role of concepts in empirical science. Moreover, Hegel's defense of concepts in natural science would be completely ineffectual in this context if the target of the apology differed from the target of allegation.

The same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for Hegel's extended discussion of Kant's theory of concepts at the beginning of the *Doctrine of the Concept*. The introduction to that book consists in an extended discussion of the Kantian view of concepts. There he disputes Kant's attempt

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[57] Thus do the views of McDowell (1994, 2009) and Pippin (1989 et al.) suggest, along with standard conclusions drawn from the "Sense-Certainty" chapter of the *Phenomenology* (see, e.g., deVries 2008). See Wolf (2019) for a criticism of this "conceptualist" view.

[58] See also: "In part, all these champions of experience after him [Bacon] who carried out what he longed for, and from observations, experiments, and experiences believed to get at the thing itself [*die Sache selbst*] purely, could do this neither without concepts nor syllogisms; they conceptualized and syllogized about so poorly that they thought they had nothing to do with concepts but transcended inference for immanent, true cognition" (*VGP* III: 83/180-1; heavily modified). Bacon sees syllogisms as only combinations of words, and principles derived from syllogisms as misleading except where constructed on the basis of true induction (*New Organon*, Book I, aphorisms 13, 14, 17). Hegel's explicit defense of *der Begriff* (as well as correction of Bacon on syllogisms) lies just at the point of Bacon's criticism.

to make conceptual content depend on sense experience, which, for Hegel, amounts to separating concepts from truth. As he understands it, Kant's view entails that "*reality* lies *absolutely* outside *the concept*" (*WL* II: 263-66/522-23 and *passim*). It is hard to see what the point of such a complaint would be if it did not assume a background agreement about what "the concept" is. The fact that Hegel credits Kant – who made modifications, but conservative ones, to conceptual theory – with both and negative contributions in the understanding of concepts is a good indication that Hegel's "concept" is not so far from standard philosophical usage. There is plenty of uniqueness in Hegel's theory of concepts, but nothing which disqualifies it from pertaining to a common subject matter of other treatments. Hegel's *critique* of some standard theories of concepts is not a rejection of the terms of the debate. I have just argued that this would make his critique all but unintelligible.

However, one last historical issue should be mentioned. As true as it is that Hegel is involved in a controversy with historical philosophers about concepts, he does think that the modern era in a sense "discovered" the concept. Since philosophers before modern times discussed concepts as well, mustn't Hegel mean something historically specific or otherwise idiosyncratic by "concept"? Such historically oriented passages should rather be understood in Hegel's acceptance of a key feature of the Kantian revolution: that much of what was once perceived as found in the object is now recognized as the work of the subject. As he says with respect to the "essence" of something, "that essence can only be the concepts that we have of the things" (*WL* I: 25/16). Though pre-critical philosophy recognized concepts, according to Kant and then Hegel following him, they often failed to credit concepts where

they played an active role.[59] "Recent German philosophy" is the era of the concept because of its self-consciousness about the latter, not its invention of it.

2.2. Hegel's Account of Conceptual Form

I have just argued that when Hegel writes a "Doctrine of the Concept," we should take him at his word. Book III of the *Science of Logic* (and related texts) indeed concern Hegel's theory of concepts, in a related and rival sense to other such "doctrines." Moreover, Hegel's notorious singular use of "concept," though not interchangeable for the pluralized form, only thematizes the "power" that Hegel sees active in the use of particular concepts. Hence, it presents no threat to my contention that Hegel's *Begriffslehre* is not based on an equivocation.

The ground is now cleared to present a positive account of the "formal" element of Hegel's theory of concepts – a task needed to understand what conceptual "content" could be. I should note here that this account of conceptual form will still not itself be sufficient to relieve all suspicion about the metaphysical import of Hegel's conceptual theory. That relief depends on addressing the metaphysical issues head on, and that is fodder for later chapters. In this chapter, I will simply try to make sense of Hegel's concept of the concept now assuming that it can satisfy the core conditions. I will also put off for now discussing the relation of the theory of the concept from the "Subjective Logic" (Book III) to what precedes it in the "Objective Logic" (Books I and II), a discussion needed to help

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[59] Cf. Hegel's remark about the developmentally early stage of perception in the *Phenomenology*: "[C]onsciousness has not yet grasped its *concept* as *concept*. […] However consciousness is not yet for itself the concept, and it thus does not recognize itself in that reflected object" (*PG* 108/79, § 132). See Emundts (2013, Ch. IV) for a detailed discussion of the gradual transition in the *Phenomenology*'s discussion of force (*Kraft*) from something conceived to be resident in things to something explicitly acknowledged as conceptual. This development is, Emundts argues, characteristic of the transition from Newton to Kant (222).

disambiguate the metaphysical significance of "the concept" (see Ch. 3). Before getting to

that, I want to make it seem likely that Hegel's account *could* relate a theory of conceptual

content in a philosophically recognizable sense.

In the previous chapter, I gave several indications of the German rationalists' theory

of conceptual form, and recalling a few features of that theory may help provide background

to the present discussion. As we saw, the rationalists saw all conceptual content in terms of

containment relations. A concept "contains" a sub-concept just in case the predicative sub-

concept is always true of the subject concept. Moreover, a predicate's being "true" of a

subject concept required that the predicate concept is *identical* to a component concept of the

subject – this required every object to be conceived as a complete concept. This identity-

based theory of conceptual content was used to explain the truth of any judgment on a

common formal basis. If we use "conceptual form" to refer to what is common to any

content that a concept,[60] then conceptual form, for the rationalists, is an identity relation

between a subject and predicate. Where such a relation did not obtain, neither did genuine

conceptual content. The rationalists would not distinguish fundamentally, as we saw,

between singular concepts and general ones. Instead, the distinction lies in the completeness

of the containment relationship.

A classic critique of Hegel maintains that he involves himself in metaphysical

absurdities by accepting this "identity theory" of concepts (and then of true judgments) just

as the rationalists did.[61] Though this criticism is mistaken to the extent that it regards this

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[60] Hegel is not very explicit on what he takes conceptual form to be, but this "variable" conception must be close to what he has in mind, given the focus on terms like "universal," "particular," and "singular," which do not specify any definite content, but a content that can applied variously. Hegel objects to an *absolute* distinction between logical form and content, but this is because he thinks that specifying a concept's role as universal or singular, for example, is logical content (even if it is also logical form). See *WL* II: 317/562.

[61] This is the specific point which Bertrand Russell takes as "an example of how, for want of care at the start, vast and imposing systems of philosophy are built upon stupid and trivial confusions, but for the almost

identity theory as Hegel's general theory of truth in an ordinary sense (as it was for the

rationalists), I believe it is correct with respect to Hegel's theory of conceptual form. In fact,

I will argue that Hegel largely accepts the rationalist theory for concepts properly so called.

Hegel's innovation (following Kant, in part) will be to show that much that we call a concept

or judgment does not obey proper conceptual form, so that all of our knowledge is not – as

the rationalists maintained – purely conceptual. Nevertheless, Hegel suggests that the proper

understanding of conceptual form is necessary to understand certain types of knowledge.

2.2.1. The Unity of Conceptual Form

Relative to Hegel's overall project in the *Doctrine of the Concept*, the theory of

conceptual form therein plays a decidedly preliminary role. The treatment of conceptual

form stands under the heading of "subjective concept" to distinguish it from conceptual

content that has proven to be truly objective:

> *At first*, the concept is only *implicitly* the truth; because it is only something *inner*, it is
> equally *only something outer*. … The shape of the *immediate* concept constitutes the
> standpoint that makes the concept a subjective thinking, a reflection external to the
> *subject matter*. (*WL* II: 270/526-7)

This is not at all unique to Hegel. Any theory of concepts must be at first neutral in terms of

content that is genuine or not. It must make intelligible how there could be both adequate

and inadequate concepts. Nevertheless, Hegel ascribes great significance to abstract

conceptual form, for, as he writes, "The *formal* concept makes itself into something

substantive [*Sache*] by virtue of the necessary determination of its form, and it thereby sheds

the relation of subjectivity and externality that it had to that matter" (*WL* II: 271/527;

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incredible fact that they are unintentional, one would be tempted to characterize as puns" (quoted in Pippin
(1996 [1978]), 241-42). From Russell's "On Logic as the Essence of Philosophy."

modified). The implication here is that conceptual form 'has what it needs' for a non-subjective expression of conceptual content. We thus cannot understand Hegel's conception of the objectivity of conceptual content without understanding his theory of conceptual form.[62]

I said above that Hegel follows the rationalists to the extent that he conceives of conceptual form as involving an *identity* relation. This identity relation is what Hegel calls truth: "an identity of concept and thing which is the *truth*" (*WL* II: 262/521). Famously, however, Hegel scorns conceptions of identity which involve empty tautologies, like Schelling's tortuous attempt to give the formula "A = A" some interesting metaphysical sense. Instead, the identity involved in conceptual form is the unity of three "moments" or overlapping features of the concept: universality (*Allgemeinheit*), particularity (*Besonderheit*), and singularity (*Einzelheit*).[63] Here, of course, Hegel seems simply to conform terminologically to a long-standing philosophical tradition, preserved up to Kant.[64] What distinguishes Hegel's account is his attempt to show the relationship between these three formal terms. A common view, both in Hegel's day and our own, is that the relationship between the universal, particular, and singular is essentially *quantitative* (or "extensional"): a concept or judgment with *universal* scope applies to *all* of an extension, one with a *particular* scope applies to *some* (merely *less than* the universal), while a singular concept or judgment applies only to one (cf. *WL* II: 295/545). Considered thus extensionally, <*dog*> is a particular concept with

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[62] It is noteworthy that a tendency in "conceptual realist" readings of Hegel is virtually to ignore (or inadequately interpret) Hegel's discussion of conceptual form. Thus in recent readings such as Bowman (2013) and Kreines (2015), almost no attention is given to the passages I am commenting on. Even non-traditional readings (like Pippin 2018) do not pay much attention to the specific treatment of conceptual form.

[63] A conceptual "moment" can be identified in three different ways: "each of the moments is just as much the *whole* concept as it is *determinate concept* and *a determination* of the concept" (*WL* II: 273/529). Hegel speaks of the "identity of the *concept*" as the "*inner or subjective* essence" of these determinations (271/527).

[64] Kant takes universal and particular to mark a difference in *use* (cf. *Jäsche Logik* § 16). However, in context this seems to mean that this is not an intrinsic feature of concepts, but connected only to their relations. Primarily, these terms are the quantities of *judgment*, of course (*Jäsche Logik* § 21; A 70/B 95).

respect to <*mammal*>, which is more universal, while <*Fido*> is a singular since it is restricted to one case. The only principled relationship between the terms is a numerical overlap.

This quantitative model of conceptual form fits perfectly the "standard model" that Hegel so thoroughly criticizes, for, just as that model emphasizes, universal conceptual content involves a mere omission of detail from singular objects. A concept refers to *more* by saying *less*.[65] By contrast, Hegel's account of conceptual form is intended to make it plausible that concepts have content apart from mere abstraction. I will summarize in advance the claim that I take Hegel to be making. Hegel thinks a properly developed concept has content when in it the formal moments of universality, particular, and singularity are unified: call this the "unity of form" thesis. More specifically, this unity of form occurs if and when an object (= singular) qualifies under a type (= universal) in virtue of a differentiating principle (= particular). Hegel's innovation lies in his realization that conceptual content requires the unity, even identity, of each aspect of conceptual form, but also that much that we call conceptual does not involve this "unity of form." Though "concepts" as mere general classifications are possible when only two of the above moments are unified – typically singular objects and general types – Hegel is arguing that a concept can (putatively) "comprehend" an object only when it also expresses a differentiating principle, what he calls particularity. Hegel's emphasis on a concept's particularity is one of the distinguishing features of his view from the standard model. In essence, particularity for Hegel is the formal role for the *criterion* that qualifies an object to fall under a concept – something lacking in the standard model's quantitative conception of conceptual form. Much of what

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[65] "The content and extension of a concept stand in inverse relation to one another. The more a concept contains *under* itself, namely, the less it contains *in* itself, and conversely" (Kant, *Jäsche Logik*, § 7/Ak. 9: 95/1992a, 593).

we call "conceptual" does not qualify for Hegel on the grounds that a rational principle is not united with its singular and universal form.

The textual progression of the "Subjectivity" chapter of the *Begriffslogik* (where the "formal concept" is discussed), accordingly, moves in two directions. It first attempts to show that, properly constituted, the three moments of conceptual form are united, that a definite concept displays them all seamlessly. It then attempts to show how specific forms of judgment – and thus articulations of conceptual content – fail to express such unity. We can see the first direction in the following quotation:

> It follows that each of the determinations established in the preceding exposition of the concept [sc. universality, particularity, singularity] has immediately dissolved itself and has lost itself in its other. *Each distinction is confounded in the course of the very reflection that should isolate it and hold it fixed.* (*WL* II: 298-99/548; emphasis added)

Yet after expressing the dissolution of the distinction of these formal moments, Hegel writes in discussing the judgment,

> The immanently reflected determinations [sc. universality, particular, singularity] are *determinate totalities* that <u>are just as much in an essentially disconnected subsistence, indifferent to each other,</u> as they through mediation with each other […]. As contrasted to the predicate, the subject can at first be taken, therefore, as the singular over against the universal, or also as the particular over against the universal, or the singular over against the particular […]. (302/550-51; modified; underline added)

The judgment, Hegel says, "has not yet restored itself to the unity through which it exists *as* concept…" (306/552). Hence, in the judgment, the distinct moments of conceptual form remain distinct. This is evident especially in what Kant called "synthetic judgments," where we can easily distinguish the role played by the "singular" term, which refers to an intuition, from the predicative role of the "universal" concept. Hegel would say that such judgments display a "contradiction" between subject and predicate, singular and universal (cf. *WL* II: 310/556).

The details of Hegel's theory of judgment are not at issue here. What is essential to note at this stage is only that Hegel maintains both that the formal features of conceptuality can and should be unified in a genuine concept, but also that they can come apart as well. This means that the formal features of a concept, though properly unified, can be separately identified. The account of the syllogism is an attempt to show how they come together again, redeeming as it were the scourge of the judgment: "If the 'is' of the copula were already *posited* as the determinate and fulfilled *unity* of subject and predicate earlier mentioned, were *posited* as their *concept*, it would already then be *the syllogism* [*der Schluß*]" (309/556; modified). But if a syllogism can restore some unity of form that is implicit in a concept as such, it should be explicable in terms of its original basis. To this we now turn.

2.2.2. The Moments of Conceptual Form

Hegel's descriptions of the moments of conceptual form – universality, particularity, and singularity – are both highly abstract and highly metaphorical. Rather than attempting a detailed exegesis of these descriptions, I wish to provide an account thorough enough to establish what Hegel's "unity of form" thesis means, as well as to strengthen my view that Hegel is offering a theory of concepts in a recognizable sense. To recall, Hegel's thesis of the unity of conceptual form states that a concept involves the identity of universality, particularity, and singularity. We will first discuss them in turn, and then suggest how they form a unity.

2.2.2.1. Universality

The very fact that Hegel sees the forms of conceptuality as properly identical and interrelated makes a linear account of them difficult. Though this makes some circularity unavoidable, we will begin where Hegel does, with the form of *universality* (*Allgemeinheit*), or "the universal concept" (*WL* II: 274ff./530ff.). Hegel often speaks of the form of universality interchangeably with the singular form of "the concept," which we have already discussed: "The universal is thus the totality of the concept" (277/532).[66] This suggests that Hegel sees the universal as identical to the "evasive and creative" power behind all thought – the ability of thought to be independent of anything in particular. Such universality has no "features" or "characteristics," since to ascribe any such characteristics would be to make it a *particular* concept (275/530).[67] Even so, universality can be seen in the way any concept both exceeds what is given, and is united to a common context of thought. The content of such universality, however, is bare "self-identity" (ibid.).[68] Though Hegel does not say this, it may be helpful to think of the universal as the "meaning" of a free variable in logic. The free variable, by design, is open to any assignment of meaning, so it means nothing in particular. Still, nothing can occupy the variable except what belongs syntactically to thought, something that has or could have some meaning. Likewise, the universal is the open syntax of conceptual content in general.[69]

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[66] In lectures of 1808/09, Hegel writes, "The concept is the universal that is at the same time determined, but which remains the whole universal in its determination" (W 4: 104).

[67] This is why Hegel says that "one cannot speak of the universal apart from determinateness which, to be more precise, is particularity and singularity." (*WL* II: 277/532)

[68] I thus take to be premature what Trisokkas (2009, 144), in an otherwise excellent piece, attributes determinacy to universality itself, even claiming it has "the most determinate content." The universal will be constituted by determinate particularity, but is not that determinacy itself.

[69] Though Hegel himself is rather allergic to the term, the form of universality could be seen as the "logically possible" (cf. *EL* § 143R and *Zusatz*). However, the traditional definition of logical possibility, 'that which is not self-contradictory,' would perhaps not apply to Hegel, given his vexed relationship to the law of non-contradiction.

It is because universality is so empty of specific content that it is open to any content: it is *unbounded* or *free* (277/532). Given the emptiness of universality, it imposes nothing on objects external to it; thus does Hegel address the popular notion[70] that conceptualizing something "does violence" to it: "The universal is therefore *free* power; it is itself while reaching out to [*greift … über*: or "overlapping"] its other and embracing it, but without *doing violence* to it; on the contrary, it is at rest in its other as *in its own*" (ibid.). A possible content would be violated by conceptual universality only if it contained something alien to vacuous self-identity. But as Hegel shows in the "Sense Certainty" chapter of *Phenomenology*, any demonstration of something (even something supposedly non-universal) depends minimally on the universal form even to express the supposedly singular content. While we can always 'point' to something we don't understand conceptually, even at that stage we are *relying* on the most minimal feature of conceptual form ("that self-same α") rather than avoiding it.[71]

Given that Hegel seems to identify the universal with "the concept," the universal displays a similar oscillation between "the one and the many" as the concept did. That is, there is a sense in which there is "one" universal or universality, the "free power" that withstands any opposition, but also a sense in which there are many universals, or possible concepts. Despite the fact that the differentiation of concepts is properly fodder for the discussion of particularity, Hegel anticipates the issue. He writes that when a distinction occurs, and thus a concept is posited with less than the total scope of pure universality, that

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[70] This perspective is especially characteristic of early German Romanticism, which motivated its turn to art as non-discursive "disclosure." See especially Frank (1989). Apart from that connection, Hegel himself held a similar view under the influence of his friend Hölderlin. This connection is described further in Wolf (2017).

[71] I am not suggesting here that this provides evidence that sensation or later perception must therefore count as "conceptual" in the true sense. Indeed, partly because of the further formal constraints Hegel puts on genuine conceptuality, this should not be the case. But Hegel would say that intelligible sensation and perception rely on formal universality, and thus on a *necessary* (if not sufficient) condition of conceptuality.

concept "does not lose its character of universality," it is simply a "relative universal" (278/533). Although all conceptual difference will depend on the subsequent form of particularity, every lower "determinate concept" can be treated as a *genus* (*Gattung*) and thus as relatively universal vis-à-vis some other possible concept. Hegel thus insists that "even the determinate concept remains in itself infinitely free concept" (ibid.). Universal conceptual form is preserved without loss in every concept.[72] "The universal … even when it posits itself in a determination, *remains* in it what it is" (276/531). On the one hand, there remains an abiding conceptual form, "the universal," that is merely shared by any additional concept that may occur; on the other hand, each determinate concept fully possesses the necessary form of the concept as such.

We can see from Hegel's discussion of universality why he is led to treat "the concept" as a *singulare tantum*. For the singular use of "the concept" corresponds to the form of universality. As we have seen, the form of universality determines the common aspect of any possible concept; and given that it is maintained even across oppositional relations between concepts, each concept belongs to a unity. The meaning of each concept is determined against a single conceptual background – a "space of reasons" as some commentators are inclined to say.[73] Thus, Hegel can metonymically refer to all concepts under the title "the concept," since they share a single necessary form. The unity of this formal element does nothing to preclude the arising of determinate differences sufficient to authorize our use of "concepts" in the plural.

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[72] As is further clarified in the subsequent section: "The particular has one and the same universality as the *other* particulars to which it is related." (*WL* II: 280/534)

[73] Cf., e.g., Pinkard (2012), Koch (2014).

2.2.2.2. Particularity

Hegel's discussion of particularity (*Besonderheit*) or "the particular concept" (*WL* II: 280ff./534ff.) is his explanation of how determinate conceptual content is formally possible, given that all concepts share universal form in common.[74] To return to the analogy with free variables, granted that α and β are logical terms, the question here is why should we suspect that they express *different* concepts (which a difference in symbols, of course, does not guarantee)? Hegel's answer turns on the notion of *distinction* (*Unterschied*). All concepts are particular, in Hegel's sense (even, ironically, the concept <*universal*>[75]) because it is a necessary condition for a concept to have content that it contain distinction, and all distinction implies a limitation on *intensional* content.[76] If α is distinct from β, then neither has a total intension; neither 'means everything' (which, as we saw, might be said of the universal form as such). Every distinction implies particularity of content, but the totality of distinctions is equivalent in content to the universal: "The particular, therefore, does not only *contain* the universal but exhibits it also *through its determinateness*; accordingly the universal

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[74] It should be borne in mind that *logical* or *conceptual* particularity is something quite different than "particularity" as used in English to mean something like the individual details of something (or using "particular" to refer to an individual object, i.e. "bare particular"). Such a mistake renders Winfield's (2006, 76-84) remarks on this passage virtually useless. He does not conflate particularity and individuality, but he treats a particular, quite anomalously, as a "undifferentiated instance" (ibid., 77). According to Rand (2015b), this mistake is also evident in Sedgwick (2012). Standardly, logical particularity corresponds to the use of "some" in categorical judgments, in contrast to "all" (cf. Arnauld and Nicole (1996 [1683]), Part II, Ch. 3). Kant distinguishes between the general and particular *use* of concepts in their relative abstractness from individuals. Cf. his *Jäsche Logic*, § 16.

[75] Hegel explains that the universal is a species (particular) of itself. Cf. *WL* II: 281/535.

[76] Cf. Schick (1994, 201). Hegel's context had a clear place for the distinction between extension and intension. Kant himself made a correlative distinction well enough: "The content [*Gehalt*] and extention [*Umfang*] of a concept have an inverse relation to one other. The more a concept contains *under* itself [*unter sich*], the less it contains *in* itself [*in sich*], and conversely" (*Jäsche Logic*, § 7/Ak. 9: 96/593). I.e., <*being*> has a massive scope, but little or no content or distinguishing conditions, while (were we to follow Leibniz's acceptance of individual concepts), the concept <*Julius Caesar*> has tremendous content but a scope or extension of one. Hegel discusses and dismisses a purely extensional interpretation of logical quantities at *WL* II: 295/545.

constitutes a *sphere* that the particular must exhaust" (280/534). Since particularity maintains

its connection with the universal, it still conforms to the "unity of form" thesis.

However, the notion of "distinction" that Hegel uses to explain particularity does

not only provide a necessary condition for conceptual content. As I stated above, the key

and perhaps most difficult thesis of Hegel's theory of conceptual form is that distinction is

solely *sufficient* for conceptual content (at least logically considered).[77] This comes out in

Hegel's dispute with Kant in the Introduction to the *Doctrine of the Concept.* There he

reproached Kant for apparently failing to recognize that even concepts without supporting

intuitions cannot be *intensionally* empty, since the concept "surely contains determinateness

and distinction [*Unterschied*] within itself" (261/520; modified). We noted above (cf. 1.4.3.)

that Kant is referring to an emptiness of objects and perhaps not of meaning; but, despite

this interpretive unfairness, Hegel's positive point comes through: distinction between

concepts is already sufficient for conceptual content of some kind, and this distinction is

itself not something sensory or 'intuitive' in Kant's sense.

However, this tells us that distinction is sufficient for some content ($\alpha \neq \beta$, perhaps),

not that distinction is solely sufficient for any conceptual content at all.[78] For example, if I

introduce the concept <*schleep*> with the qualification that <*schleep*> is not (is distinct from)

<*sleep*> (or even <*schleep*> is <*not-schleep*>), this is enough to give *some* conceptual content to

the term. This content obviously relies on the preexisting content of <*sleep*>, but even

setting that issue aside, we can hardly get off the ground. For as far as we know, there is not

necessarily even an interesting contrastive relationship between <*sleep*> and <*schleep*>. The

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[77] By this qualification, I mean that it may well be the case that there are historical, social, or psychological conditions on conceptual content coming to be. For Hegel, this is clearly the case, given his belief that concepts are always transformations of pre-existing *Vorstellungen*. On this, see 2.3.2. below.

[78] See Inwood 2013, 222.

latter could turn out to be equivalent to <*blue*>; the content of the distinction would amount to <*blue*> is not <*sleep*>.[79] The mere distinction, understood in this way, tells us next to nothing.

Even so, Hegel insists on the point : "To reproach the concept as such for being empty is to ignore its absolute determinateness which is conceptual distinction [*Begriffsunterschied*] and *the only true content in the element of the concept*" (*WL* II: 285/538; slightly modified and my emphasis). It is one thing to admit that conceptual distinction is necessary for conceptual content; it is another thing to imply that it is solely sufficient. In the following section (2.3.), I will say more about how Hegel uses the notion of negativity to explain this. For now, I will admit that Hegel's views on this point elude my ability to reconstruct them – because they are obscure and exaggerated to be sure, but also possibly false.[80] One gets the sense that Hegel's semantics requires us accepting that we can get something from nothing. However, we can still salvage something important from Hegel's understanding of "particularity," namely, that conceptual distinctions depend on negative relations, even

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[79] Hegel is clearly aware of this interpretation of the negative as "other" rather than opposite: "This is the determination which is normally treated in logic in connection with the *contradictory* concepts, and the further point is made … that in the *negative* of a concept one should only focus on the negative, taking it as the mere *indeterminate* extent o the *other* of the positive concept. Thus the mere *not-white* would be just as much red, yellow, blue, etc., as black" (*WL* II: 320/564). Hegel must not understand negativity in its logical significant sense as equivalent to the mere "not" of distinction or otherness. This issue is also discussed by both Kant and Hegel under the heading of an "infinite" (i.e. indefinite) judgment. Cf. A 71-72/B 97.

[80] Many attempts have been made to make sense, but despite promising efforts, in my view, interpretations never prove to fully illuminate Hegel's position; it continues to seem unmotivated. The problem is to show how mere negative relations can constitute something positive. Sophisticated proposals generally suggest that some kind of recursive algorithm ("Grundoperation") could be entrusted to aggregate new content. Cf. Henrich (1976) and the attempt to carry this program on the scale of a commentary in Martin (2012). Such proposals can often make minimal sense of initial moves in Hegel's *Logic*, but stand little chance of being extended to explain the whole, not to mention Hegel's *realphilosopische* concepts. It is still even controversial whether Hegel accepts the principle of non-contradiction (PNC) or not. Brandom (2002), e.g., argues Hegel is the firmest supported of the PNC, while M. Wolff (2010) argues that Hegel means what he says about "de re" contradiction. De Boer (2010b, 362; 366-67) argues that Hegel refers only to intra-conceptual contradiction, rather than contradiction in things, though this is hard to square with evidence where Hegel speaks of both (cf. *WL* II: 79/384, where Hegel says that "a thing, a subject, a concept" can be "resolved contradictions"). Redding (2007, Ch. 7) adopts a kind of social-perspectival reading of Hegel on contradiction. Even if (*per* improbable) Hegel can be given a sensible reading on contradiction, however, this does not amount to showing how the contradiction constitutes conceptual content.

oppositions, between concepts. For it seems reasonable that negative relations amount at least

to a necessary feature of conceptuality. As such, Hegel's discussion of particularity concerns

the principle for the legitimate "division" (*Einteilung*) or analysis of concepts. The main

upshot of Hegel's view is that such division should be restricted to oppositional predicates.[81]

In such an opposition, lower determinations become *mutually determining*:

> When we speak of *two opposing sides*, we must repeat that the two constitute the
> particular, not just *together*, as if they were *alike* in being particular only for external
> reflection, but because their determinateness *over against each other* is at the same time
> essentially only one determinateness; it is the negativity which in the universal is
> *simple*. (281/535)

A higher concept is adequately analyzed, Hegel says, only when its lower concepts or

determinations are found to be mutually exclusive. This oppositional relation amounts to a

concept's particularity: what restricts its scope vis-à-vis other concepts. For Hegel, genuine

oppositions ensure that a distinction is not an arbitrary one, so that concepts so divided will

be genuine centers of thought. The system of concepts as a whole will then be structured by

"joints" of such oppositions – what he would call "contradictions." The whole structure can

be called "*absolute* negativity" insofar as all positive content is reduced to these negative

relations.[82]

    Thus, when Hegel refers to the "particularity" of a concept, he points to the fact that

a concept can be individuated as a concept apart through negative, oppositional relations to

other concepts. What a concept authentically contains thus cannot be a purely material or

empirical determination, which would lack such negativity. Hegel points to this deficiency in

the division of natural-descriptive (so-called) concepts: "The manifold genera and species of

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[81] The notion of conceptual "division" goes back to Plato's use of *diaeresis*, especially in the *Sophist* and *Statesman*. See Koch (2014) for more on this connection.

[82] "For in its absolute negativity the universal contains determinateness in and for itself, so that, when speaking of determinateness in connection with the universal, the determinateness is not being imported into the latter from outside" (*WL* II: 277/532).

nature must not be esteemed to be anything more than arbitrary notions of spirit… [T]hey do not exhibit [the concept] in a trustworthy copy, for they are the sides of its free self-externality…" (282/536). Instead, conceptual division must be guided by a non-arbitrary formal feature of conceptuality.

One reason Hegel seems to believe that negativity or contradiction is sufficient for conceptual content is that he sees content as reducible to a minimalist simplicity. In a concept, after all, "the subject matter is reduced to its non-contingent essentiality" (263/521). If one finds the structure of contradiction in a concept, this reduction is complete. In "negativity," then, Hegel finds a resource from within purely "logical" features of conceptuality for expressing content "outside" of the purely formal.

It is important to note, then, that despite Hegel's "minimalism" about content, he uses his notion of particularity to affirm how *any* subject matter can be conceptual. After polemicizing against the standard view of determinate concepts as mere abstract universals (SC 2 above), he adds:

> To be sure, any determinate concept is *empty* in so far as it does not contain the totality, but only a one-sided determinateness. Even when it has otherwise concrete content such as, for instance, humankind, the state, animal, etc., it remains an empty concept inasmuch as its determinateness is not the *principle* of its distinction […]. (285/538, slightly modified)

This passage does not suggest, as a first glance may suggest, that concrete contents such as "humankind, the state, animal, etc." are not conceptual. It suggests instead that such content *is* conceptual, so long as the content of such concepts is understood as a principle of distinction or opposition. The content of a term like *<humankind>*, *qua* conceptual, is not merely the mental summary or common denominator of known human beings, it is the

negative principle that sets that term apart from – *against* – all others. When a concept

contains such a principle, Hegel suggests that it "contain[s] the totality."[83]

A final point is essential to mention here, to which we will have occasion to return.

When a concept is analyzed into its particularity, and hence the contradictory determinations

that provide a necessary structure, we have, for Hegel, also found the *essence* or *constitutive*

reason for the thing of that type. For example, finding the principle of distinction for the

concept <*humankind*> is *eo ipso* to define what it is to be a human and not something else.

This is implicit already in the Aristotelian "*horos*" – limit, boundary, or "term" – which is

both the definition and correlate with the essence. The proper determination of conceptual

particularity, in other words, does not only yield a nominal but a *real* definition – though real

definitions will be determined solely by negative relations. Thus, Hegel's notion of

particularity (and the "negativity" that constitutes it) will be essential to his conception of

Conceptual Transparency (see 4.4. for more on this).

2.2.2.3. Singularity

The particularity of conceptual form leads to the possibility of particular concepts:

"particular universals" (Schick 1994, 197). But *singularity* (*Einzelheit*) never qualifies a different

type of concept (see McTaggart 1910, 198; Gerhard 2015, 33); in Hegel there are no

"singular concepts" such as we find in Leibniz. Instead, Hegel suggests that what he means

by singularity is something already implied in his discussion of particularity, – "particularity

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[83] That an individual concept can 'contain the totality' is fascinating suggestion that cannot detain us here. In passing, however, Hegel's remark seems to suggest a close parallel to the Leibnizian idea that every monad is a window to the whole world. Hegel would be arriving at such an idea using the *negation* implicit in every concept as obliquely referring to that concept's relation to all others. See Hegel's suggestion that his "object" (the result of conceptual determination) is akin to the Leibnizian "monad" at *WL* II: 411/632. See also Lau (2005, 255).

[is] also *singularity* in and for itself" (*WL* II: 288/540) – and thus no new conceptual type is needed. Singularity is merely "determinate determinateness or absolute negativity" (ibid.), which is captured in the oppositional relations within determinate concepts. Preliminarily, we can already conclude that the formal features needed to explain conceptual content are already exhausted by the negativity displayed in the structure of particular concepts.

The form of singularity, then, is redundant by design. It contains nothing other than particularity to achieve conceptual content: negative determinacy or distinction. Instead, singularity differs from particularity only because of its intended *use*.[84] This use, of course, does not leave a mark on conceptual form itself: a concept used in two ways, say, as subject and predicate of different propositions, does not change its content, but this does not make it a frivolous difference.[85] This is the case with Hegel's notion of singularity: singularity may defined as the *object-level positing* (*Setzung*) of conceptual determinacy. Before returning to Hegel's text to show this, I will attempt to illustrate my understanding of Hegel's meaning. Consider the difference in the role of the term 'rooster' in the following sentences:

(a) 'The rooster is a male chicken'.

(b) 'The rooster is bound to wake you in the morning'.

Though (a) can be taken ambiguously, the most plausible reading is that it defines or determines the concept <*rooster*>, rather than providing information about a particular rooster (even 'That rooster is a male chicken' would be an odd thing to say). On the other hand, though 'rooster' also stands as the grammatical subject of (b), its intendent target has

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[84] The emphasis on the singular as use is especially to be found in the work of Stekeler-Weithofer (1992, forthcoming, etc.). I am grateful to discussion on this matter with Prof. Stekeler-Weithofer and other participants in a workshop devoted to Stekeler's reading of Hegel's Logic in Paderborn, Germany, July 2017.

[85] Compare a remark from the Doctrine of Being, referencing deictic expressions that Hegel associates with the form of singularity: "By 'this' we *mean* to express something completely determinate, overlooking the fact that language, as a work of the understanding, only expresses the universal, albeit *naming* it as a single object" (*WL* I: 126/91).

clearly shifted. Though the conceptual content of the subject of (b) is the same as of (a), (b) employs the term in an object-level position, to *refer* to some rooster. Moreover, each use results in different inferential possibilities. Because the predicate (a) functions as an identity, we can use substitution to conclude from (a) and (b) that

(c) 'The male chicken is bound to wake you in the morning',

but we cannot use the predicate 'bound to wake you in the morning' in (b) as a substitute for 'the rooster' in (a), since (b) is not an identity statement.

Now Hegel would not end up accepting <*rooster*> as a concept *per se*,[86] but the example illustrates the formal issue all the same. What Hegel attempts to account for with <*singularity*> is the fact that in using self-same conceptual content, an object rather than a concept can be under consideration.[87] If a concept can be used both generically, ultimately in an *analytic* definition, and *synthetically* as a predicate of a certain object, the same content has to be suitable for both uses. This does not mean that the form of singularity already imports any object-level content, only that Hegel is making a conceptual provision for this kind of content.

Hegel explains what I have just said metaphorically by saying that singularity is a "*doubly reflective shine*," namely a reflection *inwards* (*nach innen*) and *outwards* (*nach außen*): "Insofar as the reflective shine is *inward*, the particular remains a universal; through the outward shining, it is *something determinate* [*ist es Bestimmtes*: trans. modified]…" (*WL* II: 296/546). The inward "shining" of singularity is its relation to existing conceptuality; the

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[86] "There is only one animal type and all the varieties are merely modifications of it. … One must not therefore seek conceptual determinations everywhere, although traces of them are everywhere present" (*EN* 503-4/418/§ 368 Z, modified).

[87] Hegel's thought on this point seems in harmony with much that Frege would later say. For example, Frege writes that (in a case like mine about roosters) the statement 'whales are mammals' is not about whales, but the concept of a whale (Frege (1980), § 47), while ordinary predicative statements of the form *F* (*a*) are about objects and not concepts. See "On Concept and Object" [1892] in Frege (1997).

outward shining its relation to the world outside of the concept. In particular, the inward

relation of singularity involves the *fixing* of a conceptual distinction that otherwise has the

form of particularity. Hegel says this more directly just later:

> But, as this negativity, singularity is the determinate determinateness, *distinguishing* as such, and through this reflection of the distinction into itself, the distinction becomes fixed; the determining of the particular occurs only by virtue of singularity, for *singularity* is that abstraction which, precisely as singularity, is now *posited abstraction*. (ibid.; slightly modified, underline added)

Hegel thus credits singular reference as helping to create conceptual distinctions that

otherwise have the merely negative form of particularity. But this happens through what he

calls the outward shine. Clarifying this aspect, Hegel says, "Singularity is not, however, only

the turning back of the concept into itself, but the immediate loss of it. Through singularity,

where it is *internal to itself*, the concept becomes *external to itself* and steps into actuality" (ibid.,

299/548).[88] Though singularity involves conceptual form, the singular "this"[89] does not at

first seem to belong to the conceptual sphere, but to its outer boundary. In describing the

form of such singular reference only in terms of "negativity," however, Hegel has suggested

that the singular is not formally different than the particularly qualified universal, despite the

clear difference in its role. In other words, singular usage is formally *transparent to* (universal

and particular) conceptual form.

Yet it is not only that the singular is formally compatible with pre-given particular

concepts (whatever those turn out to be). The form of singularity is supposed to clarify

something that is left a mystery in terms of particularity alone: how concepts of differing

content could arise on the basis of merely negative form. Hegel thinks that the object-level

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[88] Cf. also, "The singular is the same as the actual, except that it has issues from the concept, and hence is *posited* as something-universal, or negative identity with itself" (*EL* 311/240, § 163R).

[89] Cf. just below: "The singular, which in the reflective sphere of concrete existence is as a *this*…" (*WL* II: 300/549).

positing of conceptuality is what determines or gives boundaries to conceptual content in the first place. Something singular puts pressure, as it were, on conceptual distinctions, so that definite conceptual content is a certain kind of "abstraction." But though Hegel uses the term "abstraction" here to describe the determining of a concept, he means it quite differently than the standard empiricist. For while it in the standard empiricist view of concepts, the 'universal' content is only available as the common denominator to many cases, so that the universal 'abstracts' from the differences in the many, Hegel envisions the one singular *itself* as the 'abstraction'[90]: "This <u>abstracting by the singular</u> [*Abstrahieren des Einzelnen*] is, as the reflection of the distinction into itself, is the first positing of the distinctions as *self-subsisting*, reflected into themselves" (*WL* II: 300-1/549, underlined; modified). Abstraction is not something we do, but something it, the singular thing, does. As far as I can tell, the best way to understand the function of the singular here is that of an *exemplar* or *paradeigma*. The exemplar of a new type, we can say, "abstracts" from an existing type; it thereby "posits a distinction." Moreover, in doing so, the exemplar can in principle act alone; there is no need for 'more of the same'.[91] This point, which I take to be Hegel's, is accessible in ordinary experience: a novel case can help define a new type, and this not only once it has been joined by enough followers to admit a reduction to the common element, but simply by expressing a difference to the types at hand.[92] That is, the singular can establish a negative relation to the concepts at hand on its own. In terms of conceptual

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[90] I have (conservatively) downplayed the way this point comes across in the Giovanni translation ("This *act of abstraction by the singular…*"), but I think the point stands in the original.

[91] This point is emphasized in Stekeler's reading.

[92] Given a type, say "jazz," it is reasonable to think that a sufficiently different performance in jazz could first merit the description "not jazz." I am thinking, for example, of the so-called free jazz of Ornette Coleman and followers. It does not take a band of new performances to create the new concept, only the allowance that the new performance *distinguishes* itself from "bad jazz" of the old type, and is rather "good jazz"—but only of a new type.

content, it does not matter *how many* cases of a singular type there are, but there should be at least one case that 'demonstrates' that content.[93]

Hegel is admitting, then, that it is *conceptually significant* that there are 'instances' of concepts, for without such instances, no difference in conceptual content could arise. But he does not mistakenly infer that concepts are somehow inductions from a number of common instances. While concept formation (in an ordinary sense) may occur inductively in natural science, Hegel envisions the role of singular cases in a philosophical context as first *provoking* and then *exemplifying* generic content, rather than being of primary interest itself.[94] Hegel contends that when such singular provocation is tracked conceptually, it mirrors the bare formal features of universality and singularity.

2.2.2.4. Summary

Now that I have set out Hegel's basic understanding of the different moments of conceptual form, I need to make sense of the way they work together in a theory of conceptuality. To recall, Hegel thinks that that the moments of conceptual form just described are identical, since each moment is just a different perspective (we can say) on a single, unified structure of "absolute negativity" which is thought itself. But I also said that Hegel suggests that this unity of the concept is not a *given* of human thought, as if the unity

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[93] Kant similarly implies that only one intuition is necessary to prove the potential reality of a cognition (B xxiii-xxxiv). The theme of comprehending via a single intuition becomes prominent in his *Critique of Judgment* (cf. Ak. 5: 259).

[94] It may be useful to give a more concrete example from Hegel himself. In general, I believe the role of conceptual singularity is on display in any *historical* development. One of the recurring figures Hegel discusses in his historical and political writings is the so-called "hero," who is responsible in the formation of a "state" (*GPR* §§ 93, 350). As such, the hero embodies the principles of law or justice that will later be in force in the state. The individual bears the universal. However, a key moment in such a process is the hero's *transition* from a previous regime: the hero will be a *criminal* in terms of the former regime (cf. § 93Z). This is the hero's 'negative determinacy' vis-à-vis the then available determinations, which, through a negation of the negation, can become a new, positive term.

of universals and singular things could be taken for granted. Hegel accepts no such magic. Instead, we should take his treatment of the unity of conceptual form as a *conditional* account about conceptual form in a properly developed system of concepts (what he would say occurs in philosophy itself).

The conceptual unity of the whole – "the concept" – is where the unity of conceptual form seems properly considered an identity. For the "universal concept," as we saw, is essentially an empty identity of thought that can be anything and nothing. That empty whole becomes contentful when opposition and thus limitation of content is introduced: the sphere of particularity. But since particularity is where universality itself has any content, the sphere of particularity is the same as that of universality. I already explained above how particularity is then identical to singularity. Singularity is the sphere of the actual demonstration of particularity – which is the only way particularity can be constituted in the first place. Singular content provides the occasion for the particular determination of the universal whole of content. As Hegel sees it, each comes to be at the same time in the same way; they are strictly identical.[95]

This is a formal, *a priori* conception of the identity of conceptual form, considered as a totality. We can also see, more significantly, how the moments of conceptual form unify in the case of any adequately developed particular concept. This will be quite important when it

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[95] The following figure (taken from Wolf (2018)) may help to show how the moments of conceptual form are united on my view:
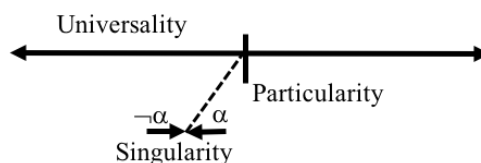
In this image, the negative form of the singular is what makes a distinction (particular), though it makes a distinction within universality. There are "many" universals (particulars) because there are many singulars which provoke new distinctions in universal conceptual space.

comes to understanding how Hegel's conceptual theory allows us to distinguish the properly conceptual from everything else. What is required here is that the same pattern exhibited abstractly as the identity of conceptual form can be exhibited in the case of more concrete contents. Here is my suggestion for how such a unity could obtain:

> **Unity of Conceptual Form:** An object-term a **(singular)** qualifies as a type α **(universal)** because it contains opposing determinations $\beta/\sim\beta$ **(particular)** that suffice for and necessitate the a to be an α.

This only expresses what we have seen above: conceptual particularity provides the sole content by which the singular thing attains a specific universal (though that singular thing is also the only means of showing that particularity). The universal, moreover, does not have content on its own (where it is empty identity), but only through the unique form of particularity that creates a principle to distinguish it as a type (*Gattung*). The particular, in short, must stand in a *constitutive* relation both to the singular and the universal. Given that many so-called "concepts," are developed and discussed without expressing such a constitutive relation – lacking "formal" conceptual unity – they are not really concepts at all.[96]

In sum, a concept does not become a concept until it includes a rational principle for its objects. Hegel has a unique conception of "particularity," to be sure, centering on negative and opposing relationships (see the following section for more about this); but he shares a more general "rationalist" conviction that concepts must express *reasons*. His claim

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[96] This can be seen clearly in Hegel's discussion of "consciousness" in the *Phenomenology*, where Hegel conspicuously avoids speaking of concepts of perceptible objects. Instead, he notes how the apprehension we have of such objects is marked by "formal" disconnection: "From out of sensuous being, it becomes a universal, but since it *emerged form out of the sensuous*, this universal is essentially *conditioned* by the sensuous and is thus not truly self-equal. Rather, it is universality affected *with an opposition*, which for that reason is separated into the extremes of singularity and particularity, of the *One* of properties and of the *Also* of the free-standing matters" (*PG* 104/77/§ 129).

for now is that classical moments of conceptual form are only unified when a concept is developed for such a rational purpose.

2.3. Conceptual Content Unconstrained

2.3.1. *Negativity and the Aesthetic Constraint*

The account Hegel gives of conceptual form is certainly austere, and it is not easy to see what consequences it should have for a philosophical semantics. I now wish to explain briefly how the key "formal" innovation of Hegel's theory, namely his reliance on negative relations for conceptual content, relates to the limitations Kant set on conceptual content, which I dubbed the "Aesthetic Constraint." The *desideratum* of a Hegelian theory of concepts is to achieve a measure of Kantian restrictiveness (so that not just anything is admissible as conceptual content) without falling to the exclusivity of Kant's Aesthetic Constraint, which (as I argued in the last chapter) threatens to "prove too much" when it comes to the content of philosophical concepts.

First, then, we must show how Hegelian negativity provides some restriction on what can be genuinely conceptual. Hegel provides a similar restriction as Kant without invoking sensibility to explain it. Kant claims that only with reference to a singular representation, namely an intuition, can a concept be seen as objectively contentful. Since Kant thinks human beings have a faculty only for *sensory* intuition, the singular representations required for concepts are found only in what is sensibly given. This allows Kant to exclude as "senseless" concepts that cannot be defined (at least indirectly) in sensory terms. As we saw above, Hegel thinks a concept cannot be adequately determined or defined

except with reference to an "individual" (*Einzelne*) which exhibits negativity with respect to other conceptual contents. This suggests that Hegel, too, thinks that the notion of a purely universal concept, without singular content, is empty or even senseless. However, for Hegel, this logical point need not be purchased at the price at which Kant sets it. For the essential point is that singular demonstrations are in some way available. Moreover, they must be in some way "homogenous" with conceptual form. If Hegel can explain how there can be an immanently "logical" form of homogeneity, then there is no need to appeal to the sensory aspect of intuition to account for how a concept is exemplified and thus constrained.

To see how a concept can be constrained without recourse to sensibility, it is only necessary to consider the "reflective" level at which philosophy itself is typically conducted, rather than the level of observational experience. (If Hegel challenges Kant's concept-intuition distinction, it is at the former rather than the latter level.) I mean a context in which one might introduce a theoretical distinction that requires immediate illustration, quite removed from the context of observation. For example, a compatibilist notion of free will might be explained by appealing (à la Frankfurt 1971) to the difference between the attitude of two addicts to their drug addiction. The discussion may argue that an addict who identifies with her addiction counts as free, while a second addict who repudiates his addiction does not, regardless of the deterministic processes potentially at play in both cases. Both Kant and Hegel would agree that the statement of a concept is accountable to the demand for examples like this, which show that it is not empty. They differ on what is important about them. Kant sees the sensory content as doing all the work. But, even independently of Hegel, it is hard to see why. Apart from the fact that the case suggested above could be imaginary, little apart from "coloring" could be provided by further "sensory" detail in the kind of example I mentioned. Instead, the illustrative material

provided by the example is itself "conceptual." That is, for the example to work, we must already know what it means to "identify" with an attitude, to *have* an attitude, what being "determined" is, etc. These are not just sensory qualities. Thus, though one could admit that an abstract concept (like <*compatibilist freedom*>) requires singular content, the fact that the *sensory* component involved in exemplifying the concept does little (if any) independent work in providing content serves as a reason to suppose that the concept-intuition distinction is otiose in such contexts.

Though the compatibilist example about addicts does not mention Hegel's specific notion of "negativity," which is supposed to explain the unity of the universal and the singular, if we reflect on what we look for in a good example, we can see that Hegel's solution may be implicit in what we have already said. In looking for an example that illustrates a concept, we frequently need first to find a point of continuity with what is previously known. So, for example, here the compatibilist will take natural causation for granted and provide two cases of people who are naturally determined (addicted). The effectiveness of the example of the new concept will then involve showing how the exemplary case can be *opposed* to the one it is otherwise continuous with. This "negative" component seems important in the case I just mentioned, for example, since a philosophical novice will not initially be able to positively identify the self-endorsing addict as free – for she is just learning the compatibilist notion. Instead, she will first be told to notice the *difference* between the two cases, and only on that basis (if the compatibilist is persuasive) provisionally hang the new title "free" (in the compatibilist sense) on the seeming exception to normal determinism. Hence, it seems plausible that the selection of an effective example to illustrate a conceptual distinction can rely significantly on the "negative" relations that can be modeled in examples, just as Hegel claims.

Recall that this "exceptional" character of the example is what, in my view, Hegel

refers to as "the abstracting *by* the singular," which helps provoke conceptual change.[97]

Though I have been speaking about a pedagogical context, Hegel does not think such

examples are necessary only to *learn* a concept, but they even *constitute* it. Hegel offers

constraint for conceptual content from the necessity of singular examples, and those

examples are tasked with showing how a new conceptual content can be constituted through

negative relations to prior concepts.[98] Kant, of course, demands constraint in a concept's

homogeneity with their objects, but since he thinks the singular objects falling under a concept

are sensory, he must think concepts, too, contain something sensory. By contrast, instead of

lowering concepts to sensory objects, Hegel *raises* objects to a logical homogeneity. This is the

promise of negativity for Hegel, since he wants to suggest that it belongs both to objects

themselves (in our consideration of them), but also to pure conceptual form.[99] Thus, we do

not need to appeal to logically exogenous sensibility to explain conceptual constraint.

Hegel does not repudiate the demand for conceptual constraint, but neither does he

preempt the acceptance of content on non-logical grounds, such as Kant's insistence on the

human dependence on sensibility. Does this mean that Hegel, too, "proves too much,"

though in the opposite direction? That is, does Hegel's criteria for conceptual content allow

us to have legitimate "concepts" of God, the soul, the world, and even Swedenborg's

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[97] I think this interpretation is borne out when compared with what Hegel says here: "In singularity, the earlier true relation, the *inseparability* of the determinations of the concept, is *posited*; for as the negation of negation, <u>singularity contains the opposition of those determinations and this opposition itself as its ground or the unity where the determinations have come together,</u> each in the other" (*WL* II: 299/548; underlined). On my view, a singular "example" (which should not be merely *logically possible*, but actual) contains "the opposition" of prior determinations within itself, in just the way that Frankfurt's addict "contains" an opposition between determinism and freedom.

[98] What about the *first* concept? I can only reiterate my inability to explain how the "Hegelian serpent of knowledge" (Sellars 1956) is born. Hegel's own answer can be seen in his "With What Must Science Begin?" chapter of the *WL*. But it is still dubious that one can reach all the concepts Hegel deals with by starting on a linear path from <*being*> and <*nothing*>.

[99] Hegel uses <*teleology*> to explain how "logical homogeneity" can arise without sensibility. See 4.4. below.

"spirits" (none of which satisfy Kant's Aesthetic Constraint)? A glance at the ink on Hegel's

pages may suggest (and has always suggested) that he makes just this kind of allowance. But

apart from the interpretive difficulties of distinguishing Hegel's spirit from his letter, it is fair

to admit that Hegel has a harder time on this point than Kant, if the exclusion of such

concepts is desired. Even Hegel's *ambiguity* on concepts like *<God>* may be enough to

convince a (non-metaphysical) Kantian that he does not exclude enough. Still, one might

wish for a conceptual structure that allows such questions to be asked, rather than virtually

decided in advance.

Though Hegel's way of thinking about conceptual content does not exclude *a priori*

some such metaphysical concepts – depending of course on their supposed satisfaction of

the exemplification condition mentioned above – his own theory of content shows how

such cases could be decided. Ultimately, Hegel takes the view that a concept that is

illegitimately formed will prove unable to stand up to dialectical pressure – "*ye shall know them*

by their fruits." The very thing that gives a concept content in the first place, logical negativity,

is that by which each concept is tested. Hegel sees conceptual structure formed by "joints"

of negative relations, but he also thinks that ersatz concepts can collapse when considered

through to the end. In Hegel's terms, the "understanding" is allowed to fix any concept it

wishes, but the "dialectical" power of reason is able to lead any such concept to its demise:

> To be sure, the understanding does give them through the form of abstract
> universality a *rigidity* of being, so to speak, which they do not otherwise possess in the
> qualitative sphere and in the sphere of reflection; but by thus simplifying them, the
> understanding at the same time *quickens* them *with spirit*, and <u>it so sharpens them that
> only at that point, only there, do they also obtain the capacity to dissolve themselves
> and to pass over into their opposite</u>. The ripest maturity, the highest stage, that
> anything can attain is the one at which its fall begins. (*WL* II: 287/539; underlined).

This, of course, is all quite familiar, given that Hegel here only depicts the immanently

critical procedure of "dialectic," which is mentioned in the same context. His use of this

notorious procedure is different from Kant's in that while Kant considered only transcendent concepts as "dialectical" (i.e., containing contradictions or antinomies), Hegel thinks that *all* concepts contain antinomies: they are characterized by oppositional relations.[100] So while Kant can settle the validity of most concepts via the "Transcendental Analytic," whereby empirical concepts are vindicated non-dialectically, Hegel subjects all concepts to the same kind of test.

Hegel's claim of the dialectical nature of all concepts implies that there is no way to dismiss certain concepts prejudicially, even though this does not mean they cannot be adjudicated. But since the dialectical test will have to be performed in each case – the concrete critical work of philosophy – , abstract explanatory remarks have limited value here. A study of dialectical method is also outside my present scope, since it requires a book-length topic in its own right.[101] But it is important to note that Hegel sees the difference between legitimate and illegitimate concepts not as that between those that do not and those that do contain "antinomy" or even contradiction, but between those whose antinomies lead to the dissolution of the subject and those which can stand up to them. A passage which recalls Quine uncannily makes this clear:

> Here and there on this web [of the categories of spirit] there are knots, more firmly tied than others, which give stability and direction to the life and consciousness of spirit; they owe their firmness and power simply to the fact that, having been brought before consciousness, they stand as independent concepts of its essential nature. (*WL* I: 27/28)

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[100] "…Kant brings forward only *four* antinomies. … The main point that has to be made is that antinomy is found not only in the four particular objects taken from cosmology, but rather in *all* objects of all kinds, in *all* representations, concepts, and ideas" (*EL* 127-28/92/§ 48R). The way that all concepts are unifications of oppositions is greatly emphasized by de Boer (2010a).

[101] Cf., e.g., Wandschneider (1995); Schäfer (2001). In general, however, abstract accounts of "the dialectical method" (if it even should be treated as singular) seem to be tailored to explain particular cases (such as the opening discussion of <*being*> in the *WL*), but typically fail to extend to explain all (or even much) of Hegel's dialectical thought.

Elsewhere, Hegel explains this stability using negativity, "A thing, a subject, a concept [*Das Ding, das Subjekt, der Begriff*], is then <u>precisely this negative unity</u>; it is something inherently self-contradictory, but it is no less <u>the *resolved contradiction*</u>; it is the *ground* which contains the determination it bears" (*WL* II: 79/384; underlined). Perhaps my toy example of compatibilist freedom can illustrate this point as well,[102] since one could argue that the compatibilist notion of freedom at least putatively "resolves" the antinomy of freedom and determinism. In this way, Hegel's use of "negativity" to explain conceptual content shows, double-facedly, both how a concept can have content as well as how it can be subject to critique. A different concept of freedom, say a libertarian one, turns out to be dialectically susceptible in this way. Though Hegel's limitations on conceptual content are only open-ended, this does not mean that "anything goes."

Hegel offers both an *object-level* standard for conceptual constraint, with his demand for concepts to have singular content (which I have glossed as the need for concrete examples), but also an *intra-conceptual* standard that is cashed out in terms of dialectical consistency. Moreover, neither standard is brought in *ad hoc*, since they both rely on the very thing that Hegel sees as essential for conceptual content: "negativity" and its tendency toward contradiction. And even if, as I have suggested, this solution does not come with a satisfying sufficient condition for conceptual content, it seems an important first step outside the Kantian conviction that sensibility itself offers a necessary source of constraint for concepts.

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[102] This may not be coincidental, of course, given the common characterization of Hegel's own doctrine of freedom as compatibilist. See, e.g., Pippin 2008, chapters 2 and 5.

2.3.2. Material Presuppositions of Conceptuality

In this final sub-section, I want to provide a slight palliative to the austere account of conceptual content I have attributed to Hegel. Hegel understands the need for such a palliative, for he observes that in the attempt to think conceptually in his sense "the very ground, where [one] stands solidly and is at home, has been pulled from under [one]. Finding [oneself] displaced into the realm of the concept, [one] does not know *where* in the world [one] is" (*EL* 45/27/§ 3R). The palliative comes in the form of an acknowledgment that, despite Hegel's suggestion that a concept's content can be reduced to negative relations (and since this holds for all concepts, concepts come from "nothing," absolutely speaking), this does not mean that the philosophical practitioner starts with nothing. There are a number of things one could cite as offering a "material presupposition" to conceptuality for Hegel, including the strong emphasis Hegel places on concrete history, both of culture in general and philosophy in particular. Here, however, I only want to register Hegel's view about the relation of concepts to what he calls "representation," which, in my view, makes his notion of conceptuality easier to swallow.

In my discussion of Hegel's rejection of the "standard conditions" on conceptual content, I noted that many of Hegel's dismissive remarks about what others call "concepts" proffer that such supposed concepts are often only general or abstract "representations" (*Vorstellungen*): "What is usually understood by 'concepts' are *determinations* of the *understanding*, or even just general *notions* [*Vorstellungen*]; hence such 'concepts' are always *finite* determinations (cf. § 62)" (*EL* 310/239, § 162R). Hegel's use of "*Vorstellung*" is quite broad, at least as broad as the modern philosophical English "idea," which it was used to translate in the early modern context (cf. Hegel 1991, xlvii). Hegel uses *Vorstellung* to refer to

"intellectual" items such as the meaning of words (*EL* § 164 R), but also for those "determinacies of feeling, of intuition, of desire, of willing" of which we are *aware* (§ 3). Perhaps "mental representation" (as used in a contemporary sense) is close to Hegel's meaning, for the distinguishing character of representation is its "mentalistic" ontology: "*Representation* has sensible material … as its content; but it is posited in the determination of its being *mine* – that the represented content is in *me*" (73/49/§ 20R). This separates representation from concepts at least in that Hegel treats conceptuality as ontologically neutral (or "multiply realizable" in contemporary jargon).[103] For example, we "share" concepts in a culture or in a language, though individuals also think with them or about them. As ideal entities, they have no definite "location," but representations do. They are quite definitely 'in the head'.

Moreover, since representations are mental states of animate individuals, Hegel acknowledges that they are formed by a causal process that is related to sensibility.[104] Thus, for example, it may be true as an empirical claim that individuals, when they use a term (even an abstract one) associate with it an *image* or sensible exemplar, which they may even take to give the term meaning. Hegel assumes some such learning process is typically in play (cf. *WL* II: 259/519; *EG* § 451). Thus, when one inherits what is otherwise a system or network of concepts from one's cultural and linguistic predecessors, one does not inherit that system *as* conceptual, in Hegel's view. Given the association of concepts with real definitions or putative essential truths, this point is obvious. Even when we can use a schema like "*x knows that p*" correctly (as judged by our peers), we do not have to understand explicitly any

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[103] On Hegel's idealization of such ontological questions about concepts, see Winfield (2006, 59-65) and Nuzzo (2016).

[104] Representation "begins from the intuition and the *ready-found* material of intuition" (*EG* 257/185/§ 451). Hegel's extended discussion of *Vorstellung* from the side of the philosophy of mind is found in §§ 451-464 of his *Encyclopedia*.

conditions on the predicate "knows" – which a concept would have. Instead, one may have a primarily *affective* and *associative* relation to the term's meaning. Our relation to meaning in this sense is not reflective, and it is not in our "control." (Hence, Hegel's remarks about the role of representations in our lives have a decidedly psychoanalytic ring *avant la lettre*.)[105]

Hegel can therefore approve benignly the customary saying "Nihil est in intellectu, quod non fuerit in sensu. (There is nothing in the intellect that has not been in sense-experience.)" (*EL* 51/32/§ 8). As a statement about the process of learning, this is unthreatening to Hegel's view. Undoubtedly, sensory *Vorstellung* is a causal antecedent of conceptuality.[106] As a statement explaining *content*, however, this principle would be false according to Hegel, for in his view conceptuality proper (even mere "thinking") comes on the scene as an oppositional relation to sense-experience:

> As feeling and intuition the spirit has what is sensible for its object; as fantasy, it has images; and as will, purposes, etc. But the spirit needs also, in *antithesis to*, or merely in *distinction from these forms* of its thereness and of its objects, to give satisfaction to its highest inwardness, *to thinking*, and to make thinking into its object. (*EL* 54-55/35/§ 11).

Thus, sensible representation is always, temporally, a predecessor of concepts, though concepts are not simply a species of representation, but involve an opposition to representation. Hegel says that concepts "transform" representations (*EL* § 20R), or "take the place" of them (§ 3R). The content of a representation is thus altered in becoming conceptual (§ 22). So while representations are causally necessary for, they are not strictly constitutive of concepts.

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[105] "It is all the less plausible, therefore, to believe that the thought determinations that pervade all our representations … that such thought determinations are at our service; that it is we who have them in our possession and not they who have us I theirs. What is there of more in *us* as against them?" (*WL* I: 25/15).

[106] Perhaps this marks Hegel's acceptance of what Robert Brandom calls "platitudinous empiricism" (2000, 23).

Nevertheless, I take Hegel's acknowledgment of the genetic relation of concepts to

Vorstellungen to be a palliative to his austerity about content because it suggests that the

negative relations that are posited as conceptual are first "discovered" in a less sophisticated

"positive" psychological form. Most significantly, we encounter representations in a *linguistic*

form,[107] so that the transformation of representations into genuine concepts involves a

development of representations connected to our linguistic habits into modally loaded

oppositions: to conceptions of what can and must be. For example, it may not be the case

that an individual uses "knows" in a way that *excludes* believing what is true by accident (i.e.,

without proper justification). They might say a meteorologist "knows" the weather every

time his prediction happens to be correct. This "knows" involves a *Vorstellung* that is not yet

refined by negativity. The *concept <knowledge>* arrives only when these loose associations are

developed into an oppositional structure that clarifies the unique significance of the term as

against its conceptual neighbors. But we arrive at this negative structure by working through

the vague and unrefined representations at hand.[108] Though this "source material" is valuable

and necessary as a starting point, Hegel would also have to say that a "language of concepts"

would bear no *direct* resemblance to a language of representation.[109] Thus he can say, finally,

that the content of a concept is *only* negative, even if this holds more *an und für sich* than *für*

uns.

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[107] "The *name* is thus the *thing* [die *Sache*], as the thing is available and carries weight in the *realm of representation*. … The association of the particular names lies in the meaning of the determinations of the sensing, representing, or thinking intelligence…" (*EG* 278/199/§ 462).

[108] Recall the view of "conceptual analysis" attributed to Moses Mendelssohn above (1.2.4.), namely, "All our concepts are like the seeds of grain of dying plants which, as bad as they look, are nonetheless full of inner virtue and conceal forests of beauty in their husks" (1997, 271).

[109] In obscure saying, Hegel says that representation are "metaphors" of concepts (*EL* § 3R). This must mean at least that there is at most an *analogy* between representation *A* and concept *A'*. In several contexts, Hegel speaks explicitly of two languages of representation and concepts respectively, epitomized in the difference between religion – which depends on feeling and image – and philosophy. See *EL* 24/11 (1827 Preface): "…so, too, there are two tongues [*Sprachen*] for that import: the tongue of feeling, of representation, and of the thinking that nests in the finite categories and one-sided abstractions of understanding, and the tongue of the concrete Concept."

2.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown in what sense Hegel's *Doctrine of the Concept* is aptly named. It is not, as so many interpreters suppose, a *sui generis* project, despite the unique approach Hegel takes. Hegel does indeed wish to provide a theory of conceptual content, but he thinks that content that is conceptual, rather than being merely psychological, occupies a narrower sphere than is often supposed. Moreover, in representing the logical form of genuine concepts, we have primarily to consider the austere yet capacious relations of "negativity" and "contradiction," such as can constitute logically definite but not unmovable relations between conceptual contents. Ultimately, it is the relation of these contents in a certain way, as they occupy the formal roles of universality, particularity, and singularity, that makes definite contents possible. Such contents are not to be found merely through passive experience, of course, but (as we will consider later on) through the active work of philosophy itself, which is tasked with articulating the logical 'joints' of our concepts. When we realize that such philosophical endeavor is necessarily systematic, in that it proceeds from the same active 'power' of our thought, it becomes less surprising that Hegel is compelled to refer to it in the singular, as "the concept." He is comprehending concepts in a unique way, rather than changing the subject.

Chapter 3: Comprehending Metaphysics in the *Doctrine of the Concept*

3.1. Introduction

The preceding chapter provided a key piece of my argument that Hegel subscribes to a version of "Conceptual Transparency," for it shows in schematic form what Hegel takes a concept to be. It will be the work of the Chapter 4 to show more specifically how this account of conceptual form will be extended on the side of "objectivity" to promote Hegel's conception of Conceptual Transparency concretely. However, I have begun my positive account well into the heart of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, a work which, despite the apparently semantic and logical content of its *Doctrine of the Concept*, claims to effect a "replacement" of metaphysics. Though I have justified my claims that Hegel does indeed have concepts in view in this work, I have undoubtedly incurred some new interpretative debts regarding Hegel's metaphysics along the way. These debts may be exacted from two sides. On the one side, some will say that, though Hegel is indeed concerned with concepts as such, given his *destructive* work in the "Objective Logic," my anticipation that Hegel will have something to say about "essences" or objective reality as well as concepts disregards a crucial lesson from the first half of the *Logic*. That lesson is that "objective" metaphysics proves to be a *failure* that needs to give way to a subjectivized account of thought alone.[1] On the other side, those taking a more traditional stance toward the *Logic* may think I am creating a problem where

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[1] Recall what Pippin thinks could only be an error of Hegel: "On the face of it, there are several places where Hegel … slips frequently from a 'logical' to a material mode, going far beyond a claim about thought or thinkability, and making a *direct* claim about the necessary nature of things …." (1989, 187). See also his (2002) essay "Leaving Nature Behind, or Two Cheers for 'Subjectivism.'"

there is none: for if the *whole* of the *Logic* involves constructive conclusions about "being" or "reality,"[2] then my suggestion (which I have only anticipated and not yet defended) that Hegel's third Book justifies his turn to the objective world will seem otiose at best.

As a result, the present "architectonic" chapter is required. Though the arguments of the preceding chapter for Hegel's concern about concepts should stand on their own, they are further supported when we can see how they figure in Hegel's sweeping revision of metaphysics, which takes place over the course of the *Logic* as a whole. Needless to say, I will not be offering a thorough treatment of the argument of the *Logic* as a whole in this chapter. Instead, I will be offering a thesis about the structural relationship between the formal part of the *Begriffslogik* and the prior Objective Logic. This kind of work, I believe, has not been carried out at much length by scholars in the past, and as far as I can tell, nothing like my specific structural account has been offered in the literature.[3] And though my account will

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[2] See Hösle (1987, 60), who conceives Hegel's project as forming "an apriori system of the basic structure of the world." Or: "The categories [of the Logic] are explicit definitions of the Absolute, which the philosopher can claim to elicit only because Absolute Spirit is immanent in his thinking" (Mure 1940, 111-12). Also Taylor (1975, 231): "The *Logic* thus presents the chain of necessarily connected concepts which give the conceptual structure of reality." Houlgate (2006) is an interesting mixed case. Though he reads the majority of the Objective Logic as being surpassed by the developing concepts (see also his 2005), he also sees the *Logic* as a whole being a ontology in the sense of giving an account of being as such. Likewise, Pippin's most recent work (2018) perhaps surprisingly treats Hegel's work as an ontology in the classical sense (though he does not recognize it as such), in that it supposes that each of the thought-determinations are determinations of what it is to be anything at all (according to *possibility*). Despite his criticisms of Houlgate (ibid., 58n.47), I cannot see how Pippin's recent view is substantially different from Houlgate's. Pippin does not himself explain how there can be a difference between "real" and "logical" possibility for Hegel, the very point he accuses Houlgate of missing. Pippin's frequent talk about the conditions of "anything's being at all" being the same conditions of conceptual determinacy (e.g., 59) just seems to reproduce the Wolffian identification of being (*qua* possibility) with logical compossibility.

[3] Though broadly similar narratives about the culminating (but recapitulatory) character of the *Doctrine of the Concept* are accepted (see esp. Bubner 1980, "Hegels Logik des Begriffs"; Iber 2003) the unique feature of my account (as far I can tell) lies in the weight I put on the forms of judgment and syllogism as expressing the recapitulation of the Objective Logic in the Subjective Logic. Robert Pippin's recent book (2018) takes as its whole theme the question: "What does Hegel mean by claiming that 'logic' has 'taken the place of the old metaphysics,' and so that logic properly understood can be understood as a new metaphysics?" (37). Yet Pippin devotes virtually no space to the specifically logical forms in the *Doctrine of the Concept*, instead treating the question as a more general one about the reality of intelligibility to claims about what is. Though he often mentions a connection between Hegel's project and Kant's "Metaphysical Deduction" (cf. ibid., 62-65, 122; see 3.2.3. below), he does not suppose that the logical forms *in fine* are crucial for understanding Hegel's logification of metaphysics, which is the explanation I will pursue in what follows. Stekeler-Weithofer (2018) in his chapter "Metaphysik als Begriffslogik" offers a picture of the relationship of logic and metaphysics that

leave many of the details untouched, I believe it has rich consequences for the interpretation of Hegel, as well as for considering his place in the history of metaphysics and his relation to Kant.

A word of apology should be offered here. In this chapter, I will make few concessions to the often reasonable demand for "reconstruction," especially in terms of the *justification* Hegel offers for his views. The case I am trying to make here involves a general interpretation of the *Logic*, and for that purpose, I will not be evaluating Hegel's positions or their arguments, though I will try to make their implications intelligible. To some extent, I conceive this chapter as a 'literary' enterprise: why did Hegel structure his book as he did, and what conclusions can be drawn from the interrelation of its parts? I see these questions as important for clearing the way for the positions of Hegel I will discuss more substantially in the final chapters. While I will show in several cases what philosophical positions seem to be implied by the structure of Hegel's *Logic*, I won't be able to show why they are justified, since this would possible only by re-tracing Hegel's lengthy dialectical path in its entirety.

I will proceed as follows. I will first (3.2.1) provide an account of the kind of critique of metaphysics Hegel carries out in the Objective Logic. I hope to show in what way Hegel reserves the right to use certain metaphysical concepts despite this critique. This is partly due to the non-linear structure of the logic (3.2.2), which allows that a concept criticized in one context finds a legitimate role later on, especially in the *Doctrine of the Concept*. Accordingly, I argue (in 3.2.3) that the *Doctrine of the Concept* involves a certain "deduction" (in the Kantian sense) of the traditional concepts of metaphysics, by tracing their role to the structure of thought, judgment, and syllogism. In other words, metaphysical concepts can be preserved

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resembles the one here, though it is not defended exegetically. I discovered Stekeler's chapter only after this one was completed.

once interpreted in terms of the "logical" role they play in thought (I claim they "supervene" on logical forms). In 3.3, I try to show more concretely how the *Doctrine of the Concept* expresses this. The famous transition from "substance" to "subject" provides (in 3.3.1) both an example of the kind of metaphysical recapitulation I attribute to the book, but also proleptically contains all other instances of such recapitulation. I seek to show that Hegel's use of "substance"-talk should be seen as similarly radical (and deliberately provocative) as Fichte's use of the same. Finally, (3.3.2) I outline the general way that Hegel's account of judgments and syllogisms involve a recapitulation of metaphysical concepts, a strategy that expands upon Kant's "metaphysical deduction of the categories." Namely, we can understand traditional configurations of metaphysical concepts as *resulting* from the structure of forms of judgment and syllogism. While other interpretations of the *Logic* may be compatible with what I suggest in the later parts of this work, the one I present here best complements my twin convictions that Hegel affirms a form of philosophical rationalism while being committed to a certain Kantian order of explanation of such rationalism. It emphasizes Hegel as a kind of radical "modernist,"[4] who nonetheless wants to keep all he can from the philosophical tradition.

3.2. The Inheritance-Structure of the *Logic*

3.2.1. The Critical Dimension of the Objective Logic

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[4] See esp. the Introduction to Pippin (1997). Hegel's "modernism" consists in his unwillingness to export any normative authority outside of the claim-making ability of self-conscious subjects. Despite differences from Pippin, I think he is right to see Hegel as an exemplary modernist in this sense.

The first two books of Hegel's *Logic*, the *Doctrine of Being* and the *Doctrine of Essence*, which are collectively titled "The Objective Logic" contain, in terms of *topics* if not method, almost nothing out of place in the history of metaphysics.[5] If anything, Hegel provides us with perhaps the most thorough attempt yet to consider all concepts of historical metaphysics in a systematic shape. This can be judged simply from the table of contents. There one finds a succession of such concepts as *<being>*, *<nothing>*, *<becoming>*, *<essence>*, *<appearance>*, *<form>*, *<matter>*, *<substance>*, *<cause>*, *<finite>*, *<infinite>*, and so on. Though some concepts Hegel treats had only recent precedents in the history of philosophy,[6] none of them is introduced by Hegel for the first time. What Hegel takes to be unique in his approach (though even here he credits Fichte with the inspiration[7]) is his view that this collection of concepts can be shown to be a genuine *series*, where successors are not merely treated in an orderly manner, but are *derived* in a necessary order and systematic relationship.

Even still, Hegel's attempt to derive metaphysical concepts in a series differs mainly in method from traditional metaphysics. Why then call the book a "logic," and not just "metaphysics"? After all, Hegel remarks that the Objective Logic has the project of "tak[ing] the place of" (*tritt … an die Stelle*), or "replacing," traditional metaphysics (*WL* I: 61/42). This suggests that, despite appearances, something new *is* envisioned in the *Logic*. "Replacement," however, is inherently ambiguous. For something can be replaced by something of the same

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[5] Bubner (2003, 66) argues that Hegel's *Logic* is designed "to provide an intrinsically coherent and interconnected articulation of the totality of all previously generated concepts [of metaphysics]. Hegel's *Logic* thus *methodologically reinterprets the entire history of metaphysics*." Recall the remark of Erdmann quoted in Ch. 1: "[T]here is hardly a single category to be found [in Hegel's *Logic*] which Wolff had not discussed – in his own way, of course – in his Ontology" (quoted and translated from Honnefelder 1990, 298; orig. 1932).

[6] Namely, the way that the "Concepts of Reflection" are made thematic by Hegel goes back first to Kant (cf. A 260ff./B 316ff.), but perhaps even more closely to Fichte. Many of the key terms Hegel discusses in the Doctrine of Essence correspond to those of Fichte's 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre* (such as "identity," "opposition, "reflection," "substantiality," "interaction" [*Wechselwirkung*], "form/matter," etc.), often even in the sequence in which they appear.

[7] Cf. *EL* § 42R, § 60Z.

kind or by something of quite a different kind. A cruel dictator, for example, can be "replaced" by a new tyrant, or by a democratic regime. Just so, Hegel's *Logic* can "take the place" of metaphysics by performing the *same* function in a new way, or by replacing the function altogether. Major differences on the interpretation of Hegel – though certainly not based on this single phrase – can be typified by their allegiance to one of the respective notions of replacement.[8] Traditional readings understood Hegel as a metaphysician, but of a "panlogicist" stripe. He saw specifically logical categories (like *<judgment>* and *<syllogism>*) as metaphysically important in the same way that concepts like *<cause>* and *<substance>* were, and so needed to be added to basic categories of ontology.[9] This is "replacement" with more of the same. Non-traditional readings, beginning especially with Klaus Hartmann's (1972) proposal of a "non-metaphysical" Hegel, by contrast, understood Hegel's replacement of metaphysics as replacing its whole *function* or program with one of a new kind. Hartmann in particular saw Hegel as committed only to a "categorical" project that left in abeyance any existential commitments (ibid., 110). A discussion of *being*, was (as my convention helps to show) a discussion of *<being>*. Paradoxically, we still can ask: *is* there *<being>* ('*Gibt es <das Sein>?*')? Does Hegel's discussion apply to anything? The task for Hartmann could be carried out even lacking a definite answer to this question. (In this respect, Hartmann's program resembles classical metaphysics in being rigidly *a priori*, but without assuming the "happy coincidence" I discussed above in 1.3.2.) On this view, however, what "replaces"

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[8] The "traditional/"non-traditional" distinction is well-summarized by Kreines (2006). It has been a major (and perhaps distracting) source of debate in recent literature. See the essays collected in de Laurentiis (2016).

[9] Perhaps the iconic quotation in support of this view is the claim that the content of logic is "*the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and of a finite spirit*" (*WL* I: 44/29). As I noted in 2.1.3., this quotation is more an acid-test for interpretations of Hegel than decisive evidence in favor of a metaphysical view. As to the ontological significance of the specifically logical vocabulary, see esp. Stern (1990, 58): "The categories of universal and individual therefore enter Hegel's *Logic* as the highest determinations in his philosophical ontology, and most closely represent the rational forms of thought." For further metaphysical readings of logical vocabulary, see McTaggart (1910, 190) and Taylor (1977, 309; 313). Winfield (2006) also sees the concepts of the *Doctrine of the Concept* as the culmination of attempts to account for "determinacy" (56).

metaphysics is more recognizably called "logic," given that the concepts of metaphysics are considered at first only as basic elements of *thought*, which need not be assumed to agree with any deep structure of the world.

However, even if Hartmann's conception is correct, Hegel cannot simply be read as suspending the universal application of metaphysical concepts while leaving untouched the traditional concepts themselves. This is because, as is widely recognized, Hegel's serial derivation of metaphysical concepts also involves a *critical* dimension, even on the purely conceptual.[10] That is, Hegel's project clearly differs from, say, Wolff's, at least in that Hegel's does not assume that all the concepts he treats are meant to apply universally or disjunctively to things as such. He plans to assess these concepts prior to any such claim. Yet as we saw in the previous chapters, Hegel disallows himself Kant's strategy of rejecting outright concepts without possible empirical application just as such. He cannot say that there are no "essences," for example, just because that concept has (*ex hypothesi*) no sensory conditions on its application. Instead, if Hegel wishes to arrive at any similar conclusions as Kant about the limits of concepts, he vows to do so through an internal critique, or "dialectically." And the Objective Logic is a dialectical text *par excellence*. Hegel says explicitly that he wishes to show that the concepts of the Objective Logic, "if they are clung to in their isolation, or by themselves, must be considered at the same time as untrue" (*EL* 180/134/§ 83Z). It is thus widely agreed that some kind of critique (even proto-"deconstruction") of key metaphysical concepts is in play therein.

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[10] This is a central theme of Theunnissen 1978a (subtitled "*Der kritische Funktion der Hegelschen Logik*"). Cirullo (2006) reads the *Wesenslogik* as a "critique of essence." Bowman (2013) also sees the Objective Logic as performing a critical function, by showing the "finitude" of the traditional categories of metaphysics. He writes that the work "constitutes a *clarification* of why there are finite thought-determinations, *not a vindication* of the objective validity of finite thought-determinations" (59).

For the sake of clarifying this point, I will give a brief example of what a critique of a metaphysical concept (in this case, a pair of concepts) could be in Hegel's *Logic*. I will discuss the concept <*essence*>, since it will be fruitful for the present account in several ways.[11] Hegel devotes a whole book to the *Doctrine of Essence*, and he considers it the most difficult aspect of the *Logic* (*EL* 236/179/§ 114R). Moreover, there is not a single concept of essence involved in that work, but rather a series of oppositions that are all involved in the traditional and modern metaphysical conceptions of essence. Hegel's starting point is that a concept of essence arises as a negation of being in its finite and determinate form (*WL* II: 13/337). Colloquially, the attempt to find the essence of something is the attempt to look 'beneath the surface'. The essence is always opposed to mere being in some way, and hence each of the iterations of essence-concepts Hegel discusses includes an opposition to being, considered as something "immediate," within it. Thus, in the series of oppositions Hegel discusses we first have essence as contrasted to "semblance"[12] (*Schein*), a contrast Hegel sees in play in ancient skeptics as well as Kant; then, essence as "identity" in contrast to difference and opposition; later, essence as "ground" in contrast to what is grounded; and finally, essence as "substance" – now identical to the totality of appearances, as in Spinoza's metaphysics (and perhaps the "identity philosophy" of Schelling). To simplify the general aim of the *Doctrine of Essence*, Hegel wants to show that these contrasting relationships never involve the relation of two independent "entities," but an oppositional relation intrinsic to each term.[13] The oppositions require such relations to be intelligible at all.

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[11] While it should be noted that the *Doctrine of Being* and the *Doctrine of Essence* have different modes of critique (cf. *EL* § 161Z), my interest will be primarily concerned with the latter.

[12] I prefer this translation to the over-theorized (and overly literal) "reflective shine" of di Giovanni.

[13] "This part of the Logic … contains most notably the categories of metaphysics and of the sciences generally;—it contains them as products of the reflecting understanding, which both assumes the distinctions as *independent* and at the same time posits their relationality *as well*. But it only ties the two assumptions together … it does not bring these thoughts together it does not unity them into the Concept" (*EL* 236/179/§ 114R).

For present purposes, I will focus on essence as contrasted with *appearance*, which is one of a number of the dichotomies Hegel discusses. Hegel's account in the "Appearance" section (*WL* II: 147ff./437ff.) develops what can be seen as a conceptual genealogy[14] of a *dualism* between appearance and essence (including the Kantian notion of "things in themselves"), such that the two sides could be considered as autonomous realms. The account begins by noting that "appearance" is a *negative* characterization, which involves a contrast to something that is in itself (148/437). But this "in itself" likewise has its identity only in the negative relation to what is called appearance.[15] Nevertheless, insofar as the autonomy of appearance is denied, the negatively posited "in itself" must be given a positive identity. Hegel calls the newly minted positive identity that is contrasted to appearance *law*. A law perfectly mirrors the appearance precisely because it is constructed by way of a negative relation to the appearance: "The law is therefore the *essential* appearance; it is the latter's reflection into itself in its positedness, the *identical* content of itself and the unessential concrete appearance" (154/441).

Already Hegel's critical intent is all but obvious. Not only does the dualism of appearance and essence mischaracterize the ground of the contrast – it is appearance itself, and not essence, that provides the original content – it mischaracterizes the character of the contrast as a substantive one: (essential) laws are something *different* than and *opposed to* appearances. As Hegel continues, he uses the genealogy as a way of explaining how someone like Kant (in a "two-world" reading of the latter's metaphysics) could arrive at a view that appearances are caused by "things in themselves." He draws attention to the way that

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[14] I use this term in the literal sense of an origin story, not in the critical, Nietzschean sense.

[15] "[T]he essential moment of appearance becomes opposed to appearance itself, and, confronting the world of apearance, the world that *exists in itself* comes onto the scene" (*WL* II: 149/438).

"thing" language ascribes concreteness to these newly posited entities. According to this next move,

> The supersensible world likewise has immediate, concrete existence, but reflected, essential concrete existence. *Essence* [according to its previous determination] has no immediate existence yet; but it *is*, and in a more profound sense than being; the *thing* is the beginning of the reflected concrete existence; … Things [sc. in this new account] are posited only as the things of another, supersensible, world – first as true concrete existences, and, second, as the truth in contrast to that which just is… (158-59/445).

So the two-world theory involves a confusion of "reflected" entities, such as are posited via a negative relation to appearances, with the true basis of concrete entities, which are otherwise the very source of these novel posits.

Even so, we have not yet arrived at a truly Hegelian source of critique, since the present observation may only lead to the rejection of the theory based on a prejudice against "reification." Hegel's official criticism, rather, is unsurprisingly "dialectical." He attempts to show that the way that the dualism between appearance and essence (in the form of lawful things in themselves) is posed, when considered to the end, leads rather to an *identity* between the terms of the dualism: the world of appearance has the same content as the world of essence. Roughly, the artificial simplicity of the world of essential laws, and thus its difference from the world of appearance, is only an artefact of its *incompleteness*. At the beginning of the account, the "one" law is always outnumbered by the "many" of appearance. The law explains only *some* of the phenomena, so that others can be deemed "unessential" or "mere appearance" (cf. 154/441-42). On this construal, it seems that there is a great difference between the world of appearance and the placid and sparsely populated "kingdom of laws." But if we allow the positing of the kingdom of laws to continue to its

end, so as to account for the *whole* of appearance,[16] and if that positing is always derived

(albeit negatively) from appearances themselves,[17] then what is posited as a series of

explanatory laws is just a replication of the world of appearance it is supposed to explain.

There are no longer two "sides" but one and the same content: "[B]ecause it is now the total

reflection of this [existing] world, it also contains the moment of essenceless manifoldness

[sc. mere appearance]" (*WL* II: 158/444). The content of the kingdom of laws only "inverts"

the complexity and diversity of the realm of appearance.[18]

Thus Hegel seems to see this result as a *contradiction* between the originally dualistic

form of the contrast,[19] which requires the absolute difference of the two sides, and its result,

which affirms their identity. Here, Hegel explains the result:

> Thus the world of appearance and the essential world are each, each within it, the
> totality of self-identical reflection and of reflection-into-other, or of being-in-and-
> for-itself. <u>They are both the self-subsisting wholes of concrete existence</u>; the one is
> supposed to be only reflected concrete existence; the one [sc. *essence*] is supposed to
> be only reflected concrete existence, the other [sc. *appearance*] immediate concrete
> existence; but each *continues* into the other and, within, is therefore the <u>identity</u> of
> these two moments. (162/447; underlined)

It was clearly essential to the original distinction between essence and appearance that the

two not be reducible to each other, nor to different perspectives on "concrete existence." So

if they become, on reflection, identical, then the dualistic version of the distinction is clearly

illegitimate. The result of this account is, we can say, a *critique* of the dualism of essence of

appearance. For assuming the initial dualism leads to its own contradiction. Moreover, at its

conclusion, we are left with little to say positively about the proper role of these concepts.

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[16] "As immediate content, law is *determined* in general, distinguished from other laws, of which there is an indeterminate multitude." But now: "[I]ts content is <u>rather every determinateness in general</u>, essentially connected together in a totalizing connection" (*WL* II: 158/444; underlined).

[17] "In fact, however, law is also the *other of appearance as appearance*" (*WL* II: 156/443).

[18] Pippin (2018, 215) rightly notes that Hegel's critique here is parallel to the "Inverted World" chapter in the *Phenomenology*. Hegel cites the same parallel in a note at *WL* II: 161/447.

[19] Hegel cites the contradiction as one in which the essence/appearance contrast is seen to be a relation of *grounding* (*WL* II: 160-61/446).

The subsequent section then shows how more specific "essential relations," such as whole/parts, force/expression, inner/outer, are subject to a similar dissolutions. Without appealing to any flaw in human cognition, Hegel proceeds to show dialectically how certain metaphysical concepts, and especially their forms of constellation, come to grief.

I have felt it important to emphasize and illustrate the critical side of Hegel's treatment of metaphysics, partly to show my acknowledgment of common ground with many interpreters. For it is a significant achievement of Hegel that he is able to subject metaphysical concepts to dialectical scrutiny. However, I also think that the implications of this critical dimension are typically overdrawn. It is frequently suggested that Hegel has "left behind" the concepts which he subjects to his critical dialectic, such that the critique implies that these concepts need not further concern us in our positive "speculative" philosophizing.[20] Instead, we should attend to the ever more adequate conceptions that carry us through the end of the *Logic*. I will call this conception the *linear reading* of the *Logic*.[21] This reading supposes that series of concepts discussed by Hegel is a story of upward progress, such that early concepts in the series always represent outmoded conceptions. (Christopher Yeomans has described these, disparagingly, as readings in which the truth is only on the "second-to-last page." It can't be on the last page, since that is typically the point of

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[20] See, e.g., Houlgate (2005). Nevertheless, Houlgate makes an exception of <*being*>, and constantly affirms that the *Logic* is an explication of the true nature of being, despite his dismissal of other earlier categories of the Objective Logic. Cf., e.g., Houlgate (2006, 140). Koch (2014) also seems to endorse a purely critical view of the *Logic* when he writes, "The supposed structure of being and of relative negativity in the *Seinslogik,* and the supposed structure of absolute negativity in the *Wesenslogik,* are both deconstructed [*abgebaut*] and dissolved"(146). Koch does not think the *Begriffslogik* rehabilitates these concepts, but is a rejection of all "ontologization" (ibid.). A brief and effective challenge to the purely critical view is provided by Hartmann (1999, 282-84).

[21] E.g., "[U]ntil the final categorial shape of the 'Absolute Idea,' each categorial shape reveals its incomplete status through its explicit failure to grasp completely that which it was intended to seize upon. … Thus, we should be able to detect in the categorial sequence [of the *Logic*] a cumulative process of growth: each category should, while retaining the strengths of its predecessors, thematize more fully self-possession and the active character of such self-presence" (Cirulli 2006, 2-3). Cf. also Winfield (2006, 56) and his (2012, 291-92) where he discounts Hegel's own use of "cause" to describe teleology, since causality had been discussed earlier in the text.

transition to the next conception. Nor can it be any of the earlier pages, since those have all been left behind.[22]) If this linear understanding of the *Logic* were correct, and the *Doctrine of Essence* were thus a gallery of metaphysical failures, we should expect Hegel not to use affirmatively the kind of conceptual distinctions he overthrows. However, this is far from being the case. For example, in the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel writes,

> Philosophy has to do with Ideas, and therefore not with what are commonly dubbed 'mere concepts'. On the contrary, it exposes such concepts as one-sided and without truth, while showing at the same time that it is the *concept* alone … which has actuality, and further that it gives this actuality to itself. All else, apart from this actuality established through the working of the concept itself, is ephemeral existence, external contingency, <u>essenceless appearance</u> [*wesenlose Erscheinung*], untruth, illusion, and so forth. (*GPR* 29/17/§ 1R; slightly modified and underlined).

On this and many other occasions,[23] Hegel continues to draw a meaningful contrast between essence (often in the guise of the concept) and appearance.[24] Though such cases are not identical to the form of the distinction he criticizes, in which essence and appearance form two isolated "worlds," they are not merely equivocal. They involve the same *kind* of contrast between essence and appearance that traditional "metaphysical" philosophers have drawn.

That this is not an exceptional case, but instead holds for nearly the entire content of the Objective Logic, will be shown and explained more completely in the sequel. Unless

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[22] This was mentioned in his talk at the conference "Reconsidering Hegel's Logic" at the University of Pittsburgh, April 2017.

[23] Cf. also from that work: "external appearance [is put] in place of the true nature of the thing" (37/22/§ 3R); "A thing which is in itself or as concept is also existent in some way and its existence in such a way is a shape proper to the thing itself … The gulf present in the sphere of the finite between 'being-in-itself' and 'being-for-itself' constitutes at the same time that sphere's mere existence or *appearance* [*Erscheinung*]" (60/34/§ 10R). In the philosophy of nature: "It has already been mentioned that, in the progress of philosophical knowledge, we must not only give an account of the object *as determined by its concept*, but we must also name the *empirical* appearance [*Erscheinung*] corresponding to it, and we must show that the appearance does, in fact, correspond to its concept" (*EN* 15/6/§ 246R). Addressing the same challenge to purely critical readings, Hartmann (1999, 281-82) points out that the category of substance is also used to describe "the state" (cf. *EG* § 535).

[24] Hegel often treats "Wesen" and "Begriff" as near equivalents, as Conceptual Transparency already implies. E.g., "Die Erfahrung lehrt also nur, wie die Gegenstände beschaffen sind, nicht, wie sie sein müssen, noch wie sie sein sollen. Diese Erkenntnis geht nur aus dem **Wesen** oder dem **Begriff** der Sache hervor. Sie allein ist die wahrhaftige. Da wir aus dem Begriff die Gründe des Gegenstandes erkennen lernen, so müssen wir auch von den rechtlichen, moralischen und religiösen Bestimmungen die Begriffe erkennen" (W 4: 210).

Hegel is guilty of frequent and flagrant hypocrisy, then, his critique of metaphysical

distinctions like that between essence and appearance cannot be as general as a linear reading

must hold. It cannot be that by the end of the *Doctrine of Essence* we have seen such

distinctions, or the concepts they involve, to be obsolete. Thus, we need a way to make

sense of the remains of the Objective Logic after its critical deconstruction.[25]

3.2.2. The Non-Linear Structure of the Logic

It would be surprising indeed if a work described by its author as "circles of circles"

took a strictly linear shape. Here is Hegel's self-description of the structure of "science" in

general:

> By virtue of the nature of the method just indicated, science[26] presents itself as a *circle*
> that winds around itself, where the mediation winds the end back to the beginning
> which is the simple ground; the circle is thus a *circle of circles*, for each single member
> ensouled by the method is reflected into itself so that, in returning to the beginning it
> is at the same time the beginning of a new member. (*WL* II: 571-72/751; modified)

Hegel then applies this conception to the *Logic* itself, wherein the circle in question is the way

that the process of conceptualizing has come to conceptualize itself, and at the same time to

return to its opening subject matter, namely "being" (572/752). This "circular" path of the

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[25] Perhaps the most obvious way to make the case is simply to start with <*being*>. For this provides a helpful point of comparison. In Hegel's account, <*being*> is proved to be the same as <*nothing*>. The sameness-in-difference of the concepts provokes the development of <*becoming*>, in which <*being*> and <*nothing*> are "sublated" (cf. *WL* I: 82-82; 111-12/59-60; 80-81). Yet this case shows how a concept can be definitely "surpassed" in Hegel's progressive account, while also not being abandoned later on. For it is obviously not the case that every time Hegel uses the term "being" later on in his work that he means the same as "nothing." This is to say that Hegel's texts cannot really be used like a dictionary of concepts. What is true of <*being*> in this case, I would contend, is true *a fortiori* of other concepts of the Objective Logic.

[26] Giovanni translates the definite article, suggesting that Hegel is speaking of a specific science, perhaps "the science of logic." However, this cannot be, for two clear contextual reasons. First, Hegel just later speaks of "the single sciences" as the members of this "circle of circles." By Hegel's lights, these sciences – presumably those of *nature* and *spirit* – are not species of the science of logic. Second, the following paragraph seems to apply this general conception of science to the logic in particular ("So the logic *also* [*auch*] has returned to the absolute idea…"; emphasis added).

Logic will come as a surprise to no one, and it is even compatible with the linear reading, though only if there is only *one* circle in the text. For in that case, there could be a linear path from start to finish, even if the text ends where it begins.

However, if the *Logic* is not only a circle, but a circle of circles, the linear reading will not always hold when considering relationships between terms encountered in the text. For in that case, some of the inter-textual relationships will be within "smaller" circles, which may or may not have correspondents in the main circle from <*being*> to <*concept*> and back. Before getting further trapped in such geometrical metaphors, however, I will attempt to articulate an alternative to the linear reading by starting with some important clues from Hegel's texts. Hegel says a number of things that indicate that the *Doctrine of the Concept* plays a uniquely significant role with respect to the rest of the *Logic*:

> [I]t is precisely the Concept that *contains* [*enthält in sich*] all *the earlier determinations of thinking sublated within itself.* … the Concept is what is utterly concrete, precisely because *it contains Being and Essence, and hence all the riches of both these spheres,* within itself in ideal unity. (*EL* 307-8/236/§ 160Z; italicized)

> Being and essence are therefore moments of [the concept's] becoming; but the concept is their *foundation* and *truth* as the identity into which they have sunk and in which they are contained. (*WL* II: 245/508)

> The concept is the truth of the substantial relation in which being and essence attain their perfect self-subsistence and determination each through the other. (*WL* II: 269/526)

Occasionally, Hegel suggests that this "containment" of <*being*> and <*essence*> in the concept is carried out in Hegel's account of judgment (and syllogism) in the *Begriffslogik*:

> In their relation to the two preceding spheres of *Being* and of *Essence*, the *determinate concepts* are, as judgments, reproductions [*Reproduktionen*] of these spheres, but they are posited in the simple relation of the Concept. (*EL* 322/248/§ 171R; underlined)

> But all the same, what underlies this classification [Kant's table of judgments] is the genuine intuition that the various types of judgment are determined by the universal forms of the logical Idea itself. Thus we obtain, first of all, three main types of judgment, which correspond to the stages of Being, Essence, and Concept. … The inner ground of this system of the judgment must be sought in the fact that, since

> the Concept is the ideal unity of being and essence, the unfolding of it that comes about in the judgment must also, first of all, reproduce [*zu reproduzieren*] these two stages in a conceptual transformation, while the Concept itself shows itself to be what determines the genuine judgment. (*EL* 322/248-49/§ 171Z; underlined)

This last quotation is especially significant in its allusion to Kant's "Metaphysical Deduction of the Categories," and we will have occasion to explicate the passage at length in section 3.2.3. My current, more abstract interest, however, is Hegel's suggestion since the *Begriffslogik* "contains" the spheres of being and essence, the content of these earlier spheres is "reproduced" within the Subjective Logic.[27]

It is this latter suggestion which has not, in my view, been worked out by other scholars.[28] It is not well-understood how the *Doctrine of the Concept* "contains" the earlier Objective Logic, and if so, what significance this could have. Moreover, even a moment's reflection reveals that if there is any substance to Hegel's metaphors in such contexts, the linear conception of the *Logic* must be mistaken in general, since it now appears that the criticized categories of being and essence are recapitulated within the concept. A point on a line can only be at one place. Now while this does not suggest that such categories are not still subject to critique, it does suggest that any critique does not prevent them from becoming thematic in a new way later on. Thus, if Hegel's images about the relationship of *<concept>* to *<being>* and *<essence>* can be cashed out, significant progress in understanding the structure of his *Logic* can be made.

Though it is not intended to be geometrically sophisticated, I offer *Figure 1* as a way to visualize the basic structure of the *Logic* as conceived by Hegel in such passages:

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[27] Given this circular and reproductive character of the *Logic*, Stephen Houlgate's devout effort to show "Why Hegel's Concept is Not the Essence" (2005), while correct in the most literal terms, seems to be seriously misguided in its implications, in that Houlgate attempts to downplay appearances of recapitulation within the Objective Logic, even suggesting that concepts of being and essence that appear later on should be put in "scare quotes" (24).

[28] See note 3 above.

Figure 1.
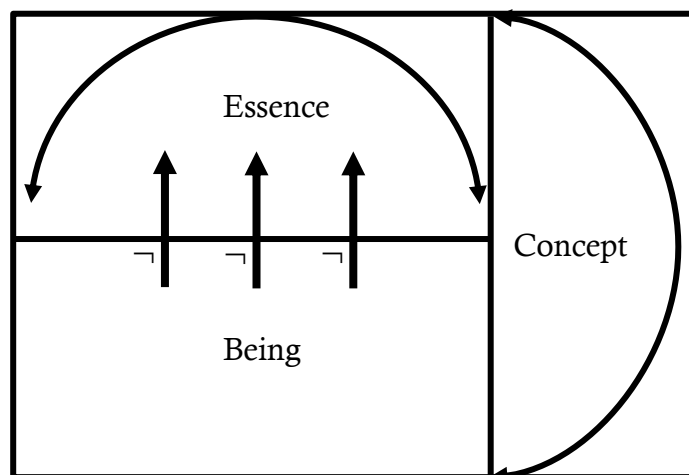
The main significant relationships depicted (or assumed) in *Figure 1* are as follows:

> (a) The categories of being are in a significant sense the foundation of the *Logic*. Both <*essence*> and <*concept*> relate to or comprehend these categories. As a purely dialectical analysis, the *Doctrine of Being* is perhaps the most self-standing part of Hegel's text.

> (b) The concepts of essence result from a *negative* relation (¬) to concepts of being (as discussed in the previous section). They emerge as concepts of "reflection," which correlate to thought's freedom vis-à-vis being, a feature of the concept as well.[29]

> (c) On the other hand, since essence-concepts are dualities, one member of the pair should be seen as a recapitulation of a being-concept. The negative relation to being is preserved within essence-concepts.[30] The curved arrow above "Essence" shows that essence progressively "comprehends" being. (This becomes clear in the case of concepts such as <*actuality*>, <*absolute*>, and <*substance*>, which involve the unity of essence and existence, appearance, etc.) Concepts of being thus 'move up' into the sphere of essence as one member of a duality.

> (d) For reasons to be clarified later, the comprehension of <*being*> by <*essence*> (in a synthesis modeled after Spinoza) leads to problems involving self-reference. (*Contra* Spinoza, substance cannot comprehend its own comprehension of substance.)[31] The said comprehension is a dialectical one and must "pass over" to something new.

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[29] "…the same determinations occur in the development of Essence as in the developing of being—but they occur in *reflected* form" (*EL* 235/179/§ 114R).

[30] "Being has not vanished [in Essence]; but, in the first place, essence as simple relation to itself is being; while on the other hand, being, according to its one-sided determination of being *something-immediate*, is *degraded* to something merely negative, to a *shine* [or *semblance*]" (*EL* 231/175/§ 112).

[31] "This infinite immanent reflection … is the *consummation of substance*. But this consummation is no longer the *substance* itself but is something higher, the *concept*, the *subject*. The transition of the relation of substantiality occurs through its own immanent necessity and is nothing more than the manifestation of itself, that the

(e) The concept <*concept*> is what succeeds in unifying <*essence*> and <*being*>, which <*essence*> cannot do on its own. The concept comprehends the *content* of the *Doctrines* of *Essence* and *Being*, as well as its own comprehension of the latter. The circle is complete.

Though some details of interpretation could be contested, I do not intend so far to present anything too controversial. However, my hope is that putting these thoughts together can help a more unified picture of the *Logic* emerge. What the model is supposed to help show is that the content introduced by the *Begriffslogik* has an additional task from the one predicted by the linear reading, which would have us assume that concepts like <*universal*>, <*particular*>, and <*singular*>, for example, are somehow a dialectical "improvement" on concepts from the Objective Logic, simply because they appear later.[32] Instead, we can see how concepts introduced in the Subjective Logic have a task involving the *preservation* of the traditional concepts of metaphysics (this, after all, is one of the meanings of Hegel's infamous "*Aufhebung*"). Putting it loosely, the Subjective Logic has to show how these metaphysical concepts and dualities can be unified in a way which could not be done without the "meta-language" of conceptuality.

3.2.3. Hegel's "Deduction" of Metaphysics

In this section, my strategy of suspending discussion of Hegel's metaphysics in the preceding chapter, for the sake of clarifying Hegel's <*concept*> as conceptual, will hopefully begin to pay off. For without that prior work, it would be difficult to convey the radical

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concept is its truth…" (*WL* II: 248-49/511). Here the failure of self-reference is evident: "Looked at more closely, the use of the relationship of interaction [in the realm of substance] is unsatisfactory because, instead of being able to count as an equivalent of the Concept, this relationship itself still requires to be comprehended [*begriffen*]" (*EL* 302/231/§ 156Z; slightly modified).

[32] Recall Stern (1990, 58): "The categories of universal and individual therefore enter Hegel's *Logic* as the highest determinations in his philosophical ontology, and most closely represent the rational forms of thought."

nature of the thesis embedded in the model I have just described. Namely, unless we assume that Hegel is really concerned with conceptuality, we will be tempted to think that the *Doctrine of the Concept* just presents a new and strangely titled chapter of first-order metaphysics. Instead, on my view, the structural and literary fact that Hegel's *Doctrine of the Concept* "contains" or "reproduces" the content of the Objective Logic helps to express the following thesis:

> **Logical Supervenience**: Metaphysical concepts and distinctions supervene on[33] the variety of forms of conceptual thought (including moments,[34] judgments, and syllogisms). The content of metaphysical concepts and distinctions can thus be understood by attending to the forms of conceptual thought.[35]

The "supervenience" relation, as understood here, implies that what supervenes on something is conceptually posterior to it. We could adequately understand the supervened on without understanding the supervening; not *vice versa*. In this case, the thesis claims that only by witnessing the transformation of metaphysical concepts into their role in basic forms of thought – the concept, judgment, and syllogism – can the function of traditional metaphysics be understood, and (at least to some extent) preserved.

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[33] Supervenience, as I understand it here, obtains whenever any variance in ϕ-features (i.e., logical) entails a co-variance in ψ-features (i.e., metaphysical), and the ψ-features depend on the ϕ-features (not vice versa). Note my prior use of this term in Chapter 1, which even provides an example of the specific Logical Supervenience thesis. I said there that, for Leibnizians, existence supervenes on conceptual completeness. This was meant to say that nothing over and above conceptual completeness (a logical property) of x is needed to determine the existence of x (a metaphysical property).

[34] I use this Hegelian term to include the fact that some metaphysical concepts may supervene on the generic forms *<universality>*, *<particularity>*, and *<singularity>*, as discussed in the previous chapter, in addition to their forms as involved in judgments and syllogisms. As we will see in particular, *<substance>* supervenes on the logical moment of *<universality>*.

[35] This thesis is similar in spirit to the neo-Fregean approach to ontology taken by Crispin Wright and Bob Hale. They, too, see the order of explanation in ontology as beginning with language and logical form. As Hale writes, for example, "[O]bjects are the (typically) non-linguistic correlates of the devices of singular reference, i.e. simple and complex singular terms" (2013, 11). In other words, for Hale, if one knows whether a word functions as a singular term in a true sentence, then one knows something about an object: metaphysics supervenes on logical form. (This allows Hale and Wright to provide a deflationary account of mathematical objects; since, so long as a statement like '2 is a number between 1 and 3' is true, then *2* is an object, or exists.) The same holds for properties, facts, etc. While the Fregean conception of logical and conceptual form Hale accepts is far more austere than Hegel's (and thus, so is its range of metaphysical concepts), I see Hegel as endorsing an approach that is similar in kind.

Contrast the order of explanation (and direction of supervenience) offered here with the kind of emphasis placed in "realist" accounts of Hegel's *Logic*. Here, for example, is Robert Stern:

> Hegel begins his analysis [in the *Doctrine of the Concept*] with a frankly realist and essentialist account of universality, stating that the universal constitutes the '*essential being*' and '*substance* of its determinations': 'it is the soul [*Seele*] of the concrete which it indwells, unimpeded and equal to itself in the manifoldness and diversity of the concrete.' Hegel defends the view that that it is the universal that constitutes the real nature of the particular individual by claiming that the universal determines what *sort* of being each individual is; and unless it exemplified a substance-kind the individual could not exist. (1990, 59)

Though there are certainly points of contact between Stern's view and the one I will offer later on, one can see that he understands Hegel's use of a logical term like "universality" as depending on the given significance of a metaphysical term like "essence," "substance," or "soul," rather than *vice versa*. Stern takes metaphysical commitments as prior to their explication in terms of logical roles (leaving it unclear how Hegel's "frankly realist and essentialist" views are justified in the first place). The logical, for Stern, supervenes on the metaphysical, at least in the sense that metaphysical concepts must be independently intelligible before the logified vocabulary of universality and particularity can be understood.

By contrast, Logical Supervenience preserves a Kantian order of explanation. Substantially, this thesis is a more general modification of the Kantian claim involved in the so-called Metaphysical Deduction of the Categories:

> The same function that gives unity to the different representations **in a judgment** also gives unity to the mere synthesis of different representations **in an intuition**, which, expressed generally, is called the pure concept of understanding. The same understanding, therefore, and indeed by means of the very same action through which it brings the logical form of a judgment into concepts by means of the analytical unity, also brings a transcendental content into its representations by means of the synthetic unity of the manifold in intuition in general, on account of which they are called pure concepts of the understanding that pertain to objects *a priori* …. In such a way there arise exactly as many pure concepts of the understanding, which apply to objects of intuition in general *a priori*, as there were

> logical functions of all possible judgments in the previous table …. (A 79/B 105; underlined).

Kant's insight, construed genetically, was that concepts like <*substance*> (as used by metaphysicians) supervenes on the role of the subject in judgment. Considered genetically, <*substance*> could only have been "reverse engineered" from this legitimate subject-role involved in ordinary empirical judgments, so that the sensory conditions which first enabled their legitimate use were set aside. Abstracted from its role in actual sensory judgments, <*substance*> only specifies the contentless subject-position in a judgment, a mere logical form.[36] This implies that anyone who wanted to "theorize" about *substance*, as if it were a referring term and indicated some content apart from the logical form of our knowledge, would be merely confused, a confusion evidenced in the antinomies (and other dialectical failures) apparent in the history such theorization. Moreover, no one could even begin to think about substance if they had no conception of the subject of judgment.[37] Kantian Critique thus presents an "error theory" of metaphysical judgments for any application which does not explicitly recognize the "condition of possibility" involved in the form of empirical judgments. For Kant, one cannot do metaphysics without talking about forms of judgment.[38]

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[36] "Now to the use of a concept there also belongs a function of the power of judgment, whereby an object is subsumed under it, thus at least the formal condition under which something can be given in intuition. If this condition of the power of judgment (schema) is missing, then all subsumption disappears; for nothing would be given that could be subsumed under the concept" (B 304). "So much is lacking to be able to infer these properties [e.g., endurance] solely from the pure category of substance, that we must rather ground the persistence of a given object on experience if we would apply to that object the empirically usable concept of a **substance**" (A 349).

[37] This requirement, of course, closely resembles even Aristotle's early attempt to define the categories: "A *substance*—that which is called a substance most strictly, primarily, and most of all—is that which is neither said of a subject nor in a subject, e.g., the individual man or the individual horse" (*Categories* 5.13-15/1984, vol. 1, 4). Aristotle defines substancehood (at least partly) by the asymmetry of its role in judgments, though I don't mean to imply that categories are reducible to this role in Aristotle. See Lau (2008) for a comparison of the Aristotelian-Kantian conception of the categories with Hegel's.

[38] In case the twelve categories of Kant seems too sparse to make the analogy to Hegel plausible, it should be recalled that Kant thought that a system of derivative concepts ("predicables") could be obtained from the

Now in Chapter 1 it had already become clear that I do not take Hegel to accept Kant's specific requirements regarding the role of thought for the content of metaphysical concepts (which includes his Aesthetic Constraint). But I will argue that his *Logic* nevertheless involves a similar revisionary interpretation of metaphysical concepts as supervenient forms of thought. This is easier to miss in Hegel than in Kant, however, because Hegel puts the dialectical failures up front and the logical "deduction" in the back, a reversal of the Kantian order of exposition, if not explanation.[39] Nevertheless, Hegel's use of this Kantian strategy is even more sweeping than Kant's. Kant's "category" is not, for the most part, in Hegel's preferred vocabulary, but his general title for the concepts of the *Logic* is "*Denkformen*" ("forms of thought/thinking"). In the Objective Logic, this is not explicitly thematized, since the aim there is only to consider metaphysical concepts "in and for themselves." However, given that such a procedure shows these concepts to be dialectical – full of contradictions – the result of the Objective Logic (much like the Kantian Dialectic) is negative indeed. Yet this is not the end of the story, for the Subjective Logic shows how, when considered *as* "*Denkformen*," the concepts of metaphysics have a legitimate role in the structure of thought.[40]

Hegel acknowledges the similarity of strategy between his *Logic* and Kant's revision of metaphysics very clearly in a letter written the year the first volume of the *Logic* was published:

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categories, which Kant suggests would closely resemble manuals of ontology; it would deliver "a complete system of transcendental philosophy" (A 81f./B 107f.). I owe this point to Karin de Boer.

[39] Apart from the quotations above, recall that Hegel also clarifies that the *Doctrine of the Concept* is also the "*absolute foundation*" of the rest of the work. Cf. *WL* II: 245/508. Thus, though Hegel thinks that one can *criticize* metaphysical concepts on their own, he seems to think accounting for their truth (to they extent that they are true) depends on the way they are recapitulated in the *Doctrine of the Concept*.

[40] This preservative element distinguishes my reading from some seemingly extreme non-metaphysical readings of Hegel. For example, di Giovanni (2005, 39) sees the transition to concept as revealing the absoluteness of "discourse." Hegel is supposed to be teaching that "the point of all discourse is discourse itself; its underlying theme is precisely the meaning that it constitutes."

> According to my view, metaphysics in any case falls entirely within logic. Here I can cite Kant as my precedent and authority. His critique reduces metaphysics as it has existed until now to a consideration of the understanding and reason. Logic can thus in the Kantian sense be understood so that, beyond the usual content of so-called general logic, what he calls transcendental logic is bound up with it and set out prior to it. … [T]hose Kantian distinctions already contain a makeshift or rough version of [my logic]. (Hegel 1984, 277; Letter to Neithammer, October 23, 1912)

"Transcendental Logic" in Kant concerns logical forms insofar as they can be used to cognize an object ("laws of the understanding and reason"), while "General Logic" concerns the mere form of judgments and inferences without regard to any object (A 57/B 81; A 53/B 77).[41] Hegel's suggestion that transcendental logic is "bound up with" and "set out prior to" general logic in his *Logic* seems to correspond, in my proposal, with the way the Objective Logic (which he equates with Kantian transcendental logic: *WL* I: 59/40) concerns the basic "metaphysical" concepts connected to the objective determination of things, while the Subjective Logic shows how this "transcendental" role is tied specifically with the forms of judgment and syllogism: general logic. Just as the categories "supervene on" the forms of judgment as used in objective cognition in Kant, so do all "objective" concepts of metaphysics supervene on the fully specified forms of concept, judgment, and syllogism in Hegel.[42]

Though it will be helpful to see (as in 3.3. below) some detailed examples of this interpretation in action, the basic starting point of the view can be stated generically. The metaphysical import of the *Begriffslogik* lies in showing that metaphysical dualities are (for the most part) records of so many failed attempts to relate the *singular* and *universal* content of

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[41] Pippin (2018) also emphasizes the way Hegel sees general and transcendental logic "bound up" together. However, he nowhere leads us from this suggestion to a thesis about the role of *specific* forms of judgment and syllogism with certain categories of "transcendental logic" (namely, Hegel's Objective Logic).

[42] Though he does not develop the point, Pippin (2018, 57-58) makes a suggestive remark in a similar direction: "One could say something similar about Kant (although he would not): that *S-is-P* form already embodies a metaphysics, requires a distinction between substance and properties, entities that could be subject to that form."

thought to each other. Roughly speaking, concepts of "finite being" correspond to singular contents of thought. This is why the development of the *Doctrine of Being* ends up with <*measure*>; the singular is the measurable. The *Doctrine of Essence*, by contrast, concerns concepts of "reflection," as negative flights away from mere finite being. Yet essence-concepts cannot be considered on their own, but only in a negative relation to concepts of being. The dualistic structure of the *Doctrine of Essence* then shows that attempts at "reflecting" being lead to oppositions. One pole of the opposition is always a correlate of a "finite being" term (such as <*appearance*>). The other pole is some "essence" term, namely an idealization with respect to being. In the *Wesenslogik*, these terms are considered in such a way that their relation to each other is obscure. (Hegel's conception of *wesenslogische* oppositions conforms nicely to Robert Brandom's (2009, 98) slogan about dualisms: "A dualism is a distinction drawn in such a way as to render unintelligible crucial relations between the distinguished items"). The *Begriffslogik* then reinterprets the nature of the confusion involved in previous metaphysics as a "logical" one: namely, traditional metaphysical oppositions are the products of forms of judgment in which the relationship of terms functioning as *singular* terms and those functioning as *universal* is obscure. Roughly, what was called being (as finite being) corresponds to what functions logically as a singular, while what was called essence or reflection corresponds to what functions as a universal.

Clearly, then, if this view is on the right track, there is not *one* "problem of universals" that occupies a dusty corner of metaphysics. Rather, a whole variety of metaphysical problems result from the failure to understand the relation of singularity to universality in general.[43] Hegel shows this vividly by traversing a linear path that "deduces"

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[43] See Berman (2005) and Winfield (2005), in the same volume, for accounts of the differing notions of singularity and universality (respectively) involved in Hegel's treatment of judgment and syllogism. This diversity of logical notions shows why Stern's (1990, 58) claim (based on a highly linear reading of the *Logic*)

the variety of forms of judgment and syllogism, which he groups according to the *Doctrines*

of *Being* and *Essence*. Hegel's theory of judgment in particular *reproduces* the dualisms

belonging to the Objective Logic, but then overcomes this dualism on the way to the form

of a syllogism. Hegel says this as explicitly as one may hope in a quotation that bears

repeating:

> Thus we obtain, first of all, three main types of judgment, which correspond to the
> stages of being, essence, and concept. … The inner ground of this system of the
> judgment must be sought in the fact that, since the concept is the ideal unity of being
> and essence, the unfolding of it that comes about in the judgment must also, first of
> all, reproduce these two stages in a conceptual transformation, while the concept
> itself shows itself to be what determines the genuine judgment. (*EL* 322/248-49, §
> 171Z)

Here Hegel shows that the Subjective Logic sets out to solve problems remaining from the

Objective Logic. Though the problems are set out again (reproduced) in the theory of

judgment, they verge on resolution through his account of the syllogism. Namely, the

syllogism (developed in its most adequate form) shows how the singular and universal

content of thought can avoid dualism and resolve into a unity. With this we can appreciate,

from a different point of view, the "unity of form" thesis discussed in the last chapter. In the

context of the *Logic* as a whole, the "unity of form" expresses not only the internal relation

of thought-forms amongst themselves, but also the resolution of the metaphysical concepts

that are covered by those terms. For example, if there is a dualism of essence and

appearance, and this dualism is correlated to a configuration of a universal (essence) and

singular (appearance), then a resolution of that *thought-form* is *eo ipso* a resolution of the

metaphysical concepts that supervene on those thought-forms. In general, a successful

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that "The categories of universal and individual therefore enter Hegel's *Logic* as the highest determinations in
his philosophical ontology, and most closely represent the rational forms of thought," cannot be right. The
singular and universal can represent *any* kind of thought, including those of the Objective Logic, therefore they
are not in themselves more ontologically basic or more perspicuous. The progress in the *Doctrine of the Concept*
lies in better defining their relations.

mediation of singular and universal (via particularity) will illustrate the mediation of former

metaphysical dualisms.

Hence, *Figure 1* can be modified in this way:
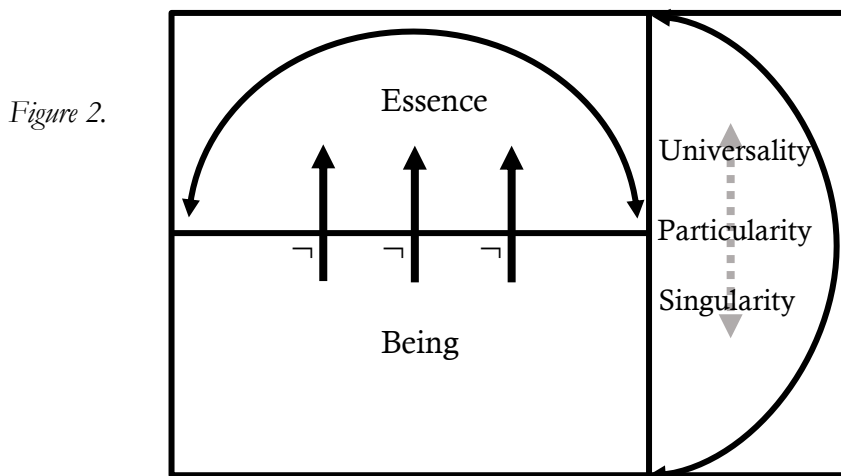
Figure 2.

Figure 2 suggests that the right account of the relationship between the forms of thought will

be the account that also shows how the concepts of being and essence can be

comprehended in a unity. Let us compare this figure directly with the unity of form thesis

from the previous chapter:

> **Unity of Conceptual Form:** An object-term *a* **(singular)** qualifies as a type α
> **(universal)** because it contains opposing determinations β/~β **(particular)** that
> suffice and necessitate for the *a* to be an α.

Though this thesis is stated in the language of the *Begriffslogik*, when juxtaposed with the

above account, we can see that the formal unity it discusses is not something introduced late

in Hegel's *Logic*. Rather, the unity described in the Subjective Logic, in which a concept

involves the unity of formal moments, is the very thing that the Objective Logic had hoped

to achieve. The prospect here is that if a concept can be adequately expressed according to

the unity of conceptual form, then that concept *eo ipso* reconciles certain metaphysical

"antinomies," which would be unresolved if the formal contribution of thought was not recognized.

I call the preserving and re-capitulating of metaphysical dualisms in the *Begriffslogik* its "inheritance structure." Though the *Begriffslogik* has its own "positive" objectively oriented metaphysic (see chapter 4 below), the basic terms involved in its expression of metaphysical claims come through a re-structuring of previously available concepts through their role in various forms of judgment and syllogism. This means that the dialectical critique of concepts like <*essence*> and <*substance*> is not the last word. Rather, everything depends on showing how these terms can be properly understood as having roles within the formal structure of conceptual thought. The most important concepts and distinctions of traditional metaphysics can be preserved if, by extending the insight of Kant's "Metaphysical Deduction," traditional metaphysical concepts are reinterpreted as specific "*Denkformen*" of the moments of the concept, judgment, and syllogism. This is why Hegel is justified in using metaphysical concepts from the Objective Logic when stating his own philosophical positions, despite his otherwise critical diagnoses of these concepts.

3.3. Recapitulation in the *Doctrine of the Concept*

3.3.1. The Transition of Substance to Concept as an Interpretive Key

The first conceptual "inheritance" carried out in the *Begriffslogik* is significant not merely as an example of the inheritance structure of that text, but also as metonymically containing all others. This is the inheritance of <*substance*>, the final overarching concept of the Objective Logic. Hegel is famous for announcing in his *Phenomenology* that "everything

hangs on conceiving and expressing the true not *substance*, but just as much as *subject*" (*PG* 23/10/§ 17). In the context of the Logic, Hegel carries out a similar transition from substance to subject, though he specifies the "subject" in this context as "the concept."[44] Just as "subject" or "spirit" is to reinterpret substance in the *PG*, so "concept" reinterprets substance in the Logic. Stated most succinctly, "the concept is the *truth* of substance" (*WL* II: 246/509).

In this section, I want to get more precise about what such a transition implies about the role of the *Begriffslogik* in interpreting the history of metaphysics. In historical terms, it is clear that Spinoza is the main thinker of <*substance*> in the sense that Hegel develops the term (cf. *WL* II: 249/511),[45] and, we can assume by his near-ultimate position in the *Wesenslogik* (not to mention Hegel's often high praise), a high-point of the metaphysical tradition.[46] Hegel concedes the common sentiment of his contemporaries that Spinozism is a bulwark of rational proof that seems irrefutable on its own terms.[47] Importantly, Hegel credits the Spinozist concept of substance, and its Romantic variant "the absolute," with provisionally unifying the oppositions that are shown to result in the earlier stages of the *Doctrine of Essence*. Though I have emphasized the incomplete resolution of the *Wesenslogik* on its own terms (something correct when seen from the end), it is Spinoza, for Hegel, who first attempts to show that such oppositions as essence and appearance, thought and

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[44] He also clarifies that "subject" is not here to be equated to the form of individual subjective consciousness. See *WL* I: 62/42-43.

[45] Of course, neo-Spinozist thinkers such as Schelling and Herder are also implicitly under consideration, especially given the revival of Spinozism in Germany a generation prior to Hegel. Since I won't be attempting a strict historical comparison of Hegel and Spinoza (or specific Spinozists), this won't affect the main point here.

[46] "Spinoza is the high-point of modern philosophy. Either Spinozism or no philosophy" (W 20: 163-64; Quoted from Franks 2005, 84). Cf. Franks (2005, Ch. 2) for the monistic tendencies in post-Kantian philosophy resulting from the renewed influence of Spinoza.

[47] "This idea of Spinoza's must be must be acknowledged to be true and well-grounded. There is an absolute substance, and it is what is true. But it is not yet the whole truth, for substance…must determine itself as spirit" (Hegel 2009, 122). On the unsurpassed influence of Spinozism on the generation prior to Hegel, see Beiser (1987, Ch. 2). Most striking of all was F.H. Jacobi's twin conviction that Spinozism is the paradigm of rational justification *and* it leads directly to nihilism (cf. ibid., 83ff.).

extension, are mere "moments" of a single, unified whole. When expressing this idea in his own voice, Hegel glosses "substance" as "actuality" (*Wirklichkeit*).[48] Hegel defines "actuality" (*Wirklichkeit*) in terms emblematic of all the prior metaphysical oppositions: "Actuality is the *unity of essence and concrete existence*; in it, *shapeless* essence and *unstable* appearance – or subsistence without determination and manifoldness without permanence – have their truth" (*WL* II: 186/465). Readers of Hegel will be well-familiar with this term, which appears notably in the famous "*Doppelsatz*" of the *Philosophy of Right*: "*What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational*" (*GPR* 25/14).[49] The term is clearly involved in doctrines Hegel endorses. Accordingly, much that occurs in the "Actuality" chapter involves a explication of the genuine resolution of conceptual oppositions that Hegel wants to see resolved. In "Actuality," <*being*> and <*essence*> seem "comprehended."[50]

The comprehension of oppositions of within the Logic of Essence itself seems to indicate that Hegel's project is closer to "pre-critical" metaphysics than I have let on; perhaps even a reconceptualized Spinozism. For it is true that the final Section of the *Wesenslogik* does not lead "dialectically" to the dissolution of the apparent resolutions it attempts. Instead, much of what Hegel says in these passages is meant to stand up even once the transition to the Subjective Logic takes place. However, we must see the precise way in which Hegel preserves aspects of the Spinozian metaphysics of substance. What does Hegel mean by saying that the concept is the "truth" of substance?

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[48] "Actuality" is both a Section heading under which "the Absolute" and other topics connected to Spinoza fall, as well as a Chapter heading within that Section.

[49] See Stern (2009, Ch. 3) for an excellent treatment of the *Doppelsatz*, which explains the metaphysical resonance of its key terms, as well as its intended significance. The "*Doppelsatz*" designation is due to Dieter Henrich (ibid., 81).

[50] For example, the "movement of accidentality" – which signifies the mere formal identity of what Hegel calls "substantiality" – "exhibits in each of its moments the mutual reflective shine of the *categories* of being and of the *reflective determinations* of essence" (*WL* II: 219/490; underlined).

Hegel explains this obscure saying both at the end of the Objective Logic and in a summary in the Introduction to the Subjective Logic. I take Hegel's remarks there to suggest that the very same characteristics and features that are marks of <*substance*> are best reinterpreted as the formal moments of conceptuality. Essentially, though substance is the unity of thought and being, essence and existence, etc., it is on its own terms inwardly differentiated (in a way similar to the "attributes" of Spinoza). For example, the notion of substance as *causa sui* implies for Hegel that substance contains both an active and passive element, even if they are two sides of the same coin. When Hegel develops concepts in this way in the Objective Logic, however, he takes himself to be following through conceptual implications as they develop, not necessarily *attributing* these concepts to anything (this is a point well-taken from Hartmann (1972)). For this reason, his description of the attributes of substance does not involve an identification of that substance *with* anything – or everything.

In saying that the truth of substance is the concept, however, he finally *is* committing himself to identifying the determinations of substance with something. These determinations of substance turn out to refer obliquely to the formal structure of thought: the concept as such. Here is Hegel's way of making this identification at the end of the *Wesenslogik*, which should be quoted at length despite its difficulty:

> No longer, therefore, does absolute substance as self-differentiating absolute form repel itself as necessary from itself, nor does it fall apart as *contingency* into indifferent, external substances, but, on the contrary, it *differentiates* itself: *on the one hand*, into the totality (the <u>heretofore passive substance</u>) which is at the origin, as the reflection from internal determinateness, as simple whole that contains its *positedness* within itself and *in this positedness is posited as self-identical* – <u>this is *the universal*</u> –; *on the other hand* into the totality (<u>the hitherto causal substance</u>) which is the reflection, equally from internal determinateness, into the negative determinateness which … equally is the whole, but posited as the *self-identical negativity* – <u>the singular.</u> But, because the *universal* is self-identical only in that the *determinateness* that it holds within is *sublated* … it immediately is *the same negativity* that *singularity* is. And the singularity, because it equally is the determinedly determined, the negative as negative, immediately is *the same identity* that *universality* is. This, their *simple* identity, is <u>the *particularity*</u> that, from the singular, holds the moment of *determinateness*; from the universal, that of

<u>immanent *reflection*</u> – the two in immediate unity. (*WL* II: 240/505; key terms underlined).

Admittedly, I haven't said enough to make the Hegelese of this paragraph intelligible. Nor would a detailed explication serve my more basic present purpose. What is important to note here is Hegel's interchange of "substance terms" with "concept terms," according to the pattern of Logical Supervenience. What I take Hegel to be admitting in this passage is what that thesis implies: the conceptual explication of substance had been nothing other than an immanent development of consequences internal to the concepts involved. It was not a description or theory of something else. However, at the same time, this passage attempts for the first time to attach a reference to the erstwhile free-floating talk of substance.[51] "Substance" is not about nothing: rather, the basic elements of substance-talk can be equated with the formal features of the conceptual whole. The self-identical totality that was <*substance*> proper is now to be considered the dimension of universality of thought. The internal negative relations that suffice to express determinateness constitute the mode of singular thought. And the particular is the "immanent reflection" of the two prior sides. Hegel preserves the key moments of substance in the key moments of the concept.

These formal features of conceptuality have already been described in greater depth in the previous chapter. Given what was said there, we can see that what is radical about Hegel's transition from the Objective to the Subjective Logic is that the metaphysical vocabulary of the Objective Logic, the objective status of which is at first held in abeyance, is ultimately explicable in terms of his formal-conceptual vocabulary. A traditional "monist" reading of Hegel has to say the reverse: here, a metaphysical thesis referring to "substance"

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[51] It is perhaps on this point that I differ from Hartmann's (1972) programmatic sketch. It seems by virtue of the self-reference of concept talk, the "reference" or existential commitment to conceptuality cannot be suspended entirely.

is supposed to be explanatory in its own right, and a formal vocabulary translating this thesis into logical terms is secondary; Hegel is offering a logified or subjectified theory of something otherwise similar to the object of Spinoza's pronouncements.[52] By contrast, I am suggesting that only when the explicit language of thought-forms is developed does the "reference" of metaphysical language become clear. This means that many of the insights connected with the concept of substance are in fact attributable (in this case) to the "universal" whole of thought; the internal relations of substance are to be reconceived as relations between different formal "moments" of conceptuality.[53] The core elements of Hegel's account of <*substantiality*> supervene on the moments of conceptual form.

Because of the close connection of the substance-subject transition in Hegel to the work of J.G. Fichte, it is perhaps useful to point out the way that Fichte's work can be seen as accomplishing a similar "comprehension" of substance, one instrumental to Hegel's own. Famously, F.H. Jacobi interpreted Fichte's work as an "inverted Spinozism" (1994, 502), and not without plausibility. This was because the monistic totality ascribed by Spinoza to substance, *deus sive natura*, was ascribed by Fichte to the self-positing *Ich*. Nothing *is*, for an *Ich*, apart from its own positing, and any apparent *nicht-Ich* that is posited through the encounter with a "check" (*Anstoß*) from outside, is again only possible through the positing of the *Ich*. The "outside" of the *Ich* is only a modality of its "inside" (namely, a self-

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[52] A common interpretation assumes that Hegel's discussion of "substance" had already as it were fixed a reference to everything, and then this everything is re-interpreted as a kind of subjectivity. Henrich (1971/2010, 96) for example, speaks of Hegel's "theses" of the "substance-character of the subject" and the "subject-character of the substance." He writes as if the object of Hegel's consideration were a world-wide active subjective process.

[53] Among commentators with which I am familiar, the view I espouse here is perhaps closest to that of Iber (2003). In his terms, "Now what is decisive in the transition [from substance to concept] is that substance as reformulated in the Logic of Essence as a relation-to-self in the opposed determinations of substance and accidentality, cause and effect, and finally of interaction, implies 'in itself' the structure of the Logic of the Concept, affirmative self-referentiality as self-referential negativity, but that this structure as such cannot be made explicit under the conditions of the categories of substance" (52).

limitation). Fichte thus interprets the *Ich* as a kind of *causa sui*: "The self's own positing of itself is thus its own pure activity" (FW I: 95/1970, 97). In this way, the Fichtean *Ich* is a replacement for the Spinozian substance. The intended replacement of Spinoza is clear in the following allusion: "*That whose being or essence consists simply in the fact that it posits itself as existing*,[54] is the self as absolute subject. As it *posits* itself, so it *is*; and as it *is*, so it *posits* itself…" (I: 97/98).[55] Combined with Fichte's further view that "No possible A in the above proposition [sc. A = A] (no *thing*) can be anything other than something posited in the self" (I: 99/100), the Fichtean *Ich* is clearly a *rival* totality to the Spinozian substance. Thus can Fichte claim that his system is "Spinozism made systematic, save only [as if it were a minor difference! WCW] that *any given self is itself the one ultimate substance*" (I: 122/119; emphasis added). Inverted Spinozism, indeed.

The idea that the Fichtean *Ich* replaces the Spinozian substance entails that there is some degree of functional analogy between them: the *Ich* must achieve something similar to substance, or have a set of important common 'properties', so that it can be seen as a suitable (even if not a seamless) replacement for the latter. Yet for the replacement to be a radical one (as indeed it is in Fichte's case) there must be significant 'referential' differences between the two concepts. The Fichtean *Ich* may share some functional properties with Spinoza's substance (such as being a kind of *causa sui*), but it does *not* share a reference: the two are by no means the same thing, especially in Spinoza's mind. For this reason, such a replacement concept cannot be interpreted innocently as a descriptive variant of what it replaces.

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[54] Spinoza's definition of a *causa sui* is: "that whose essence involves existence; or that whose nature can be conceived only as existing" (*Ethica* Part I, Def. 1/2006, 3). Substance is identified as *causa sui* at Part I, Proposition 7.

[55] Cf. also: "Insofar as the self is regarded as embracing the whole absolutely determined realm of all realities, it is *substance*" (FW I: 142/1970, 136).

We need not test Fichte's claim to this functional replacement of substance with subject. I have introduced it only to make my view of Hegel's intentions clearer. My claim is simply that Hegel's view of <*concept*> as the "truth" of <*substance*> (which is textually clear, whatever its significance) should be interpreted in a similarly radical way. Just as Fichte can maintain some structural features of Spinozism while altering their significance entirely, so can Hegel maintain a congruence (and functional analogy) with Spinozistic metaphysics, while decidedly *not* affirming the existence of a single substance in its traditional meaning, since the concept of the concept is meant to replace the latter. Let us not forget that Hegel regarded the transition to the concept as the "one and only true *refutation* of Spinozism" (*WL* II: 251/512; emphasis added), not a mere reinterpretation.

Hegel's replacement of a traditional metaphysical totality with the totality of "the concept" is different from Fichte's subjectivist replacement of substance, according to which *each Ich* is a totality akin to substance all by itself. Hegel sees the root of his conception of the concept in the Kantian-Fichtean understanding of active subjectivity, transcendental apperception, but in speaking of this subjectivity as *conceptual*, Hegel refuses to index this subjectivity to individual thinkers. Instead, the concept is the active subjectivity of thought that exists *irrespective* of particular subjects, though never apart from some subject(s). When anyone thinks conceptually, they think actively in such a way that nothing is for them outside their taking it to be that way. But if their taking things to be some way comes in a *conceptual* shape, it comes in a *purely general* form, a form that is no longer indexed just to them. Hence, the prospective totality that an active thinker comes to articulate 'from the inside' of their own active thought, is also a possibly *objective* articulation of how things are, from any 'point of view'. This is the way in which Hegel both embraces the subjectivizing turn (as he sees it)

of Fichte, while supposing that it does not require a confinement to the activity of individual

subjects.[56]

However, what Hegel does is "deflationary" because he thinks that if "objectivity"

will be introduced again into his system, it has to go *through* the exaggerated form of

unbounded Fichtean subjective freedom he has introduced. In this case, however, this

"subjectivity" through which the account must pass (and beyond which it must not attempt

to go) is the "formal concept,"[57] namely the totalities of universality, particularity, and

singularity discussed in the previous chapter (cf. also *WL* II: 252/513). I take this to mean

that, in contrast to Fichte, Hegel takes his rival totality to the Spinozian substance to be (at

least initially)[58] *the formal shape of conceptual thought as such*.[59] We already saw that conceptual

form, at least qua universal, is (as logicians would say) "uninterpreted" and thus admits any

possible value. This is what part of what Hegel means I calling the concept "free":

> In the *concept*, therefore, the kingdom of *freedom* is disclosed. The concept is free
> because the *identity that is in and for itself* and constitutes the necessity of substance is at
> the same time as sublated or as *positedness*, and this positedness, as self-referential, is
> that identity. (*WL* II: 251/513)

Hegel goes on to equate the identity which is a "sublated" form of substance with the

universal: "But this *self-reference* of the determinateness in which the latter *rejoins* itself is just as

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[56] It should be noted that the trend in Fichte scholarship of the last decades has been committed to showing that the impression that Fichte's subjectivity is a purely private or solipsistic kind is thoroughly mistaken. See esp. Beiser (2002, Part II); Franks (2016).

[57] "As the soul of objective existence, the concept must *give itself* the form of *subjectivity* that it *immediately* has as *formal* concept; and so, *in the form* of the free concept it still lacked, it steps forth over against that objectivity and, over against it, it makes therein the identity with it … into an identity that is also *posited*" (*WL* II: 271/527).

[58] "Initially," because Hegel aims to re-introduce objectivity into the account, so that the purely formal concept will not qualify as, say, *causa sui,* on its own. See 4.3.1. below.

[59] Note, incidentally, that the concept is intuitively a good candidate to satisfy Spinoza's definition of substance as "that which is in itself and is *conceived through itself;* that is, that the conception of which does not require the concept of another thing from which it has to be formed" (*Ethica* Part I, Def. 3/2006, 4; emphasis added). Naturally, the concept of the concept does not require the concept of anything non-conceptual from which it may be formed. Its existence is self-certifying. See the related (neo-Cartesian) argument of Nagel (1997, Ch. 2), with regard to thought in general.

much *the negation of determinateness*, and thus the concept, as this equality with itself, is the

universal" (*WL* II: 251-52/513).

Given my earlier interpretation of the universal as the free totality of possible

content, a further analogy with Spinozian <*substance*> becomes clear. Namely, as we saw in

the earlier account, the content introduced by the singular and particular form of

conceptuality is, though different from the universal as given, always grounded in the

freedom of the universal. This is why the singular and particular (considered as a whole) can

be properly identical with the universal. But if this is so, then were we to speak of the

"cause" of this conceptual content, we would always have to credit the concept itself in an

alternate form as the source of this content. A consideration of conceptual content requires

that we say that the concept is *causa sui*. And this is what Hegel says of the concept: "it is a

cause of itself [*Ursache ihrer selbst*], and this is the substance that has been *liberated to the concept*

[die *zum Begriffe befreite Substanz*]" (*WL* II: 251/513; modified). In other words, the concept

proper is what exhibits properties formerly attributed to substance, but it achieves this

precisely as the free positing of thought.[60] The freedom of thought is what allows the

concept as such to "comprehend" – to out-conceptualize – the rigid metaphysics of

substance.[61] In fact, we can only explain *Spinoza's* (or any other thinker's) capacity to

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[60] Glocker (1924, 51-52) nicely articulates a similar conception of the role of the concept in replacing both substance and the Fichtean *Ich*: "The concept is a concrete structure [*Gebilde*] of thorough-going freedom, because it both overcomes the (logically) pre-conceptual concreteness of so-called substance as well as raises to a higher level a cogito that has come to itself. Substance was A, an obscure A, that knows nothing of itself. Conceptualizing [*Das Begreifen*] consist in the reflection A = A. … With this, A is consciously posited; its obscurity is overcome and yet nothing is lost; for the result is indeed always A, but an A that – to speak with Kant – is accompanied by an 'I think' – A free A, an A that posits itself as identical with itself."

[61] Though I do not wish to delve into the way Hegel's concept also includes the "infinity" of substance, this quotation from Lau (2008, 94) makes the point perfectly: "For Hegel, speculative reason is essentially infinite, not due to any mysterious divine power, but on the ground that it is capable of comprehending its own necessary conditions and limitations. Reason overcomes the finitude of the standpoint of the understanding by virtue of its self-critical mode of thinking, reflecting upon the very conditions under which thinking is possible. Accordingly, Hegel's absolute knowledge turns out to mean nothing but the total comprehension of finitude from within finitude."

construct such a metaphysical theory by appealing to such a free positing of thought, though Spinoza's own conception of thought as an attribute of substance makes no room for it.[62]

Thus, conceptual thought, considered as a totality, *recapitulates* or "inherits" the thought of totality as substance.[63] Inversely, <*substantiality*> *supervenes on* the conceptual totality. This entails that some or even much of what is discussed under the rubric of substance may also find a place, through a coordinate recapitulation, under the rubric of the concept. This is what I meant in saying that the inheritance of <*substance*> metonymically contains much more than that concept alone. *Figures 1* and *2* above show roughly how that is meant to be imagined. What is excluded on this account is that the self-conception of the Objective Logic governs the proper interpretation of the Subjective Logic. Instead, it is only if and when the Subjective Logic refigures the earlier categories of the Objective Logic that they are preserved. This means that, in many cases, critical remarks made by Hegel with respect to a category of the Objective Logic may not be definitive, given the prospect of the category being recapitulated (and thus, to be sure, modified) later on.

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[62] On this point see esp. Moyar (2012). One decisive difference between the conceptions of Hegel and Spinoza is that Hegel *wants* to explain the ability of thought to freely *dissociate* itself from what it takes to be reality – to be either false or simply fleeting. Hegel sees Spinoza's view of (infinite) thought as bound to extension, and thus incapable of this distance to it: "Of course, substance [for Spinoza] is the absolute unity of *thought* and being or extension; it therefore contains thought itself, but only in its *unity* with extension, that is to say, not as *separating* itself from extension and hence, in general, not as determining and informing, nor as a movement of return that begins from itself' (*WL* II: 195/472). Hegel sees the beginning of free, conceptual thought as a negative relation to presumed reality, and this why the possible emptiness of the universal is a crucial feature for him. This was part of what I meant in the last chapter in describing the concept as "evasive."

[63] Though it would distract from my main purpose here to enter into further historical connections, it is also worth noting that Kant himself seems to offer a strikingly parallel diagnosis in the chapter on the "Transcendental Ideal" in his Transcendental Dialectic. Kant there offers a genealogy from the notion of *conceptual possibility*, namely from the idea that from every pair of opposed predicates, one must apply to each thing, to the idea of a whole of positive possibility (*omnitudo realitatis*), from which each thing gets what "realities" it has (cf. B 601-11). This is a genealogy of the rational concept of God. The implication is that <*God*> represents in reified ("hypostatiz[ed]"; B 608) form what is otherwise a necessary postulate of reason. Here, too, a logical structure explains a metaphysical concept (even if the metaphysical version results from an error; cf. B 660-61).

3.3.2. Re-Placing Metaphysics in the Forms of Thought

While the transition of substance to concept entails the implicit transfer of concepts

from the Objective Logic to the domain of the concept, it is important to see in more detail

what this implies for the individual concepts themselves. Since my aim is primarily to point

out the general pattern, so that it can be affirmed that the *Doctrine of the Concept* contains the

basis for a post-Kantian metaphysics, I will only try to illustrate this pattern by showing its

general structure and then by providing some examples.

As I mentioned above, it is clear and uncontroversial that Hegel structures the forms

of judgment and syllogisms to correspond to the major divisions of the *Logic*. Thus a key

concept from each respective book becomes the title for a form of judgment and syllogism:

Doctrine of Being	A. Judgement of *Dasein*	A. Syllogism of *Dasein*
Doctrine of Essence	B. Judgment of Reflection	B. Syllogism of Reflection
	C. Judgment of Necessity[64]	C. Syllogism of Necessity
Doctrine of the Concept	D. Judgment of the Concept	[Objectivity][65]

Now what is the significance of this correspondence? Is it only a matter of organization?

Not at all. As one would predict from my "inheritance" reading of the transition from the

Objective to the Subjective Logic, the judgment and syllogism forms of Being and Essence

recapitulate the categories involved in their respective domains. In general, the account of

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[64] "Thus we obtain, first of all, three main types of judgment, which correspond to the stages of Being, Essence, and Concept. In accord with character of Essence, as the stage of difference, *the second of these main types is again inwardly divided in two*" (EL 322/248-49/§ 171Z; emphasis added). This explains why there are four judgment types, since B and C are both assigned to the stage of essence. It is less clear why there is no fourth form of syllogism. See the following note for a suggestion.

[65] Why is there no "syllogism of the concept"? Because, I contend, when the formal moments of conceptual form are sufficiently unified, there is no reason (other than, say, pedagogically) to distinguish these formal moments. A complete syllogism just is an object of a certain sort. This will become clearer in the following chapter (4.3.1.).

judgment is meant to resolve the disunity of being and essence, which are correlated

respectively with the subject and predicate of a judgment:

> The subject, as the *singular,* appears first as the *being* [das *Seiende*] or *what is for itself* [das *Fürsichseiende*] according to the determinate determinacy of the singular, as an actual object, even if only an object within representation…; the *predicate*, by contrast, appears as the *universal*, as this *reflection* [*Reflexion*] on [the subject] or rather as its reflection into itself, which goes beyond the former immediacy and sublates the determinacies as merely being – *as its in-itself-ness*. (*WL* II: 306-7/554; modified)

Here we see that, broadly speaking, a "being" term is associated with the singular *subject* of

the judgment, while the "essence" term, "reflection," is associated with the universal *predicate*

term. The specific forms of judgment, however, are preliminary configurations of subject

and predicate terms, and therewith configurations of being and essence terms. Thus, for

example, a "positive judgment" (*WL* II: 311ff./557ff.), the first form of a "Judgment of

Dasein," involves an interpretation of the form of judgment form S is P, in which S refers to

an "immediate…*something* [*Etwas*] in general" and P refers to "*qualitative being* [*qualitative Sein*]"

(*WL* II: 312/558). These are both clear references to categories of the *Doctrine of Being.* But

these terms of the Objective Logic are then assigned values in terms of the Subjective Logic.

In this case, S is "*abstract singularity*" while P is "*abstract universality*" (ibid.). According to

Logical Supervenience, we can say that <*something*> supervenes on <*abstract singularity*>[66] and

<*quality*> supervenes on <*abstract universality*>.

Similarly, in the "Judgment of Reflection," the subject-term is something "existing

and appearing [*das Existierende und Erscheinende*]" (*WL* II: 328/570; mod.), while the predicate

is "the essential" or "reflected in-itselfness" (327/569; mod.).[67] But these changed

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[66] The connection to the modern existential quantifier ($\exists x$), where any "something" is depicted as a bound individual variable, is striking here.

[67] Many more examples are possible here. Another pertinent one concerns the connection of causality (also a concept from the *Wesenslogik*) and the form of hypothetical judgments: "The hypothetical judgment can be more closely determined in terms of the relations of reflection as a relation of *ground* and *consequence*, *condition* and *conditioned*, causality etc. Just as substantiality is present in the categorical judgment in the form of its concept, so is the connectedness of causality in the hypothetical judgment. This and all other relations all recur

metaphysical valences of this form of judgment correspond to a new configuration of

subject and predicate terms:

> In the judgment that has now arisen [sc. of reflection], the subject is a singular as
> such; and similarly, the universal is no longer an *abstract* universality, or a *singular
> property*, but is posited as a universal that has collected itself together into a unity
> through the connection of different terms… (*WL* II: 326/568)

The significance of such passages lies in the fact that terms from the Objective Logic are

seen as entailed by the *logical content* of a form of judgment. Moreover, Hegel thinks that we

can see the error in the use of the relevant *metaphysical* concepts from the error or deficiency

in the form of judgment in which they are involved. Typically, Hegel thinks that a form of a

judgment expresses a contradiction by failing to express the identity of subject and

predicate.[68] Thus he says,

> The positive judgment has in fact no truth through its *form* as a positive judgment. …
> [A]nd it will surely be granted that such judgments as "Cicero was a great orator,"
> that "it is daytime now," are definitely not truths of reason. But they are not such
> truths, not because they have an empirical content as it were contingently, but
> because they are only positive judgments that can have, and ought to have, no other
> content than an immediate singular and an abstract determinateness. (*WL* II:
> 318/562)

Hegel goes as far as to say here that certain judgments are bound to be deficient quite

irrespective of their 'surface content', but because of their logico-*cum*-metaphysical form. To

this extent, the forms of judgment *recapitulate* both metaphysical concepts and their

respective deficiencies, but Hegel's account in the Subjective Logic seems even to go further

in that he uses the forms of judgment to *explain* the deficiencies in the forms of relation of

these concepts through the deficiency of judgment.

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in it, but they are there essentially only as moments of one and the same identity" (*WL* II: 338/577;
underlined).

[68] This shows the grain of truth in Russell's charge that Hegel confused predication with identity
(something, it seems to me, that could certainly be charged of Fichte, who took the form of judgment to be A
= B). The truth in the charge is that Hegel thought judgments *should* express identity; it is unfair, though, given
his view that most forms of judgment *fail* to express this identity, which shows that he clearly did not confuse
the two notions. See for example Stern (2009, Ch. 2); Rosen (2014, 250).

Why then should we not say that Hegel only recapitulates the *critique* from the Objective Logic, rather than recapitulating the metaphysical concepts themselves? This certainly looks like a viable option given the pattern I've shown so far.[69] However, though Hegel shows that various forms of judgment and later syllogism both always recapitulate the relation of certain metaphysical concepts and fall to grief in their attempts to relate them properly, the form of thought does not turn out to be finally inept. Though Hegel accepts, with his erstwhile friend Hölderlin, that the judgment (*Urteil*) is the "original division" (*Ur-Teilung*) within thought itself (*WL* II: 304/552), or between thought and being,[70] he thinks that the proper account will restore this internal separation: "To restore again this *identity* of the concept, or rather to *posit* it – this is the goal of the *movement* of the judgment" (309/556). The judgment that *does* restore this unity is, however, predictably already something new, namely the syllogism (ibid.), which has its own form of development before expressing in its way the identity of the concept. But concerning our present theme, I take it to be crucial that Hegel *does* believe the separation of terms in the judgment (and hence the metaphysical disunity between the concepts of being and essence) can be overcome within the progress of judgment and syllogism. This means that forms of thought reached within the Subjective Logic *succeed* in expressing the genuine unity of the concepts of the Objective Logic. And while this will not mean that each concept of the Objective Logic will be "saved," it means

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[69] This purely critical conception is close to the approach of Lau (2004; 2008), though this may be because he almost exclusively attends to the prototypical form of judgment Hegel criticizes: "The underlying concern of Hegel's critical examination is directed toward the ontological assumptions that come with the form of judgment. It attacks the ontological dichotomy of substance and accidents resulting from hypostatizing the logical subject-predicate asymmetry" (2008, 96). Though Lau clearly sees the logical-metaphysical correlation Hegel emphasizes, he would deny the supervenience relation I have argued for because (I believe) he does not attend to the way that the through the syllogism, the form of thought does become reconciled with its metaphysical implications. Lau sees Hegel's critique of the judgment as rooted in his "*subjectivity-ontological monism*" (2004, 194), which would seem to exclude the syllogistic form as expressing the truth as well.

[70] See Wolf (2017) for a brief account of Hölderlin's early influence on Hegel's attitude toward concepts and judgments.

that it will be correct to say that thanks to the Subjective Logic, talk about concepts like

<*being*>, <*substance*>, <*essence*>, <*appearance*>, etc. will again be appropriate.

We can see this if we skip to the finale of Hegel's progressive argument of logical

forms and notice what Hegel says in the final moment of the syllogism, "The Syllogism of

Necessity." He writes of the categorical syllogism that it

> is the *first syllogism of necessity*, one in which a subject is contained with a predicate
> through *its substance* [*seine Substanz*]. But when elevated to the sphere of the concept,
> substance is the universal, so posited to be in and for itself that it has for its form or
> mode of being, not accidentality, as it has in the relation specific to it, but the
> determination of the concept. Its differences are therefore the extremes of the
> syllogism, specifically universality and singularity" (*WL* II: 392/618; underlined).

In such a syllogism, "The terms, in keeping with the substantial content, stand to one

another in a connection of identity that is *in and for itself*; we have here one essence running

through the three terms – an essence in which the determinations of singularity, particularity,

and universality are only *formal* moments" (*WL* II: 393/619; underlined). Hegel shows here

that he does indeed think of <*substance*> and <*essence*> to be valuable and genuine concepts

of metaphysics. But they are only used correctly when they are seen to be implicated in a

certain form of thought, namely one in which its singular, particular, and universal content

becomes identical. This occurs in (Hegel's specific understanding of) a categorical syllogism.

Notice that my above stated "unity of form" thesis is essentially a categorial

syllogism: *because* some singular is such a particular, it is such a universal. The "particular,"

the ground of connection between singular and universal, is the middle term, uniting being

and essence.[71] In discussing the objective character of syllogistic form, Hegel says, "the

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[71] The final form of the syllogism of necessity, the disjunctive syllogism, makes the important addition that
particularity itself, to provide the rational ground of the connection between singular and universal, must
involve the totality of particular conditions (either X, or Y, or Z). This helps specify that something becomes a
ground for a concept's realization only in conjunction with a 'system' of such reasons. My unity of form thesis
sets this complication aside for simplicity's sake, but Hegel's final acceptance of the thesis is of course
dependent on it. For a succinct statement on the function of the disjunctive syllogism, see Schick (1994, 255).

nature of something [*die Nature der Sache*] is that its various conceptual determinations are united in an essential unity [*wesentlichen Einheit*]" (*WL* II: 358/593; modified). As I read this, Hegel is saying that something has a nature *because* of the way its conceptual determinations are unified (*vereinigt*). Accordingly, the unity of form thesis implies that as thought reaches a kind of internal perfection – the forms of thought no longer stand in contradiction with each other and reveal themselves to be positively identical – it achieves, in doing so, a kind of metaphysical perfection, since it shows how the concepts of metaphysics can be involved without leading to vicious dualisms. In this sense, one does not really understand what <*substance*> is from the Objective Logic until one sees that it is recapitulated in the conceptual relations described in the Subjective Logic. It then becomes clear that substance is not an entity about which Hegel has a "theory," but the internal articulation of conceptual perfection or completion.[72]

The syllogism of necessity thus carries through the recapitulation of <*substance*> that was only proleptically contained in the form of conceptual thought as such. This is why it seems compelling to see Hegel's *Doctrine of the Concept* as carrying out, perhaps on an even more ambitious scale, a project analogous to Kant's metaphysical deduction of the categories from the forms of judgment. Hegel sees these forms of judgment as more differentiated than Kant, and he attributes greater significance to the forms of syllogism, but the *kind* of revolutionary insight Hegel advances is substantially similar to Kant's. Here the metaphysical

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[72] This reading puts me at odds with the still-prominent way of conceiving the relation of "substance" to "subject" in Hegel. What we might call the "neo-Spinozist" view sees Hegelian terms like "concept" or "spirit" as *deeper insights* into what "substance" is. Hanke recently writes, for example, that in the *Logic*, "The becoming of the concept is nothing other than the justification [*Begründung*] of substance" (2016, 162). Hegel further justifies the concept of substance, but he also cures its "deficiency" of being "static" (ibid., 164-65). I have often wondered why it can be considered a *prima facie* deficiency that an *a priori* account of things (as it is here considered to be) should be "static." Surely any defect on the part of an *a priori* account should lie in its *justification*, not in its *result*. Kierkegaard, for one, seemed to think that the idea of proving "movement" and "actuality" *a priori* involved a kind of *contradictio in adjecto*. See especially his *The Concept of Anxiety* (1980 [1844], 9-14).

becomes explicable in terms of something eminently (if only implicitly) familiar: the form of

thought. For Hegel, the metaphysical vocabulary is not a window into the structure of the

world, but a way of making explicit concrete differences in the basic form of understanding

and reason.[73]

3.4. Conclusion

Does this mean that Hegel "subjectifies" metaphysics after all, and thus takes leave

of the objective world altogether? (This, of course, would already be a mistaken conception

what of the analogy to Kant implies.) Not at all. For especially in using *singularity* as the form

of immediate being, and in attempting to reconcile singularity thus conceived with

essentialist "reflection," itself the universal form of thought, Hegel certainly shows that he

does not wish to ignore the actual world, if this is seen to be coordinate with the typical

object of demonstrative reference.[74] This is central to Theunissen's (1978a) understanding of

Hegel's *Begriffslogik* He contends that, despite Hegel's "critique" of the limitations of the

concept <*existence/Dasein*> in Book I of the *Logic*, Hegel endeavors to reestablish an analogy

to this concept in the *Doctrine of the Concept*:

> in returning to what was true in the immediacy of pure being and in the horizon
> opened thereby, the *Begriffslogik* also discloses something like the immediacy of
> existence [*Dasein*]. To be sure, immediacy itself does not return, since it cannot be
> wrested from the semblance of givenness, but taking its place is an immediacy with a

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[73] As the reference to "making explicit" may suggest, this conception of metaphysics bears a close resemblance to the one Robert Brandom has worked out in systematic contexts, especially in his treatment of Wilfrid Sellars' theory of categories (see his 2012 and 2015). Though Brandom's view is also partly inspired by Hegel, he rarely engages with the *Logic* (see his 2005 for the most extensive occasion currently extant), so his view of metaphysics does not seem to the relationship between the *Doctrine of the Concept* and the Objective Logic, as is the present interpretation.

[74] Myriam Gerhard points out that the title of "the judgment of the concept" (its ultimate stage) in Hegel's 1809/10 lectures on the *Begriffslehre* was "Modalität der Urteile oder Urteile der Beziehung des Begriffs auf das Dasein" (2015, 59; cf. W 4: 148). Hegel definitely intends to see the relations expressed in judgment and syllogism as *including* the relation to "existence" (*Dasein*), and thus not ignoring the categories of the Objective Logic.

totally different structure, which can correlated with the shape of existence proper to the logic of the concept. (384)

We will see how I will cash out Theunissen's proposal of a new form of "immediacy" in the next chapter (see 4.3.1.). But beyond this allowance for a new role for immediacy in the *Begriffslogik*, I have further argued that it reconstructs (in principle) all of the content that was subject to critique in the Objective Logic. Thus, the use of *logical forms* to explain metaphysical concepts is not in general meant to eliminate the content (including the potential for objective reference) of those concepts; it is to ensure that they are not explained in a way that makes their relation to thought unintelligible in the first place. This is what happens when one reifies poles of this typical opposition. In particular, the metaphysical tradition is especially susceptible to reifying the universal or reflective term in metaphysical distinctions, which is portrayed most frequently as God, as the attribute of substance as thought, as the *omnitudo realitatis*. (This was certainly Kant's diagnosis; see note 62 above.) Some such entity is seen to be responsible for things being more than merely immediate 'appearances'. For example, metaphysicians look for something corresponding to the universal or essence "in" things, and speak as if this required a special insight or intuition. It is this pole of metaphysical oppositions that Hegel *replaces* with "the concept" – conceived as the free form of thought as such.

On the other hand, metaphysicians and anti-metaphysicians alike are often guilty of using "being," "reality," and "objectivity" as if discriminating these notions did not somehow depend on thought as well. When reality is typically *defined* as what is "mind-independent," it looks as if our access to reality requires a *subtraction* of the contribution of thought. The strategy pursued by Hegel (and held in common with Kant and neo-Fregeans) does not suggest that there isn't anything to the world that isn't a construction of thought. But it does suggest that the feature we call reality should be taken in stride with its role in

thought, typically as the target of singular judgments. It takes nothing away from the reality of our thought to accept it *as* thought.

Hegel's *Logic* would thus be seriously incomplete without the *Doctrine of the Concept*. It would be incompletely critical, because it would fail to explain the true origin of the metaphysical concepts it criticizes in the Objective Logic, namely their supervenience on forms of thought. My main objective here, however, has been to show that the *Logic* would be incompletely *constructive* without the *Doctrine of the Concept*, because the work of reconciling the typical oppositions of metaphysics would not have been carried to its completion in a way that shows how thought can succeed on its own terms in this reconciliation.

Chapter 4: The Objective Province of Conceptual Reason

4.1. Introduction

In the first chapter of this work, I provided evidence that Hegel approved of the rationalist doctrine of Conceptual Transparency, at least to some extent, and he considered that Kant's theory of conceptuality would rule out the applicability of this doctrine full stop. As we have seen, Conceptual Transparency is the view that conceptual knowledge (or truth) is essential knowledge (or truth), that to know the concept of something is to know its nature.[1] It was already clear from the beginning that Hegel would not accept this view in an *unrestricted* form, namely such that the concept of anything would express its nature – the form held by the rationalists themselves. Nevertheless, Hegel saw it as vital for the preservation of philosophical thought that some form of Conceptual Transparency is true; thinking otherwise seemingly undermines the concepts needed for the validity of a philosophical system, critical or not.

The previous chapter gave us the resources for expressing an important side of Conceptual Transparency by showing that it remains viable, in Hegel's view, to continue speaking in metaphysical terms at all. By subordinating the traditional metaphysical vocabulary to its role in his *Doctrine of the Concept*, he both preserves it and reforms it under a new auspice. This preceding discussion has made it plausible (what is otherwise evident from his text) that Hegel would continue to affirm that things can be characterized according to

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[1] Or, to repeat my characterization above: "The fully stated content of a concept expresses the essential constituent features (the *nature*) of the object expressed by the concept."

their essence, substance, or nature, though Hegel's criteria for ascribing such characterizations lay only in a conception of the *formal relations* of concepts themselves. This move allows Hegel to restore the validity of metaphysical vocabulary without supposing that it explicates the nature of things independently of our thought. In fact, what I said in the last chapter reveals little, if anything, about how this vocabulary should be positively applied at all. For it may be that, despite the conceptual supervenience of metaphysical terms on logical relations, there would be no actual instances of some logical relation to yield its respective metaphysical implications. The Logical Supervenience thesis gives us tools for thinking about metaphysical concepts without itself making metaphysical claims.

But clearly Conceptual Transparency involves metaphysical commitments, in the sense that it asserts that our concepts (at least in some case) *do* express an essence. This means that we know some such metaphysical truths. Accordingly, in this chapter, I will show that Hegel endorses *Restricted* Conceptual Transparency. To recall:

> **Restricted Conceptual Transparency:** For some objects, there is exactly one
>
> transparent concept corresponding to them.

It is my contention that Hegel gives us the resources to endorse this thesis in the "Objectivity" (*Die Objektivität*) chapter of the *Logic*, which follows the treatment of the syllogism. The subheadings of "Objectivity" are "Mechanism," "Chemism," and "Teleology." Though the inclusion of such seemingly "natural"[2] categories in the *Science of Logic* has often puzzled readers, in my view these sections show schematically what it means for an object to be relatively "opaque" to its object (in "Mechanism" and "Chemism"), and

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[2] Hegel makes it clear that he uses these terms in a broader sense than their scientific resonance would suggest. For example, "Regarding the expression 'chemism' [*Chemismus*] for the said relation of non-indifference of objectivity, it may be further remarked that the expression is not to be understood here as though the relation were only to be found in that form of elemental nature that strictly goes by that name" (*WL* II: 429/645).

then what it means for an object to be conceptually constituted, so that the object is transparent to the concept (in "Teleology"). Hegel thus offers *teleology* as a way of explaining how and where Conceptual Transparency obtains. But since he does not suggest that everything is teleologically constituted (he rather indicates that many things are not), it follows that Conceptual Transparency can only have restricted validity. Further, what Hegel calls "the idea" (*die Idee*) in his technical sense results from the nexus of conceptually constituted objects that is made available through teleological processes.

Such is the basic core of the argument presented in this chapter. Before making this case through an interpretation of "Objectivity," I will first (4.2.) deal more generally with the notion that Hegel's acceptance of Conceptual Transparency is restricted by comparing this thesis – which I connect to Hegel's *rationalism* – to what is otherwise recognized as Hegel's *idealism*, and which may take a more universal form. Making this distinction, I believe, is important for seeing how Hegel himself actually carries out his philosophical program. Then (4.3), I will give an account of how Hegel sees conceptuality as having objective import at all. This will provide the basis for showing how there is a distinction in the "adequacy" of the realization of concepts, in Hegel's view. On the one end of the spectrum, there are "mechanical" objects, which are not fully explicable in conceptual terms. On the other end (4.4.), there are teleological objects, whose essence or nature is given in the concept that is realized as the purpose of the object. It is teleology, I will argue, that provides the *raison d'être* of the "province of conceptual reason." Teleology explains how a concept can do more than *represent* an object, but also *constitute* it, and thus provide the key to its true nature. And since not everything is teleologically constituted, I contend, the reach of conceptual reason is restricted. Finally (4.5.), I will attempt to vindicate my claim that Conceptual Transparency is restricted in Hegel's thought my showing how this restriction is exemplified in Hegel's

Realphilosophie, especially in the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, but also in the *Philosophy of Nature*, which may seem a counterexample to my interpretation in general.

4.2. Universal Idealism and Restricted Rationalism

To attribute *limits* to any view of Hegel's invites immediate suspicion. For one, Hegel himself seems to suggest that there is something incoherent, even contradictory, about the concept of a limit.[3] To know one's limits is in one sense already to be outside of them.[4] But secondly, and more generally, Hegel's reputation rests in great measure on the universal ambitions of his thought, embodied in his speaking of "the absolute" and his famous saying: "the true is the whole." As we will see, even non-traditional, "deflationary" readings emphasis a strongly universal dimension to Hegel's thought.

My account will nevertheless suggest that in many cases it is misleading to think of Hegel's philosophy as offering an all-encompassing rationalistic vision. He does not even think everything can be adequately conceptualized. As Hegel says quite candidly in the *Philosophy of Nature*, "This impotence of nature *sets limits to philosophy* and it is quite improper to expect the concept to comprehend—or as it said, construe or deduce—these contingent products of nature" (*EN* 35/23/§ 250R). In view of such admissions on Hegel's part, it will be important to explain on a systematic basis the introduction of limits in Hegel's thought, instead of relying on the reputation promoted largely by his critics. However, despite this

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[3] "Contradiction immediately raises its head because limit, as an internally reflected negation of something, *ideally* holds in it the moments of something and other, and these, as distinct moments, are at the same time posited in the sphere of existence as *really, qualitatively distinct*" (*WL* I: 136/98). And "something in its limit both *is* and *is not*" (137/99).

[4] Compare: "Something is only known, or even felt, to be a restriction [*Schranke*], or a defect, if one is at the same time *beyond* it" (*EL* /105/§ 60R). And from the *Phenomenology*: "But consciousness is for itself its own *concept*, thereby immediately the advance beyond what is limited [*das Beschränkte*] and, since what is thus limited belongs to it, beyond itself…." (*PG* 74/38/§ 80).

caution about the scope of Hegel's thought, I do wish to leave room in my account for the limited sense in which Hegel's philosophy is meant to include "everything."[5] I will call this feature of Hegel's thought his *idealism*, in contrast to his rationalism. Since my positive view is meant to explicate his rationalism, what I say about idealism in this sense is meant only to show how this dimension is compatible with his rationalism, but also to show how rationalism in the sense I will develop it is not reducible to idealism. This is why Hegel's idealism can be universal or unrestricted while his rationalism can be restricted.

While debates around Hegel's idealism have been as contentious an issue in the literature as anything in recent decades,[6] one thing that can be said with some certainty is that Hegel's idealism is *at least* an epistemological or methodological view, whatever else it implies metaphysically.[7] The *locus classicus* for this view is Robert Pippin's 1989 book *Hegel's Idealism*. Though Pippin does not give a definition of idealism, he makes its source clear repeatedly. He writes:

> For it is *with the denial that a firm distinction can ever be usefully drawn between intuitional and conceptual elements in knowledge* that distinctly Hegelian idealism begins, and Hegel begins to take his peculiar flight, with language about the complete autonomy, even freedom of 'thoughts' self-determination' and 'self-actualization' (Pippin 1989, 9; emphasis added).[8]

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[5] Interestingly, Hegel himself cites the attempt to have a concept of "everything" as the source of contradictions. He says of the "determinations of reflection," which are the basis of the traditional "laws of thought" such as the law of identity (A = A) and the principle of non-contradiction: "[These] propositions suffer from the drawback that they have 'being,' 'everything,' for [their] subject. … [O]n closer examination, the *several propositions* that are set up as *absolute laws of thought* are *opposed to each other*: they contradict each other and mutually sublate each other" (*WL* II: 36-37/355-56).

[6] For a valuable summary of these debates, see Stern (2008).

[7] Hegel gives a rather brief definition of idealism: "The claim that the *finite is an idealization* defines *idealism*. The idealism of philosophy consists in nothing else than recognizing that the finite is not something that truly is [*das Endliche nicht als ein wahrhaft Seiendes anzuerkennen*]" (*WL* I: 172/124; modified). Though Hegel does not equate idealism with a subjective or epistemic thesis in this context, he certainly uses the involvement of both conceptualization and representation in our thought as evidence for what he means by "idealization." Thus, I think it is appropriate to say that Hegel's idealism *includes* the epistemological thesis advocated by Pippin.

[8] Compare how Sellars had noted (while rebuking) the same potential for "idealism" in the denial of the concept/intuition distinction: "Indeed, it is only if Kant distinguishes the radically nonconceptual character of sense from the conceptual character of the synthesis of apprehension in intuition [which is, of course, to be distinguished from the conceptual synthesis of recognition in a concept, in which the concept occupies a

For Pippin, Hegel is an idealist on epistemological-*cum*-methodological grounds: we cannot distinguish the role of the "real in sensation" (as Kant would call it) from the conceptual apprehension of the object; thus, the contribution to our knowledge from experience will always be a modification of our "conceptual scheme," rather than a foreign non-conceptual intrusion. Idealism for Pippin is treated as an "anti-realism" in Michael Dummett's sense, in that it refuses to ascribe truth or reality outside of known epistemic capabilities.[9]

Though Pippin is commonly credited with reviving the image of Hegel as a *Kantian*, the more proximate (and less interpretively controversial) origin of an epistemological conception of idealism is Fichte, as Pippin clearly recognizes. Indeed, for a view of idealism that looks like an appropriate historical predecessor to the one Pippin attributes to Hegel, one need look no further than to Fichte for confirmation. As Fichte writes in a letter to Jacobi, "Kant clings to the view that the manifold of experience is something given—God knows how and why. But I straightforwardly maintain that even this manifold is produced by us through our creative faculty" (To Jacobi, August 30, 1795; Fichte 1988, 411). This creativity or activity of the intellect is the defining aspect of Fichte's explicit conception of idealism: "[I]dealism explains the determinations of consciousness on the basis of the activity of the intellect. The intellect, for it, is only active and absolute, never passive; it is not passive because it is postulated to be first and highest, preceded by nothing which could account for a passivity therein" (FW I: 440/1970, 21). Fichte's idealism is certainly "universal" or "unrestricted" in that he would not admit that anything outside the scope of the intellect's own activity is present to the intellect. Yet this does not require Fichte to postulate any thesis

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predicative position] and, accordingly, the *receptivity* of sense from the *guidedness* of intuition that he can avoid the dialectic which leads from Hegel's *Phenomenology* to nineteenth-century idealism" (1968, Ch. 1, § 40).

[9] "…Hegel also states that reality *is* the developing Notion, and this certainly suggests a kind of contemporary antirealism, a relativization of truth claims to the Hegelian (Notional) equivalent of something like warranted assertability, or provability, or membership in an ideal theory" (Pippin 1989, 99). For the relevant origin of "antirealism" in Michael Dummett's work, see his "Realism" (1963) in his 1978, esp. p. 146.

about the nature of reality outside this activity, so that this idealism remains epistemological

through and through. Fichte almost certainly misunderstood Kant's notion of a "thing in

itself" by virtually equating it with an object that would be purely given without any activity

by the subject; but having understood and rejected the notion in this sense helped bring to

light a form of idealism that could be detached from any lingering 'Berkeleyan' resonance.[10]

Hegel does seem to affirm roughly this Fichtean idealist view, which has to do with

the comprehensiveness of thought over any possible object. Like Fichte, he thought Kant

was inconsistent on this point:

> The way in which critical philosophy understands the relation of these *three termini* is
> that we place *thoughts* as a medium between *us* and the *things*, in the sense that this
> medium, instead of joining us with such things, would rather cut us off from them.
> But this view can be countered by the simple remark that these same things that are
> supposed to stand at the opposite extreme beyond us and beyond the self-referring
> thoughts, are themselves things of thought [*Gedankendinge*] which, taken as entirely
> indeterminate, are only one thing (the so-called thing-in-itself), the thought product
> of pure abstraction. (*WL* I: 25-26/16)

Hegel sees that feature of Kant's thought which is most often believed to stand for the *mind-independent* as instead the most *mind-dependent*, since to conceive of the thing in itself requires

the greatest (though the most vacuous) effort of abstraction. The result is a simple nothing,

but a nothing of *thought*. Hegel seems to regard this argument as extending *a fortiori*: if the

effort to conceive the mind-independent as such necessarily fails, so too does the effort to

think of something not already under the sway of thought. This makes Hegel a universal

idealist in that he refuses to admit an epistemological basis for cognition or awareness of

something outside of conceptually structured thought.

Pippin's epistemological reading of idealism has been updated recently by Klaus

Brinkmann, whose *Idealism without Limits: Hegel and the Problem of Objectivity* (2011) is apt in the

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[10] On the struggle for Kant to free himself from the charge that his idealism (especially as presented in the first edition of the first *Critique*) was Berkeleyan, see especially Beiser (2002, Ch. 5-6).

present context. Here he presents his similar conception of the Hegelian modification of

Kant:

> [Hegel's] solution consists in the overcoming of the dual-source model of cognition
> in favor of a single-source model in which the structures of intelligibility and reality
> constitute an original unity. The divide between empirical realism and transcendental
> idealism must be rejected in favor of an immanentist position – the position that
> holds that reason determines reality prior to an independently of our reconstruction
> of it. Only thus can the objectivity of the *a priori* determinations be maintained.
> (2011, 234)

Brinkmann helps frame the issue in a way congenial to my present aims. He sees Hegel's

idealism as a commitment to the non-existence of concept-independent *reference* in

experience. Whereas Kant thinks that a sense-content must be given for concepts to have

content at all, Hegel denies this. But Brinkmann argues that idealism in this sense is only a

means to an end, and not an end in itself in Hegel's thought (235). For if reference is

concept-dependent in every case, this raises the problem of objectivity in a new way (thus

the subtitle of Brinkmann's work: "Hegel and the Problem of Objectivity"). Though Hegel

subscribes to an idealistic conception of *reference* – no reference is concept-independent – this

leaves open how he solves the problem of objectivity, but also – and even more pressing, in

my view – that of *intelligibility*. For to say that experiential reference is concept-dependent in

the sense affirmed by Pippin and Brinkmann in no way implies that we *understand* that to

which we thus refer. It may be possible that I cannot refer to "Bitcoin" in a conceptually

unmediated way. But I do not understand Bitcoin. I cannot credit my 'concept' of Bitcoin

with much content in the sense of its intelligibility.

Something similar holds when it comes to "concepts" of sensible objects as such.

Brinkmann rightly emphasizes that the conceptual dependence of reference is possible only

because the "content" of sensory concepts is close to null:

> The conceptual information collected about these sensible items in this way is
> minimal, indeed substandard for purposes of knowledge … To try to describe

exhaustively each 'pixel' on a white piece of paper is utterly facile undertaking, quite independently of the fact that it would be an interminable task. (2011, 237)

Here Brinkmann uses a wider conception than mine of what a true concept is on Hegel's view; but even on his reading we can see (as he would admit) why the unrestricted form of idealism does not bake much philosophical bread. For Brinkmann, as for myself, this is because the role of concepts in sensory experience is of little philosophical interest. He explains:

> Why does [Hegel's] philosophy have so little use for this [sensory] matrix as a component in sensible cognition? The answer is that Hegel radically alters the focus of his theoretical interest, away from reference, identification and instantiation and *towards the intelligibility afforded by concepts.* The spatio-temporal matrix is for him a relatively negligible component of cognition, because his interest lies in the explanatory capacity of concepts. This shift from referentiality to intelligibility marks the difference between thinking in terms of a mind-and-world scenario to a position of the radical immanence of thought. (238)

This view, which I believe distinguishes Brinkmann's view from Pippin's more influential one, helps explain why Hegel's *idealism*, though a feature of his thought, does not best capture the focus of his philosophical attention. The latter is directed toward intelligibility, which is not primarily to be sought in direct perceptual experience.

Slightly modifying Brinkmann's terminology, we can distinguish these issues by speaking of an *idealism of apprehension* (*Auffassen*) versus a *rationalism of comprehension* (*Begreifen*). This distinction can be neatly illustrated by the important opening section of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, namely "Sense Certainty." There, Hegel describes the intention of 'sense-certain' consciousness as that of "excluding[ing] our comprehension[*Begreifen*] of [the object] from apprehendion [*Auffassen*]" (*PG* 82/43/§ 90; slightly modified). While the interpretation of that passage is contentious in itself, as far as the epistemological interpretation of Hegel's idealism is concerned, Hegel's point is that there is no apprehension of the world apart from conceptual mediation. For any reference to a time or

place has at least minimal "universal" content. As far as this dimension of Hegel's thought is concerned, we can agree with John McDowell when he says "the conceptual is unbounded; there is nothing outside it" (1994, 44). For to apprehend something at all is always to apprehend it *as* something; and according to a minimalist conception of conceptuality, this is already to step outside any boundary placed around the reach of concepts. [11]

However things stand with the use of the term "concept," my claim is simply that such an idealism of apprehension implies virtually nothing about *comprehension*, or intelligibility (nor much about objectivity, but that can be left aside for now). It is at least true that for Hegel nothing stands outside of the form of "universality," and in that sense, nothing is "non-conceptual". Even referring to something implies at least a recognition that 'it' is something minimally self-same; this was the bare mark of the formal universality of the concept. However, we also saw that Hegel does not think of mere universality as providing content in a genuinely conceptual sense. Ultimately, and again in agreement with Brinkmann, the content of a concept is supposed to be a putative essence of something, the explanation of what it is to be that thing. *This* possibility – what I would call the rationalism of comprehension – is by no means guaranteed by the idealism of apprehension. And according to this side of conceptuality, Hegel provides clear evidence that everything is *not* conceptual (see 4.5.2. below), that therefore the domain of conceptual reason is a province, whatever its size may be.

Though the epistemological interpretation of idealism may not capture how Hegel himself uses the term "idealism" (on the rare occasions where he does),[12] I do think it

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[11] Compare the way that Fichte nearly identifies concept and object: "Thus the concept and its object are never separated, nor can they be. The object does not exist without the concept, for it exists through the concept; the concept does not exist without the object, for it is that through which the object necessarily emerges. Both are one and the same, viewed from different sides" (Fichte 2000, 6).

[12] See note 7 above. Though I may disagree with Stern's (2008) general take on Hegel, I do think his view, "the idealism of finitude," captures Hegel's usage. However, if Stern is correct on this point, then "idealism" is

presents important strictures on what a Hegelian view can be, which agrees with what I described in the preceding chapter. The common insight can be summed up by Brinkmann's notion of Hegel's "immanentist" position. Namely, whatever Hegel says that concerns metaphysics is not intended along the lines of many contemporary metaphysics, for whom the investigation of "reality" just means investigating "the categorial structure of the world itself, not merely the structure of human language or thought" (Haarparanta and Koskinen 2012, 6).[13] Instead, all distinctions regarding the objectivity or reality of something are distinctions that arise *from within* thought, and so do not pretend to be an *a priori* glimpse into the structure of the world. So long as Hegel's epistemological idealism (or something like it) is unrestricted, there is no risk of treating his view as a "sideways-on" grasp of the relation of thought and being.

The latter, I fear, is characteristic of virtually all "metaphysical monist" readings of Hegel. Consider, for example, what Bowman writes in attempting to explain Hegel's mentalistic-sounding vocabulary:

> Therefore, when Hegel speaks of the true *existing* in the shape of *its* system, we must not understand him to be talking merely about the way we must organize our (seemingly external) *knowledge* of the truth. …. It means that existence itself, what Hegel calls *Dasein* or determinate bring, is structured at its core *as* truth. Intentionality, or the internal relation of objective and formal reality, is the structure of all being. (2013, 240)

Though Bowman presents this interpretation as a good-faith reading of Hegel, it strains both intelligibility and charity. Despite the contemporary fashion of the phrase,[14] how are we

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not an unrestricted phenomenon for Hegel, since Hegel acknowledges the "infinite" in addition to the finite; so Stern's view would seem irrelevant to the dimension of Hegel's thought I am addressing here.

[13] See also the opening remarks of Ted Sider's *Writing the Book of the World* (2011): "Metaphysics, at bottom, is about the fundamental structure of reality. Not about what's necessarily true. Not about what properties are essential. Not about conceptual analysis. Not about what there is. Structure" (1). He then goes on to say that this task involves "figuring out the right categories for describing the world" (ibid.).

[14] See the previous note from Sider. Speaking of the "structure" of reality or being seems to me a case in point of what Wittgenstein meant when he spoke of 'language going on holiday' in philosophy. In the

supposed to have a view about the "structure of all being"? What possible epistemological privilege could we ascribe to Hegel to grant him such insight? And by what means could *we* evaluate its truth? Such a metaphysical reading requires that Hegel can 'match' his internal knowledge of the structure of intentionality with his 'external' knowledge of the structure of reality, without the former shaping the latter. This is precisely what McDowell means by a 'sideways-on' theory. Bowman and others like him thus offer a belated example of what Pippin blames in interpretations that present Hegel as "creat[ing] a systematic metaphysics as if he had never heard of Kant's critical epistemology" (1989, 7). Pippin's slight does not apply to interpretations that simply deny that Hegel is a Kantian *in fine*, only to those that imply that he regresses to equating quasi-logical principles with directly ontological ones, as was often the practice among pre-Kantian metaphysicians. Hence: "Just attributing moderate philosophic intelligence to Hegel should at least make one hesitate before construing him as a post-Kantian philosopher with a precritical metaphysics" (ibid.). Hegel's repudiation of Schelling (the one who arguably satisfies Pippin's description of "a post-Kantian philosopher with a precritical metaphysics") in the period from the *Phenomenology* onwards should make one more than hesitate.

Though my interpretation need not endorse the specific epistemological idealism of Pippin, Brinkmann, or others, I agree with their epistemological requirements on the 'universality' of Hegel's conception of thought. Like Fichte, Hegel thought being true to the spirit of Kant meant being even more radical in endorsing the 'immanent' perspective that does not make truth dependent on stepping outside of thought. Any metaphysical claims about essences or substance that Hegel makes is thoroughly conditioned by this perspective.

transposition from a context in which it makes sense to speak of structure to one in which we speak of the structure of "all being," it is hard to see what sense can remain.

For this reason, however, Hegel's "idealism" is of less interest than his "rationalism," since it is only with the latter that more fine-grained criteria for truth and intelligibility can enter in.

4.3. From Objectivity to Conceptual Transparency

Though there are many ways of supporting the claim that Hegel's rationalism is restricted, most pertinent for our present purposes (and most continuous with the texts in focus so far) is Hegel's discussion of "Objectivity" in the *Doctrine of the Concept*. This section follows the treatment of logical forms discussed in the last chapter. It begins with a very strange transitional section, where Hegel likens his argument to the "ontological proof of God's existence." It then moves to discuss the forms of mechanism, chemism, and teleology I mentioned above. I do not intend to give a running commentary on these sections, especially not for the "Mechanism" and "Chemism" chapters. These sections establish a negative point that is important generically, though not, for my purposes, in its details. To begin, however, it is necessary to say something about Hegel's version of the "ontological proof," which does not, despite appearances, try to prove the existence of God, but the nature of conceptual objectivity. I think my above-stated "unity of form" thesis gives the means for understanding how it attempts to do so.

4.3.1. *Objectivity and the "Unity of Form"*

As I argued in the last chapter, the *Doctrine of the Concept* has its aim (at least in large part) the attempt to show that the dualistic concepts and perspectives described in the Objective Logic can be resolved when recapitulated in an explicitly concept-laden

vocabulary. Namely, a vocabulary that does not hide the fact that metaphysical terms are distinguished by their respective role in the structure of thought. Once the language of the *Doctrine of the Concept* is available, we can then affirm some things that are *similar* to traditional concepts of metaphysics, but without falling into pre-Critical naivety.

What Hegel calls "objectivity" (or, in the *Encyclopedia*, simply "the object" [*das Objekt*]) is his term within the *Doctrine of the Concept* for what is called "immediacy" throughout his writings, and which corresponds in part to what he calls "existence" (*Dasein*) in the *Doctrine of Being* and "concrete existence" (*Existenz*) in the *Doctrine of Essence* (cf. *WL* II: 406/628). We might say that <*objectivity> inherits <existence>* and <*concrete existence>* from the Objective Logic. This shows, as I have argued, that Hegel does not simply *abandon* earlier categories like actuality or existence.[15] The novelty in the Subjective Logic is that, unlike these formal categories, <*objectivity>* is determined with explicit regard to the role of conceptual form therein: "[O]*bjectivity* is the immediacy as which the concept has determined itself by the sublation of its abstraction and mediation" (ibid.). The sign of this is that each stage of objectivity is defined explicitly in terms of a syllogistic form. As Winfield observes, "In Hegel's account of all three processes of objectivity, syllogism figures prominently. Each form of objectivity involves a particular way in which something that has universality is mediated with something that has individuality by means of particularity" (2012, 287). So objectivity is an account of what exists "immediately" or "directly," but such that the *conceptual structure* of this existence is what defines it.

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[15] As Rüdiger Bubner reminds in defense of Hegel's transition to "Objectivity," "Now the *Begriffslogik*, as the Subjective Logic, was nevertheless right from the beginning silhouetted against [*abgehoben …von*] the Objective Logic of Being and Essence, and indeed as the concluding establishment of the complete logical consciousness of what was earlier already implicitly exposited" (1980, 109). Thus, Bubner would seem to agree that the conformity of objectivity to earlier "objective" categories is to be expected.

Because objectivity is supposed to be defined in purely formal-conceptual terms,

Hegel claims that <*objectivity*> emerges from conceptuality or "the concept" itself. This is

what he sees as correlated with the "ontological proof" of God's existence, which proves the

existence of an entity out of the concept of the *ens realissimum*. Since the progression to

objectivity is supposed to occur implicitly in the final stage of the syllogism, the "disjunctive

syllogism," we should look there for an explanation of this surprising claim.[16] The reason the

disjunctive syllogism leads to <*objectivity*> is because only at this stage do these erstwhile

separated moments of conceptuality explicitly form a complete unity. Each form is *replete* in all

the others, so that this syllogism satisfies Hegel's "unity of form" criterion for conceptual

content. Hegel gives a simple schema of a disjunctive syllogism to show this.[17] Here it is,

along with insertions based on explicit remarks he makes in the same context:

> A [qua universal] is either B or C or D [particularity qua totality of species]
>
> But A [qua determinate species] is neither C nor D
>
> Therefore A [qua singular] is B. (*WL* II: 399/623)

One can recognize in this bare schema the essential features of Hegel's account of

conceptual form from the beginning. There is a *universal,* A, which is replete with *particularity*

(B, C, D), a particularity which is made up of several other universals, but which has content

through their *negative* relations to each other: here, in the form of an exclusive disjunction in

which each term is not the other. Finally, a *singular* is formed precisely *through* the negative

relations of the particulars; the mutual exclusivity of these terms is what gives formal

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[16] When looking at Hegel's account of syllogisms, it is important to note that he is not necessarily considering them as arguments that prove a conclusion, but rather as arrangements of formal content. The different modes of syllogism are different ways formal moments like <*universal*> and <*particular*> can co-constitute a new content, what would correspond to the conclusion of a syllogism treated as an argument. Hegel's idea that is that some syllogistic forms do not express the unity of content that is implicit in the ideal identity of <*universal*>, <*particular*>, and <*singular*>. On the defects of the "formal" syllogism, on Hegel's view, see Schick (2003).

[17] Cf. Schick (1994, 254-55) for a helpful brief account of the disjunctive syllogism.

structure to the singular.[18] For this reason, the disjunctive syllogism finally yields the

potential "unity of form" that was supposedly present in the moments of conceptual form

all along.

With the unity of form achieved, Hegel claims we no longer need to speak of

syllogistic form at all:

> *What is posited in the disjunctive* syllogism is thus the truth of the hypothetical syllogism, the unity of the mediator and the mediated, and for that reason the disjunctive syllogism is no longer *a syllogism at all*. For the middle term which is posited in it as the totality of the concept itself contains the two extremes in their complete determinateness. … The whole form determination of the concept is posited in its determinate difference and at the same time in the simple identity of the concept. (*WL* II: 399-400/623)

The syllogistic form expresses the *difference* of its extremes, and especially the difference of

singularity and universality. Yet when content is articulated in a form of the syllogism which

unifies the distinctions of form that make syllogistic structure possible in the first place, the

form of *difference from conceptuality* (namely, singularity) is no longer an "extreme" of the

syllogism, but is united completely to its conceptual form. We saw previously that the role of

singularity is to allow for reference to something that is at variance with its universal form,

especially as expressed by the subject-predicate judgment, where a *disunity* of the singular

subject and universal predicate is announced. Hegel now tells us that the syllogism itself

finally cancels this disunity. For the middle term, the totality of conceptual determinations, is

both equal to the pure form of universality and constitutive of the determinateness posited

in the singular.

What Hegel calls "objectivity" is thus what results when the distinctions of form

articulated in the syllogism becomes irrelevant: "With this [sc. the syllogism of necessity] the

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[18] As Schick writes, "Here, the negation of other particularizations translates itself into the positive determination of a particular" (1994, 254).

concept in general has been realized, more precisely, it has gained the kind of reality which is *objectivity*" (401/622). More precisely, objectivity is "an *immediacy* that has emerged through the *sublation of mediation*, a *being* [*ein* Sein] which is equally identical with mediation and is the concept that has restored itself out of, and in, its otherness. This *being* [sc. objectivity] is a *subject matter* [*eine* Sache] which is *in and for itself…*" (ibid; modified). "Mediation" (*Vermittlung*), here, is again a reference to the "middle term" of a syllogism, which in this context is the content of "particularity," the mutually excluding lower concepts that make up a higher and more universal conceptual sphere.

In light of the previous chapter, Hegel's use of "being" to state what results from the completion of the syllogism should stand out in a new way. For according to our analysis, this means that Hegel uses <*objectivity*> to *recapitulate* <*being*>, now in such a way that it implies no opposition to the sphere of "reflection" or ideal conceptuality. The framework I have provided, I believe, gives us adequate resources for understanding the connection Hegel sees between his development of <*objectivity*> and the ontological proof of God's existence. The most basic similarity is that both accounts claim to show that there is a "*concept* [which] i*ncludes* [its] *being within itself*" (*WL* II: 402/625). Hegel makes it clear, however, that according to his understanding no particular significance should be attached to the ontological proof's target content of <*God*> itself: "[I]t must be borne in mind that the determinate *content*, God, makes no difference in a logical progression, and that the ontological proof is only one application of this logical progression to that particular content" (403/626). Thus, there is no question, at least in this context, of attempting to prove God's existence in particular (cf. Hartmann 1999, 361). Instead, Hegel approves of the "logical progression" in the ontological proof that leads to a concept of being or existence that is compatible with conceptual form.

It is important to note, however, that this logical progression is something Hegel believes he has *already* shown, namely up to the account of the disjunctive syllogism. How could this be? The key to understanding Hegel's account of objectivity lies in his concept of *singularity*.[19] Recall that Hegel introduced <*singularity*> as a kind of 'border concept' (See 2.2.2.). A singular is represented by a term that has general or universal content, but is used to designate something quite specific, something that therefore has a more determinate shape than pure universality. According to Hegel, the determinacy of such a singular is possible through the *form* of particularity, namely through the form of mutually related negativity. Thus, a singular term, on Hegel's account, is both purely conceptual and representative of the 'actual' as well. (Recall Hegel's remark from the *Encyclopedia*: "The singular is the same as the actual, except that it has issued from the Concept, and hence is *posited* as something-universal, or as negative identity with itself" [*EL* 311/240/§ 163R]). Moreover, the judgment was conceived as a representation of the unity of a singular with the universal, though one which typically fails to represent such unity. If it is now the case that, as represented by a disjunctive syllogism, a singular term can be shown to be fully united with the universal through the particular, then, in Hegel's mind, he has proven that singularity has issued from the concept.

Thus, given that singularity in a syllogistic context represents determinate existence, Hegel can say that the formal basis of determinate existence has issued from the concept as well. He makes this point explicitly:

> But the essential subject matter of that [sc. ontological] proof, *the connectedness of concept and existence*, is the concern of the treatment of the *concept* just concluded and of the entire course that the latter traverses in determining itself to *objectivity*. The concept, as absolutely self-identical negativity, is self-determining; it was noted that the concept, in resolving itself in the *judgment* into singularity already posits itself as

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[19] Other commentators to see the importance of this term here include Marcuse (1987 [1932], 137), Stekeler-Weithofer (1992, 356), Rosen, (2014, 448-49), and Gerhard (2015, 109).

> *something real, an existent*; this still abstract reality completes itself in *objectivity*. (*WL* II: 403/626; underlined)

> The concept, even as formal, already immediately contains *being* in a *truer* and *richer* form, in that, as self-referring negativity, it is *singularity* (404/627; underlined)

I think these statements show that Hegel's account of conceptual form is the basis of everything he says about "objectivity," even amidst his subsequent talk of "mechanism" and "chemism." Simply put, Hegel sees the transition to objectivity as carrying out explicitly something that was already implicit in his account of conceptual form. Namely, that within conceptuality as such, the form that treats 'actuality' is already included, namely as singularity. To articulate this form as "objectivity" is only to draw out this feature, and to show how its relation to the rest of conceptuality can be made intelligible.[20] Simply put, the "object" in Hegel's sense is the object that can be 'constructed' on conceptual resources alone.[21]

Now this may seem to take the wind out the sails of Hegel's reference to the ontological argument, since he does not prove that some specific thing exists from a reflection on pure conceptuality, but rather only shows that the form of singular existence is *compatible* with, but also *derivable from*, the form of pure conceptual generality. However, this is all Hegel needs to do for his purpose, which is to show that conceptual content can be the basis for essential knowledge. In this way, Hegel's "ontological argument" is quite consequential for the thesis of Conceptual Transparency. It opens up the possibility that

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[20] Friedrike Schick's remarks are entirely apposite and worth quoting at some length: "If one attaches the Hegelian talk of the objectivization of the concept to the standard of traditional modern epistemology – one will be inevitably deceived. For traditional epistemology, the objectivization of the concept could only rightly be spoken of when the concept abandons its status as concept and appears as a concretum. This wonderous transformation is clearly not performed in the subjective *Begriffslehere* of the *Logic*. … [The *Logic*] shows that the distinction proper to thinking between determinate (singular) and determination (universal) gives itself a form in which the unity of both can be consistently and conclusively thought" (1994, 255).

[21] This is comparable to, but somewhat stronger than, the formulation of Yeomans (2012). He says "forms of objectivity are forms of conceptualized existence. … [O]bjectivity is realized conceptual form" (190). This does not seem sufficient, since it could be said of many categories of the Objective Logic that they, too, are "forms of conceptualized existence."

something singular and existent can exemplify an otherwise purely general 'essence'. For recall that an *essential* relation for Hegel just means one in which the singular and universal are united through the particular. (The way this is cashed out through "teleology" in particular will be discussed in greater detail in section 4.4.2.) Hegel's account also supports Conceptual Transparency by preserving the objective role of conceptual form without resorting to sensibility to make it intelligible. That is, he avoids the Aesthetic Constraint, which rules out Conceptual Transparency from the start (see 1.4.2. above). Hegel reminds us of the issue in the same context. He writes,

> But of course the difficulty of finding *being* in the concept in general, and equally so in the concept of God, becomes insuperable if we expect being to be something that we find *in the context of external experience* or *in the form of sense-perception*, like *the one hundred dollars in the context of my finances*, as something graspable only by hand, not by spirit [or: the mind], essentially visible to the external and not the internal eye; in other words, if the name of being, reality, truth, is given to that which things possess as sensuous, temporal, and perishable. (*WL* II: 404/627)

I admit that, at this stage, the question of *what else* the content of a concept is may seem pressing. Kant gives us a clear answer: objects of sensible intuition. What is Hegel's clear answer? What is this "being" graspable by the mind and not the hand? Until we look at the ultimate use Hegel wishes to put this notion to, it may seem obscure or at least Platonistic. This implication can be avoided in the end, but it is worth noting that as yet it is not ruled out.[22] Hegel is opening the way for the broad possibility of objectivity, a notion distinct from, though indeed related to, existence. The main point is not to exclude (or include)

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[22] As I mentioned in the last chapter, contemporary neo-Fregeans subscribe to a quasi-Platonistic affirmation of mathematical objects (i.e. numbers) on similar grounds as Hegel provides. Mathematical objects, they say, "exist" just because and to the extent that they play a role in our true affirmations. The existence of mathematical objects sounds mysterious only if one thinks some deeper sense of existence is tacitly assumed. For example, one could say that they have "ideal being" or that they are "abstract objects." But for the neo-Fregean, these labels can be nothing more than an oblique way of describing the role of mathematical terms in statements and inference.

objects from counting as objective, but to delimit the reach of intelligibility within the objective realm. This leads us to the first sub-sections on objectivity.

4.3.2. Mechanism and the Limits of Rationalism

The first sub-section of "Objectivity" is "Mechanism." This and its successor "Chemism" are among some of the oddest and controversial inclusions within the *Logic*.[23] Commentators differ wildly on what they take the basic upshot of these sections to be. The stakes of my own account lie mainly in my interpretation of "Teleology," so I will only attempt to provide an interpretation of these preliminary sections that tries to make their relation to that section reasonable. The best general clue to what Hegel is doing in these sections, I believe, comes from brief retrospective remarks at the beginning of "Teleology." Here, Hegel contrasts his own approach to such concepts to that of "earlier" (i.e. rationalist) metaphysics. He writes:

> Earlier metaphysics has dealt with these concepts [sc. mechanism, teleology, etc.] as it dealt with others. It presupposed a certain picture of the world [*Weltvorstellung*] and strived to show that one or the other concept of causality was adequate to it, and the opposite defective because not *explainable* from the presupposed picture, all the while not examining the concept of mechanical cause and that of purpose to see which possesses truth *in and of itself*. [1] <u>If the latter is established independently, it may turn out that the objective world exhibits mechanical and final causes; its actual existence is not the norm of *what is true*, but *what is true* is rather the criterion for deciding which of these concrete existences is the true one</u>. [2] Just as the subjective understanding exhibits also errors in it, so the objective world exhibits also aspects and stages of truth that by themselves are still one-sided, incomplete, and only relations of appearances. (*WL* II: 437/651; slightly modified)

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[23] It was common among Hegel's early critics to object that such categories do not belong in a logic at all. Cf. Hösle (1987, 240) for historical references; and the same work, pp. 245-50, for Hösle's own arguments to the same effect. Hösle cannot see past Hegel's use of specific examples to illustrate the generic nature of these categories, so he accuses them of being inordinately *realphilosophisch* (See, relatedly, Westphal (2008, 297) who agrees that these categories are empirical but doesn't count this against them). My account will show why this criticism should not hold. Interestingly, Hösle admits that teleology does have a place in the logic (though not the one Hegel gave it; op. cit., 249-50).

Hegel's remarks here allow us to draw, cautiously, two main conclusions about the point of the "Objectivity" sub-sections such as "Mechanism" (corresponding to my bracketed numbers in the quotation). First [1], Hegel sees his effort as in these sections as distinct from the rationalist attempt to prove some given hypothesis about the nature of the world. Instead, it is an attempt to establish independently the character of various "pictures" of the objective world, so that one can *then* determine which is (or are) appropriate. In other words, this is pure conceptual explication. Hegel thinks that doing this gives us an independent norm for the application of such concepts: "*what is true*" in this prior analysis is "the criterion for deciding which of the concrete existences is the true one."

Second [2], Hegel does not see these conceptual explications as involving necessarily *exclusive* conceptions of the objective world. Instead, he predicts that *each* will apply in some way. For instance, both mechanical and final causes may be present, and his account does not demand that one reduce to the other. Nevertheless, Hegel thinks that according to the internal standards of the conceptual explication, one account (namely, teleology) will be more "true" than another account (especially mechanism). He does see this variation in truth as any kind of subjective or representational privilege of teleological conceptions (as if they were more "accurate"),[24] for he thinks that objects themselves under a mechanistic conception are, or at least can be, "one-sided, incomplete, and only relations of appearances." For it is compatible with his account that the world itself exhibit "stages of truth," the same stages he describes in "Objectivity."

The above suggests that Hegel is just as much existentially non-committal at this stage of his argument as any thus far. He is drawing out consequences of different concepts, rather than stating which do in fact apply. But more important for my purposes is the

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[24] This is a point rightly emphasized by Kreines (2004).

following: that Hegel does not commit himself to any specific demand for the *rationality* of the world, taken as a whole. As strange as it is to phrase it this way, the world contains (or could contain) "errors" (*Irrtümer*). We should look into mechanism more specifically to see how this could be so.

Though there is internal complexity to Hegel's account of mechanism (i.e., its sub-sections of "The Mechanical Process" and "Absolute Mechanism"), for my purposes, I will not make this complexity thematic. Instead, we can give a basic account of the "mechanical object" that is sufficient to show how it has internal deficiencies, as well as deficiencies with respect to establishing Conceptual Transparency. Hegel speaks both of "mechanism" and "the mechanical object," and it is important to make a distinction here. The mechanical object, strictly speaking, is the conception of an object that results most immediately from the collapse of the formal moments of conceptuality (universal, particular, singular) into each other (*WL* II: 410/631-32). Mechanism, by contrast, is the use of this conception of an object to form explanations.[25] Kreines (2004; 2015) has rightly emphasized the importance of explanation for understanding "Mechanism," but he fails to connect mechanistic explanation to a certain conception of objects as such. Making this distinction is important for our purposes, because while the mechanical object is "transparent" in an epistemic sense, the critique of mechanism suggests that mechanistic *explanation* is not conceptually adequate. It will be hard to see how these ideas could be consistent unless we keep the two terms distinct.

Let us begin with an abstract characterization of a mechanical object. A mechanical object for Hegel is the first concept of an object that results from the unity of the moments

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[25] Cf. *WL* II: 412-13/633. Accordingly, Hegel sees mechanism as a *begriffslogische* correlate of the *wesenslogische* category of causality. Ibid., 414/635.

of conceptual form. It is an object-type that can thus be posited from purely conceptual resources. Mechanical objects exhibit formal unity because all such (singular) objects are posited as sharing all their features (particularity) homogeneously as a type (universal). More precisely, it is an object which is so homogenous with is type that it really *has* no "features" (cf. *WL* II: 411/632): "the [mechanical] object is *indeterminate,* for it has no determinate opposition within, because it is the mediation that has collapsed into immediate identity" (ibid.). Just such a bare, indeterminate "object" is the kind of object that is posited in *a priori* theories, whether physical or metaphysical. It is, as it were, a placeholder object. For it is an object no properties of which are determined outside generic conceptual or theoretical conditions. Accordingly, Hegel discussion of the mechanical object most often refers to Leibnizian monads for its illustration. A theory like Leibniz's can have *a priori* knowledge of objects in general only by casting them all as sharing formal features homogenously.[26] The same is true of later rationalist ontologists, with respect to their discussion of "*entia*" or "*Dinge.*"[27] Hegel says that such items are "*assumed* by *reflection*" (ibid.). We might say that mechanical objects are something like theoretical posits.[28]

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[26] Compare Brian Ellis' contemporary discussion of natural kinds. As a scientific essentialist, he thinks everything consists of basic kinds he calls "substantive universals." He writes, "For the infimic [i.e., lowest] species of substantive and dynamic universals, the requirement is that their instances be essentially the same. If X is such a substantive or dynamic universal, then every instance of X must be essentially the same as every other instance of X" (2001, 98). In other words, at the most fundamental or lowest level of object, everything is completely homogenous in terms of all intrinsic properties. (Ellis' conception differs from Leibniz's on this point, since the latter demands that *every* difference between objects be explained in terms of a difference in intrinsic properties.) This is obviously not an empirical claim on Ellis' part, but purely *a priori*, based (one might speculate) on a generic conception of a basic physical object.

[27] Hegel compares "the object" to "an existence as such" (*ein Dasein überhaupt*), which further suggests the close connection with rationalist ontology (*WL* II: 412/633). Though atomistic physics also seems to depend on such ultimate homogeneity of its objects, Hegel discounts these "atoms" as objects in his sense: "atoms are not objects because they are not totalities. Leibniz's *monad* would be more of an object" (411/632). Hegel's term "totality" is a difficult one, but I suspect that he at least requires an object to have an 'intrinsic' nature or character, while atoms are involved in purely extrinsic relations. Cf. ibid., 412/633.

[28] This would make Hegel's conception of mechanism similar to Fichte's, though less avowedly subjective. Speaking second-personally, Fichte writes, "I understand very well how you can perceive changes produced by the mere mechanism of nature; for the law of this mechanism is nothing other than the law of your own thought according to which you further develop the world you have all at once" (1987 [1800], 109).

However, while Leibnizian monads or Wolffian "things" may be totally general mechanical objects on this conception, it seems that there are for Hegel more specific 'regional' varieties as well. Given a more specific "universal" category, a mechanical object will often correspond to a 'theoretical term' within that category, perhaps one defined as a constant over all objects in the domain. Thus, mechanical objects can be involved in physics (he mentions heat, magnetism, etc. as holding between such objects), but also in the realm of "spirit," i.e., with "[l]aws, morals, rational conceptions in general" (416/636). It does not seem to be the case that such things as heat or morals are *themselves* mechanical objects, but that such general things cover a domain of homogenous objects. A "mechanical" conception in political science, for example, may refer to 'the average adult U.S. citizen' to determine changes in material prosperity or intelligence.[29] For such a conception to work, 'individual differences' have to be set aside, even if there is still a sense in which every individual is covered. Terms like "heat" or "intelligence" are defined over a set of objects (atoms, citizens) assumed to be homogenous enough for generalizations to hold.

It is the general feature of being a homogenous posit in the context of a broader theory, I contend, that unites Hegel's conception of mechanical objects. Interpretations which, unaccountably, think Hegel here directly intends to offer insight into the natural sciences are certainly mistaken.[30] Nevertheless, the present point of emphasis also shows

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[29] Cf. *WL* II: 410/631. Note also this fragment by the Romantic Friedrich Schlegel (one of Hegel's personal enemies): "Understanding is mechanical, wit is chemical, genius is organic spirit" (*Athenaeum Fragments* #366/1971, 221). This also provides evidence that Hegel is not alone in using these terms in a unusual way in his context.

[30] Anton Koch's reading is too restrictive when he suggests we should associate "mechanism with macrophysics, chemism with microphysics and chemistry (which – perhaps – supervenes on microphysics), teleology with protobiology … and on the other hand a philosophy of artifacts" (2014, 182). Even if the object-schemas of mechanism, chemism, and teleology *include* Koch's respective cases, these associations should not be exclusive or even so specific. Koch supposes that we can derive conclusions such as that chemistry does not reduce to physics from Hegel's schemata, and this is clearly going too far. See also Rosen (2014), who writes that "Hegel is concerned with the concepts of mechanics and chemistry, with a statement of the dialectical significance of the general results of modern science" (454). This is strange given how well Rosen articulates the syllogistic basis of the concept of a mechanical object (cf. 455).

why examples from mechanistic physics are especially relevant. Marcuse (1987 [1932])

explains this quite well when he writes,

> The object of mathematical natural science, the purely physical "matter," is not
> deficient as existent, is no longer incomplete in the sense that something was still
> contained in its concept which was not immediately realized in it (as is *necessarily* the
> case with the concrete "thing"). The abstract "purity" of the physical object excludes
> all inadequacies of contingency. But exactly this immediate, pure, total unity of
> objectivity constitutes the latter's *inadequacy*. (138)

Marcuse seems to be suggesting that there is no lack of bare objectivity in the purely

mathematical, physical conception of an object. There may even be objects which are

perfectly defined by such a conception. However, despite their decidedly physical

application, such "objects," taken literally, are closer to abstract objects than concrete ones.

And if such a conception is *intended* to lead to explanatory import for concrete objects,

especially those mired in contingencies, it will run into severe limitations (to say the least).

This leads us to mechanism proper. Mechanism is the attempt to use a mechanical

conception of objects for the purpose of explanations. While it is possible to think that

mechanical objects are conceivable as a *type* (given that they are often theoretically

constructed entities, this is not remarkable) the mechanical conception of objects makes the

relation between such objects unintelligible from the outset:

> This is what constitutes the character of *mechanism*, namely that whatever the
> connection that obtains between the things combined, the connection remains one
> that is *alien* to them, that does not affect their nature, and even when a semblance of
> unity is associated with it, the connection remains nothing more than *composition*,
> *mixture*, *aggregate*, etc. (*WL* II: 409-10/631)

Mechanistic explanations will have to involve characterizations that group these objects

together, but since the conception of a mechanical object does not cover this grouping or

relation, the explanations will have no internal resources to account for the objects' behavior.

Even natural *laws* (the very best case of mechanical explanation), for Hegel, do not really

explain the objects they cover. The law must idealize these objects to cover them properly

(416/643); namely, they must be treated *insofar* as they are mechanical objects, but this means just insofar as they have the purely formal character of an object in general. Hegel does not see laws as *constituting* the objects they cover, and thus the adequacy of a natural law does not imply its conceptual transparency to its objects.

The reason that the mechanical concept of objects *cannot* express their constitution is because the pure generality of this conception cannot articulate specific content at all. For each mechanical object is defined homogenously, from the same purely conceptual resources. *Ex hypothesi*, all mechanical objects (in some domain) are the same: "[the object] is *indifferent* toward the *determinations* as *singulars*, determined in and for themselves, just as these are themselves *indifferent* to each other" (412/633). Nothing can individuate mechanical objects singularly; this places the burden of explanation *outside* the singular objects, to their relation: "the object has the determinateness of its totality *outside it*, in *other* objects, and these again *outside them*, and so forth to infinity" (ibid.). But if there is nothing to distinguish objects in themselves, it is unclear how appealing to their relations could add anything either. No new content is available outside the object. Thus, Hegel sees mechanical explanations as reducing to tautologies: "Now since the *determinateness* of an object *lies in an other*, there is no determinate diversity separating the two; the determinateness is merely *doubled,* once in the one object and then again in the other; it is something utterly *identical* and the explanation or comprehension is, therefore, a *tautology*" (413/633). Hegel seems to have in mind something like this: a mechanical explanation (which amounts to a determinism; see ibid.) has to say both that something determinate can occur, and that all objects in a domain are completely homogenous. It cannot say that A happened just because of B, but rather because of all objects (the type as such) and their relations. But since nothing determinate can be appealed to in any of these objects, one must assume that the reason for all events is equally given in

the nature of each object (Here again, Leibniz's conception of each monad is in the background; see 413-14/634.). But Hegel sees this as an internal contradiction. It requires that its objects be both uniquely and homogenously determinate.

Simply put, the mechanical conception of an object does not introduce the distinction in *content* that would be needed to yield meaningful explanations. This may be what Hegel means in saying that mechanism is untrue, considered on its own. We cannot both consider objects mechanically and expect that conception to provide differentiated explanations. Similarly, Marcuse (1987 [1932]), 138) also emphasizes that the mechanical conception of an object preserves no *negativity* between the singular and the universal; for the "unity of form" (using my terms) of singular and universal in this case becomes a trivial identity. Yet for Hegel, such negativity is the source of conceptual content *überhaupt*. Mechanism offers subjective transparency at the expense of being objectively vacuous.[31]

Given the failure of mechanism proper, however, it is important to note that Hegel does not rule out the existence of mechanical objects as such, nor could he do so (it seems to me) on purely conceptual grounds. It is just that such a conception of an object will yield neither content nor explanation without further supplementation. Moreover, it will even turn out that even mechanical objects and processes are needed for Hegel to explain teleological ones: "[M]echanical causality, to which chemism is also in general to be added, still makes its appearance in this *purposive* connection … [P]urpose is, in the first instance, precisely this concept which is external to the mechanical object" (444/656). Mechanical objects are, in this context, objects not yet determined by a purpose. In fact, it seems that to understand the difference a purpose can make to an object, it is necessary to have a conception of an object

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[31] It is with "The Law" (*Das Gesetz*), the final sub-section in "Mechanism," that this formal identity again breaks down: "In law, the more determinate distinction of the *idealized reality of objectivity* as against the *external reality* comes into view" (*WL* II: 426/643; modified).

not determined by a purpose. The mechanical conception, in my view, continues to serve this important 'purpose', for it allows for objects which are not yet concretely specified. Mechanical objects are like placeholders for genuine specific content.

Yet if Hegel does concede this possibility (and legitimate theoretical function) to the mechanical object, this has important consequences for the thesis of Conceptual Transparency. I have suggested that mechanical objects are akin to homogenous theoretical posits. Interestingly, Hegel's allusions to Leibnizian rationalism suggests that the universal form of Conceptual Transparency could only suggest itself insofar as substances, monads, or "things" were just such theoretical posits. Only thus could completely general knowledge be had from a single conception of an object. Perhaps such objects exist in some substratum of the world: Hegel doesn't rule it out here (and even affirms this speculatively elsewhere).[32] Nevertheless, despite the 'epistemic' transparency of such objects (as constructs of theory), they are not conceptually transparent on our definition. For given that their concept does not express specific *content* about them, it cannot express their *nature.* This was explicit in Hegel's remarks at the opening of this section: "the connection [of mechanism] remains one that is *alien* to them, that does not affect their nature" (*WL* II: 409-10/631). It is the lack of specific content that tells us, *a priori* as it were, that the mechanical conception *cannot* serve to provide us essential knowledge of something. Hegel also expresses this by saying that in mechanism "the concept does not exist in the object, for as mechanical the latter lacks self-determination" (*WL* II: 438/652; slightly modified), and similarly for "chemism." In section 4.5.2., we will see Hegel's frequent use of the idea that some things exist without "the

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[32] E.g., "In nature, only the wholly abstract relationships of a matter which is still not opened up within itself are subject to mechanism; in contrast, not even the phenomena and processes of the physical domain in the narrower sense of the word … can be explained in a mechanical way" (*EL* 353/274/§ 195Z). The statement leaves room for the minimal relevance of mechanism to nature. Just later he writes, "[W]e must also vindicate for mechanism the right and significance of a universal logical category…" (ibid., 354/275/§ 195Z).

concept" being in them. Though we need not identify as "mechanical" everything Hegel will

call "*begrifflos*" ("without the concept"), "Mechanism" is his most general attempt to establish

the restricted range of rational intelligibility. To call an object "mechanical," as I have

explained it, is not to suppose that it lies outside our *apprehension*, for the object has a nearly

vacuous conceptual content; but rather that it lies outside of genuine *comprehension*. It is

subject to Hegel's idealism, but not to his rationalism.

4.4. Teleology and Conceptual Transparency

4.4.1. The Logical Structure of Teleology

"Mechanism" helps show the limits of Conceptual Transparency negatively; it will be

more important, however, to see the positive sense of Conceptual Transparency if this point

of contrast is to be effective. Though every step in Hegel's path through the *Logic* is

significant, the importance of "Teleology" cannot be underestimated. For the specific

interests of this work, it is nearly the centerpiece.

Hegel's account of teleology plays such an important role because of the way he

inserts it into his previously given "logical" framework.[33] Hegel's account of the logical

structure of teleology uniquely reveals how his conception of conceptual content helps

resolve the metaphysical dualisms opened up by Objective Logic. Though many of Hegel's

insights are inspired by Kant's treatment of teleology in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*,

Hegel emphasizes to a greater degree the relevance of the forms of universality, particularity,

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[33] It is worth noting that in early lectures on logic and metaphysics (collected in W 4), Hegel only included the category of teleology between the syllogism and the idea. As I read him, this was possible because mechanism and chemism are not necessary for Hegel's positive explanation of Conceptual Transparency, while teleology is.

and singularity for an understanding of teleology – and *vice versa*. Like "Mechanism" and "Chemism," "Teleology" makes up a sub-section of "Objectivity," and like the others, it is an attempt to make available a conception of objects from purely formal-conceptual resources. "Mechanism" did this by evaporating the content of a concept, so that that these formal resources collapse into pure homogeneity. "Teleology" shows how the formal moments of conceptuality can combine to yield objective conceptual content.

We can see the unique logical structure of teleology by contrasting the role of generality or universality in its case to that of an ordinary "discursive" concept on the "standard model" we looked at above in Chapter 2. On this model, the general content of a concept is derived by abstraction from a number of singular cases. This universal aspect abbreviates the content of these cases across a single comparative dimension. The universal does not add anything to the content of these objects, but is the subtracted remainder at which a point of commonality is reached. Arguably, on this model the universal does not constitute the objects, but the objects constitute it (to the extent we are prepared to accept its 'existence' at all). The perennial attraction to nominalism perhaps derives from the sense that any such universal is really best interpreted as an imposed commonality on a grouping of objects that is otherwise merely *similar*. There is no universal 'in' this grouping to be recognized on its own.

In contrast to this 'bottom up' conception of the relation of singulars to the universal, teleology can be seen as a 'top down' relation of universal to singulars. This change in direction is not merely a point of emphasis or perspective on the same thing. For if a singular is in some way dependent on a universal, then it no longer seems as if the universal is reducible to the singular, but that the singular is *constituted* by the universal. This can be easily illustrated by the example of a material artifact, something Hegel uses throughout his

discussion of teleology. Though the illustration is imperfect, it will make apparent the basic logical difference between teleological and ordinary discursive concepts. Consider the difference between a newly discovered sample of rock and a sculpture carved from rock. If a geologist discovers what she believes is an unknown type of rock, she will compare a sample to existing recognized types of rock. She will want to ensure that it is not close enough to an existing type to be classified under its name; and if not, then it may be given a new name of its own. The geologist will try to observe some of noticeable differences between this sample and others, so that further samples of the kind can be identified if available. These common features (its "marks," *Mermale*) will be prominent in the 'concept' of this type of rock. The concept is likely to develop as greater comparative knowledge is gained about the sample and others classified as similar.

Now consider the relation of a sculptor to a sculpture carved in rock. Though the sculptor surely would obtain knowledge about the character of certain types of rock as suitable to his project before he embarks, his relationship to this material is different than that of the geologist. The rock matters to the sculptor only with reference to his project, to his 'concept' of the sculpture he wishes to produce. If it involves a human face, for example, he may wish to use a material that is smooth enough for a cheek, but workable enough for the wrinkles above the brow. The choice of material is subject to his 'concept'. So too, of course, is the production of the object. Though sculptors may depend on a more or less worked out plan, they must (at least the more traditional kind of sculptor I have in mind) have a plan – a concept – that can be carried out and (if successful) satisfied in the object. Though the sculptor may not be solely (or even best) suited to judge whether his work has been carried out, it is in any case not a matter of arbitrarily *classifying* the object under the intention of the artist. No; for the sculpture, *qua* sculpture, would not *be* were it not for this

intention, plan, or concept (even if that concept is developed during the process itself). Thus, the concept constitutes the object. Moreover, the plan is potentially (though perhaps unfortunately) *universal*, in the sense that the same project could be carried out in different ways and with variable materials. (If art *qua* art does not allow this multiplication, at least the quotidian artifact does.) As several objects are co-constituted under the same general plan, the universal is not constituted merely as something similar between these objects. It logically precedes them.

Accordingly, Hegel says quite explicitly that conceptual relationship of teleology represents (in Kant's typology) neither a "determining judgment" – a judgment that merely subsumes a particular under a pre-given universal – nor a "reflective judgment" – a judgment that seeks to harmonize a given particular with the universal form of cognition (*WL* II: 444/656; cf. Ak. 5: 179). For neither of these accounts for the possibility of a concept (universal) that determines itself as an object (singular). Yet even an ordinary conception of purposive activity, such as I gave above, involves just this kind of case. In Hegel's terms, a purpose is "the *syllogism* of the self-subsistent free concept that through objectivity unites itself with itself in conclusion" (ibid.). Or, in one of his most suggestive metaphors on this score: "The teleological process is the *translation* of the concept that concretely exists distinctly as concept into objectivity; as we see, this translation into a presupposed other is the rejoining of the concept *through itself with itself*" (454/664). This "translation of a concept" into objectivity is not a foreign notion to us. It is a way of explaining in logical terms what happens when an ordinary purpose is carried out.

More technically, Hegel identifies the three basic components of the purpose with three formal moments of conceptuality (cf. 2.2.2. below). He sees a purpose as a kind of

"syllogism" of the three formal-conceptual moments. Here is one Hegel's most succinct and illuminating formulations of this view:

> [P]urpose [*Er = Der Zweck*] is to be taken as the *rational in its concrete existence*.[34] It manifests *rationality* [*Vernünftigkeit*] by being the concrete concept that holds the *objective difference in its absolute unity*. Within, therefore, it is essentially *syllogism*. <u>It is the self-equal *universal*; more precisely, inasmuch as it contains self-repelling negativity, it is universal though at first still *indeterminate activity*</u>. But since this activity is negative self-reference, it *determines* itself immediately and gives itself <u>the moment of *particularity*, and this particularity, as likewise *the totality of the form reflected into itself*, is *content* as against the posited</u> differences of the form. The same negativity, through its self-reference, is <u>just as immediately the reflection of the form into itself and *singularity*</u>. (*WL* II: 445-46/657-58; underlined)

Recall that for Hegel, a "syllogism" is not so much meant as a formal argument, as a kind of arrangement of content.[35] Here, one can see that purpose involves the same three formal moments as the concept in general. However, what Hegel attempts to show is how purpose unites these moments in such a way as to explain concrete conceptual content.

The three formal moments mentioned here correlate with the three sub-sections of "Teleology": <*universality*> is correlated with "A. The Subjective Purpose," <*particularity*> with "B. The Means," and <*singularity*> with "C. The Realized Purpose." More than just an analogy to Hegel's explanation of how conceptual content can be produced through the connection of the formal moments, it is only teleology that finally explains how the formal moments of conceptuality can be exhibited concretely. The moments of the teleological process actualize the potential for content implicit in the moments of conceptual form.

First, the subjective purpose is the same as the universal in the sense that its content is unlimited and abstract: "Purpose, therefore, is the subjective concept as an essential striving and impulse to posit itself externally" (*WL* II: 445/657). Given its connection with

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[34] Recall the statement from the *Phenomenology*: "What has been said can also be expressed by saying that reason is *purposive activity*" (26/12/§ 22).

[35] See note 16 above.

the "subjective" and thus universal concept, purpose can be anything and everything: it is "indeterminate activity," which is a "self-repelling negativity" with respect to purposes that may be realized or objects that exist (cf. 446/658). Nothing distinguishes the subjective purpose from the subjective or universal concept; nor does it have specific content just as subjective.

The "means" (*die Mitte*) plays the role of *particularity* in terms of the formal concept; it mediates universality and singularity: "Through a means the purpose unites with objectivity and in objectivity unities with itself. This means is the middle term of the syllogism [*Das Mittel ist die Mitte des Schlusses*]" (*WL* II: 448/659). As in the discussion of the formal concept, particularity in the shape of the means provides the formal basis for specific content. Given an abstract, still subjective purpose, it is the selection of means – the way the purpose is carried out – that demarcates the purpose as *something*, and gives it specific content. To parrot Kant: whoever wills the end, wills the means. For Hegel, the means is the shape that "externality" takes on its way to being conformed to a subjective purpose (448-49/660). Hegel thus emphasizes the way that the object that would be purposively shaped must at first be seen as "mechanical" or "chemical": as relatively *indifferent* to the purpose or concept at hand (449-50/660-61). In the means, there is something "presupposed" as only "in itself" conforming to the concept (450/661): "The objectivity which in the means is bound with the purpose is still external to it, because it is only immediately so connected; and therefore the *presupposition* still persists" (451/661). That is, a purpose is often insufficiently realized in the means. Even so, the means as "the whole middle term" is capable of entailing a purpose (450/61). Just as existence, for the rationalists, supervenes on the completeness of a concept, a realized purpose supervenes on the completeness of the means.

It may seem doubtful to treat <*the means*> as a logical category that correlates with formal-logical <*particularity*>. However, Hegel will explain the content of <*the means*> using the same resources as he does to explain the content of <*particularity*>: namely, *negativity* (cf. 2.2.2.2. above). Before this becomes clear, however, we should see the correlation of "the realized purpose" (*der ausgeführte Zweck*: the 'carried out' purpose) with <*singularity*>; for the relationship between the means and the realized purpose is co-constitutive, just as that between the singular and particular. It is when a purpose is realized that the object "merge[s] with it in the unity of the concept through itself" (451/662). A realized purpose is a concept that has become an object.

Some purposes, Hegel allows, do not completely merge with their object; they are separable from it. Hegel calls such purposes "finite" or "external," and he sees such purposes manifest in the creation of many human artifacts. In this case,

> [T]he rationality in the purpose manifests itself as such by maintaining itself in *this external other*, and precisely *through* this externality. To this extent the *means* is higher than the *finite purposes* of *external* purposiveness: the *plough* is more honorable than are immediately the enjoyments which it procures and which are the purposes. (453/663)

Hegel has in mind here a case in which the means of the plough and the end of the process of ploughing are separated. The farmer wishes to finish his work so that he can relax in the evening; the plough is expedient to this end, but by no means essential. The end would be as well served if others did the work for him, rather than he with the plough. The content of <*relaxing*> is separable from ploughing, even though the latter can be instrumentalized to serve the former.

This is just a negative empirical example, but it shows that it is not clear in all cases that the content of a purpose is constituted by its means. There can be purposes which represent incomplete "syllogisms." Hegel associates these purposes as those that rely on a

"mechanical" relation the purpose and the means (455/664-65) – a relation I won't analyze here. What is crucial is that such "external" purposes are not the only possible ones. Since the realization of a purpose is definitionally dependent on the suitable 'arrangement' of means, not all purposes will be external to the means in which they are carried out. It is possible that the realization of a purpose is not external to the purpose itself. Instead,

> [T]he product is an objectivity which is identical with the concept, is the realized purpose in which the side of being a means is the reality itself of the purpose. In the completed purpose the means disappears because it would be simply and solely the objectivity immediately subsumed under that purpose, an objectivity which in the realized purpose is the turning back of the purpose into itself; further, there also disappears with it mediation itself, as the relating of an external; it disappears into both the concrete identity of objective purpose, and into the same identity as abstract identity and immediacy of existence. (459/667)

Hegel emphasizes that in the realized purpose, the formal elements distinguishing the subjective purpose from the object in which it is realized begin to "disappear." This can again be illustrated by a work of art. Though one can try isolate the artist's "idea" in making the sculpture, what he hopes to craft is *an actual sculpture*. His practical aim and his eventual achievement coincide. Moreover, everything he needs to do – the means – to realize this achievement is bound up in his aim. The distinction between his 'concept,' his means of achieving it, and what he achieves vanishes as he actually does achieve it.[36]

It is largely implicit in Hegel's discussion – though also clear upon reflection – that the realized purpose corresponds to the logical category of <*singularity*>. He does not frequently use this formal term in "Teleology," apart from the reference quoted above: "The same negativity [sc. of particularity], through its self-reference, is just as immediately the

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[36] This view is strikingly clear in a quaint but illuminating example from a 1810 lecture: "The intention [*Vorsatz*] to build a house is an inner determination, the form of which consists in first being only an intention; the content comprehends the plan of the house. Now when this form is sublated, the content still remains. *The house which is supposed to be built according to the intention, and the [house] built according to the plan, are the same house*" (W 4: 217, emphasized).

reflection of the form into itself and *singularity*" (*WL* II: 446/658).[37] This dearth of usage is

not hard to explain, given that <*singularity*> is conceptually correlated with terms like

"existence" (*Dasein*) and "externality,"[38] which are frequently mentioned in the context, and

since the "objectivity" in which a purpose a realized is itself the product of the formal

syllogism including singularity (see 4.3.1. above). Singularity is entailed in these connections,

so it is not especially noteworthy that Hegel does not frequently use the term. Moreover,

independently of these exegetical connections, it is obvious that the realization of a purpose

is a determinate "this" in the way that a singular is for Hegel. An achieved aim can be

repeated, but each repetition must be equally singular to qualify as an achievement at all.

If this is granted, we can see how the realized purpose represents the achievement of

the "unity of form" that is essential to Hegel's understanding of conceptual content: the

purpose is a universal that through particular means becomes a singular object that was the

target of the purpose in the first place. Here is a "top-down" explanation of the conceptual

constitution of objects, rather than a bottom-up, discursive explanation in which the

universal is a mere expedient. Only one piece is missing. Namely, Hegel thinks that the same

concept that helps to articulate how conceptual content is formally possible also shows how

such content is "really" possible. As I indicated above, that concept is <*negativity*>. We saw

in Chapter 2 that Hegel sees <*negativity*> and the family of notions surrounding it (such as

<*contradiction*>, <*distinction*>, and <*determinateness*>) as the sole formal *explanans* for the

existence of conceptual content: "To reproach the concept as such for being empty is to

ignore its absolute determinateness which is conceptual distinction [*Begriffsunterschied*] and *the*

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[37] There is also an apparently derogatory reference to the "external singularity" of artifacts like houses and clocks (*WL* II: 457/666). Presumably, not all singularity falls under that estimation.

[38] Recall: "Through singularity, where it is *internal to itself*, the concept becomes *external to itself*, and steps into actuality" (*WL* II: 299/458).

only true content in the element of the concept" (*WL* II: 285/538; slightly modified and my

emphasis). It is the negative relations between particular concepts and determinations that

constitute the specificity of some content; moreover, such negative relations are effectuated

not on a purely abstract basis, but though the way a *singular* exhibits a determining difference

to other such content. Recall this significant passage:

> But, as this negativity, singularity is the determinate determinateness, *distinguishing* as
> such, and through this reflection of the distinction into itself, the distinction
> becomes fixed; <u>the determining of the particular occurs only by virtue of singularity</u>,
> for *singularity* is that abstraction which, precisely as singularity, is now *posited*
> *abstraction*. (296/546; slightly modified, underline added)

It is the negativity *of* singularity, its self-distinguishing from what it is not that constitutes the

particularity by which the content of that singular is articulated. This is what I mean in saying

that singularity and particularity are *co-constitutive*; and negativity is their common ground.[39]

Applied to the case of teleology, this suggests that that the 'abstract' content of a concept

can only be reconstructed from a purpose once carried out.[40] The lines of conceptual

demarcation ("the determining of the particular") becomes clear only in the object itself.

    While this co-constitutivity was established as a "formal" thesis in Chapter 2, we can

now see that teleology is meant to show how it is "materially" realized, and thus responsible

for the content of actual concepts. Namely, purposive or teleological concepts have specific

content through the negative relations of a singular object that realizes a subjective aim

through the objective means that are responsible for making the means actual. Hegel affirms

this straightforwardly: "<u>The content of a purpose is its negativity</u> as *simple determinateness*

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[39] We saw this co-constitutive element above in 2.2.2.3., when discussing singularity as having a "reflection inwards" and "outwards": inwards, to the constitution of particular conceptual content; outwards, to the constitution of real objects. The same metaphor is repeated in "Teleology" with reference to singularity: "From the one side, this *reflection* [of singularity] is the *inner universality of the subject*; from the other side, however, it is *outwards reflection*…" (*WL* II: 445/657).

[40] The retrospective nature of determining purposes is emphasized especially by Pippin (2008a, Ch. 6) and now Brandom (2019).

reflected into itself, distinguished from its totality as form….[T]he content appears as that which *remains* identical in the realization of a purpose" (454/664; underlined). It is finally through a purpose that "the concept has so determined itself in [its] negativity that its *particularity* is *an external objectivity*" (461/669; underlined).[41] Negativity is the whole content of a purpose, and it is shared by the subjective aim and throughout the latter's objective realization. In this way, both <*the means*> and <*the realized purpose*> are supposed to introduce no empirical or intuitive (*aesthetic*) form in which conceptual content is articulated.[42] Though, to be sure, negative relations are instantiated empirically, it is the formal, negative relations within the empirical context that give a logical shape to the purposive content. After all, Kant himself argues that <*difference*> (like other such relations of "reflection") is not an empirical concept (A 261f./B 317f.). Just so, if teleological concepts can only be defined through a reduction to the negative relations involved in their realization, this does not involve a direct appeal to empirical "intuition" for their content.

It is eminently clear, then, that teleology expresses in a concrete way what was central to Hegel's explanation of conceptual content all along. Moreover, the role <*negativity*> plays in the explanation of teleology helps explain (another desideratum) how differences in conceptual content can arise. On Hegel's view, all purposes are equally "universal," so they

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[41] Similar affirmations occur throughout this section: "The negativity [of the purpose] thus returns to itself in such a way that it is equally the restoration of objectivity, but of an objectivity that is identical with it…[B]ecause of the identity with negativity, the product is an objectivity which is identical with the concept, is the realized purpose in which the side of being a means is the reality itself of the purpose" (*WL* II: 468/667). The larger context of the latter quotation above is: "We have now seen *subjectivity*, the *being-for-itself* of the concept, pass over into the concept's *being-in-itself*, into *objectivity*, and then the negativity of that being-for-itself reassert itself in objectivity; the concept has so determined itself in that negativity that its *particularity* is *an external objectivity*…" (461/669).

[42] Hegel admits that the teleological object shares material with the mechanical and the chemical one, but the specifically teleological involves a form not to be found in the others. Despite the common material, "[O]nly the *form of purposiveness* constitutes by itself the essential element [*das Wesentliche*] of the teleological" (*WL* II: 440/653-54). Accordingly, when Hegel discusses works of art, e.g., he does not see the purely sensuous aspect of them as essential to their content as art. Cf. *VA* 56ff./35ff.

cannot be distinguished if only that formal moment is considered.[43] But purposes are determined and thus receive particular content through the negative means by which the purpose is realized in the object. Retrospectively, we can distinguish the formal elements of the purpose;[44] in contrast with the mechanical object, these are not simply homogenous or conflated. Yet at the same time, the realized purpose exhibits the kind of formal "indifference" of the universal, particular, and singular that is intended in the unity of form thesis. Finally, though we will proceed to attempt giving more adequate examples, the basic idea that teleology involves the translation of a concept into an object is one that coheres with common sense about artifacts. We cannot explain the content of artifactual concepts on a purely empirical basis that lacks reference to the 'subjective' purposes constituting artifactual objects.

4.4.2. The Metaphysical Inheritance of Teleology

As should now be clear, I do not see teleology as representing an interesting alleyway along Hegel's path to explain what conceptual content is. Rather, teleology represents Hegel's *only* answer to how concepts, as he is prepared to conceive them, have objective content.[45] It is now possible to make explicit how Hegel's explanation of conceptual content

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[43] Cf. already in the *Phenomenology*: "For the thing [*Sache*] is not exhausted by its *aim* [*Zwecke*], but by its *elaboration*, nor is the *result* the *actual* whole, but only the result together with its becoming. The aim by itself is a lifeless universal…" (*PG* 13/6/§ 3; underlined).

[44] In other words, since a purpose must be carried out, it represents a tension between the syllogistic "extremes" of universality and singularity. In Hegel's words, purpose is "the concrete concept that holds the *objective difference in its absolute unity*" (*WL* II: 446/657).

[45] Fully cashing out this claim would of course require dealing with the whole range of Hegel's philosophical enterprise (at least so far as it is dependent on these ideas from the *Logic*). Though that task goes beyond our present purposes, it is worth noting that already in the *Phenomenology*, the content of <*knowledge*> is treated teleologically, here as a "goal" (*Ziel*) to be reached: "But the *goal* is fixed for knowledge just as necessarily as the sequence of the advance; it is situated where knowledge no longer needs to go beyond itself, where knowledge finds itself, and the concept corresponds to the object and the object to the concept" (*PG*

in terms of teleology allows him to support a restricted version of Conceptual Transparency. In this section, I will first draw attention to the metaphysical concepts that are entailed in teleology for Hegel; I will then note how these metaphysical implications have a restricted range of significance.

One way to see how teleology confirms Conceptual Transparency is by seeing how it offers a striking example of Logical Supervenience for Hegel. The latter thesis maintains that metaphysical concepts supervene on logical ones, so that when some logical relation is instantiated in thought, we are entitled to employ metaphysical concepts to describe it. In the previous section, I focused on the logical vocabulary in which teleology is articulated: a purpose is a universal realized through particular means in a singular object. What does this logical relation entitle us to say metaphysically? First, we can observe that Hegel himself, entitled or not, is willing to speak of the purpose as the *essence* of the object it constitutes: "Now purposiveness presents itself from the first as something of a generally *higher nature*, as an *intelligence* that *externally* determines the manifoldness of objects *through a unity that exists in and for itself*, so that the indifferent determinacies of the objects become *essential by virtue of this connection*" (*WL* II: 439/653).[46] As we have already seen, a purpose marshals certain means to make an object what it is: what achieves that purpose thus becomes *essential* to it.[47] Even on commonsense grounds, the idea that a purpose is the essence of an artifact is quite clear.[48]

74/38/§ 80). He even writes in the Preface to that work, "The *purpose* or concept of mathematics is *magnitude*" (44/21/§ 45), suggesting that even mathematical concepts admit of a teleological analysis.

[46] A parallel remark about concepts in general is made in the *PG* Preface: "Conceptual thinking adopts a different approach. Since the concept is the object's own Self, it presents itself as its *becoming*, it is not a static subject, which supports its accidents without moving; it is, on the contrary, the concept that moves itself and takes its determinations back into itself. … And so the content is, in fact, no longer a predicate of the subject; it is the substance, it is the essence and the concept of what we are talking about" (57-8/28/§ 60; underlined).

[47] Compare what Hegel says about the state several pages later: "But because the concept of the state is essential to the nature of these individualities [i.e., citizens], it is present in them as so mighty an impulse that they are driven to translate it into reality" (*WL* II: 465/673).

[48] This has empirical psychological support as well. As Keleman and Carey summarize, "[T]here is considerable evidence that adults reason about artifacts in terms of the design stance, and that *intended function*

And Aristotle already said, "From craft [*téchnēs*], though, come to be the things whose form is in the soul. And by form I mean the essence of each thing…" (*Met.* Z 7 1032ª29).

While Hegel does not often characterize teleology explicitly with reference to "essence"-talk in this way, it is important to note that it is not a mere fluke when it does occur. Instead, characterizing the purpose as the essence of the object realized is grounded in Hegel's treatment of the syllogism of necessity – the syllogistic form that leads to <*objectivity*> in the first place. For in a syllogism of necessity, "The terms, in keeping with the substantial content, stand to one another in a connection of identity that is *in and for itself*; we have here *one* essence running through the three terms – an essence in which the determinations of singularity, particularity, and universality are only *formal* moments" (*WL* II: 393/619; underlined). This passage was used in the previous chapter to illustrate Hegel's support of Logical Supervenience. Yet while in its original context, this passage only states how an essence *could* be realized in a case in which singularity, particularity, and universality becomes identical or co-constitutive, we now see that teleology realizes this identity actually and explicitly. The formal moments of teleology are only distinguishable in the unrealized purpose, or in the purpose *en route* to its realization. But when the purpose is realized, the universal thought that is carried out in the object becomes the essence of the object. The essence, concept, and object become virtually one and the same.

Most likely, Hegel does not often speak of teleology as realizing an essence because the realized purpose attains a new 'metaphysical' characterization of its own, namely what Hegel calls "the idea."[49] I do not want to be much detained by direct exegesis of "The Idea"

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plays the same role in reasoning about artifact kinds as representations of essences play in reasoning about natural kinds" (2007, 216; emphasized).

[49] "Idea" presents a case in which Hegel clearly wants to avoid confusion with everyday usage. Cf. *WL* II: 462-64/670-71. Even so, there is clearly a relation intended to the Kantian usage (preserved in Schelling) of "*Idee*" that harks back to Plato. Cf. *Faith and Knowledge,* W 2: 318/82.

chapter. (For one may regard the interpretive work of this dissertation as an attempt to establish *indirectly* the basis of this Hegelian notion, as well as the "Absolute Idea" [see the following chapter, 5.3.1.].) But simply put, an idea or an "*adequate concept*" (462/670) is a concept that has been realized in objectivity: a purpose carried out. This is why Hegel contrasts the idea with a mere goal:

> But since the result now is that the idea is the unity of the concept and objectivity, the true, we must not regard it as just a *goal* which is to be approximated but itself remains always a kind of *beyond*; we must rather regard everything *as being* actual only to the extent that it has the idea in it and expresses it. (464/671).

Though I think it is correct to say that teleology realizes an *essence*, it is an always an essence that is explicitly and more correctly described as a concept. For this reason, "the idea" often supersedes the explicit mention of a realized essence, but is also fully completely compatible with it.

More common than Hegel speaking of teleology as realizing an essence is the idea that it realizes what things are "in themselves" (*an sich*). Hegel attempts to recover the traditional, rationalist conception of a thing "in itself" or "as such."[50] Earlier in the *WL*, he writes in protest of the Kantian notion (or obfuscation) of a "thing in itself,"

> What, however, the thing-in-itself in truth is, what there basically is in it, of this the Logic is the exposition. But in this Logic something better is understood by the *in-itself* than an abstraction; <u>namely, what something is its concept</u>; but this concept [sc. in contrast to the Kantian thing in itself] is in itself concrete, in principle conceptually graspable… (*WL* I: 130/94; underlined)

We saw earlier (1.2.3.) that a thing "in itself" for the rationalists was precisely the thing according to its "first concept" and thus its essence. So when Hegel writes that in the idea

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[50] Cf. Stekeler-Weithofer (2014, 450-53), who traces Hegel's usage of "*an sich*" back to Plato's use of the Greek *kath 'auto*. The Platonic use of this modifier had precisely the effect of isolating the conceptual meaning of a term ("virtue as such/in itself," "justice as such/in itself") in contrast to accidental features of its application. As Edward Jeremiah writes, "The Platonic development is to make the property of being *auto kath' auto* [self by/in itself] applicable to a wide range of entities…so that the very question of what a thing is essentially involves the category of the thing-in-itself" (2012, 197).

the concept is the "being-in-and-for-itself" of objectivity (*WL* II: 673/466), this seems to

carry with it the implication that the concept is the realized essence of something in

something. For in a teleological object, its conceptual/essential nature (its *in itself*) has

become realized (*for itself*).[51]

Hegel's treatment of teleology provides additional support, then, to my proposal of

Logical Supervenience as an explanation for Hegel's use of metaphysical terms. The specific

supervenience of <*essence*> on the realized purpose is most important for us because it

shows how a concept can be transparent to the essence of an object: by being the very thing

that constitutes it through the realization of a purpose. However, in a striking passage, Hegel

seems to suggest that many more metaphysical distinctions are contained and even conflated

in the attempt to consider teleology:

> Of the teleological activity one can say, therefore, that in it the end is the beginning, the consequence the ground, the effect the cause; that it is a becoming of what has become; that in it only that which already concretely exists comes into existence, and so on; that is to say, that quite in general all the relation determinations that belong to the sphere of reflection [*Doctrine of Essence*] or of immediate being [*Doctrine of Being*] have lost their distinction, and what, like end, consequence, effect, and so on, is spoken of as an *other*, no longer has in purpose this determination of other, but is rather posited as identical with the simple concept. (454-55/664)

While it would be fascinating to try to cash out Hegel's apparent suggestion that *all* concepts

and distinctions of the Objective Logic are in some way involved (and disrupted) in

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[51] Since this reading of the "in and for itself" is not my sole or necessary support for the claim that the idea is a realized essence, I will not defend it at length. I draw inspiration for this point from Stekeler-Weithofer. E.g., "The phrase "*(being) for itself*" or "*Für-sich-Sein*" is, however, not [in contrast to *an sich*] used in a similarly well-established way. Hegel seems to use it when he wants to focus on the individuality of the case he refers to anaphorically in a present situation of discourse" (Forthcoming, 188). Arguably, the common reading of Hegel's "*für sich*" as exclusively a reference to self-consciousness derives from the influence of Sartre's use of the term in *Being and Nothingness* (though it is true that the *Phenomenology*'s use of the contrast is sometimes close to Sartre; cf. *PG* 28-31/13-14/§§ 25-26). Colloquially in German, however, the phrase can mean something like "on its own," thus implying a kind of *Selbstständigkeit* that is often implicit in Hegel's use of *für sich*. Cf. also Kant: "[B]ut the illusion can never be attributed to the object as a predicate, precisely because that would be to attribute to the object **for itself** [*für sich*] what pertains to it only in relation to the senses or in general to the subject" (B 70n.).

teleological activity, for our purposes, it is enough to see that Hegel thinks so.[52] It shows that he sees metaphysical concepts as being inherited in concepts proper to the Subjective Logic, specifically though the logical relations they realize. But no longer are such metaphysical concepts, especially <*essence*>, treated in such a way that we can only obscurely articulate how they would be realized. Instead, our own concept-laden purposes provide the clearest exemplar of something's having an essence. And if our criteria for such metaphysical affirmations is "logical," there is no reason to devalue an "artifactual" essence vis-à-vis a supposedly "natural" one.

Hegel's affirmation of Conceptual Transparency in some sense is thus completely straightforward once we see its basis in teleological activity. The formula for Conceptual Transparency, we might say, is the Unity of Conceptual Form + Logical Supervenience. But the Unity of Conceptual Form is realized with specific content only in teleology. So we can substitute within the formula: Teleology + Logical Supervenience = Conceptual Transparency. *Only teleology explains how specific concepts are transparent to their objects.*

From here, it is quite simple to explain why Hegel's affirmation of Conceptual Transparency is *restricted*. There are three basic explanations for this restriction. First of all, not everything is the realization of a concept-laden purpose. This is already clear from Hegel's distinguishing teleology from mechanism and chemism, along with his conviction that there are mechanical and chemical objects (see 4.2.2. above): "Indeed, the mechanical and the chemical object, like a subject devoid of spirit and a spirit conscious only of its finitude and not of its essence, do not, according to their various natures, have their concept concretely existing in them *in its own free form*" (*WL* II: 464/672). Not only are there such objects, if there is a distinction between objective means that are and those which are not

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[52] Compare Kant's claim that teleology requires that a thing be a "cause and effect of itself" (Ak. 5: 370).

marshalled for the realization of a purpose, there must be a domain of objects that are non-teleological. The latter are objects which are not transparently determined by a concept. Since there must be a domain of non-teleological objects for teleological objects to arise, Conceptual Transparency must be restricted.

Secondly, some objects can be related to purposes only "externally," so that they are not constituted by purposes, or not abidingly so. Though I have been using artifacts and tools as simple examples of purposes being realized in objects, it is important to note that these are not perfect illustrations of Hegel's view. For many cases of artifact are less realizations of ends as mere means to further ends. We saw this above in the case of a tool. The tool, though on the one hand a realization of an end, is also simply instrumentalized to serve some end that is not identical to it: getting work done, or saving time for leisure. Here, the "subjective purpose remains an external, subjective determination" (458/666). The tool thus becomes a "mere means": "It is therefore entirely a matter of indifference whether we consider an object determined by an external purpose as realized purpose or only as a means; what we have is not an objective determination but a relative one, external to the object itself" (457/666). Hegel explicitly gives material artifacts like houses or clocks as examples for such instrumental purposes, and cites how the means used for their production constitutes the product only by being worn out and used up, or "only by virtue of their negation" (ibid.). For such reasons, Hegel says that material artifacts do not exhibit the true realization of a concept;[53] or, conversely, the type of purposes behind them are inadequate

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[53] It is important to note that works of art should not be lumped into this assessment on Hegel's view. For though works of art also depend on material realization, Hegel does not see them as merely instrumental. While the purpose of a tool is separable from the tool, the purpose that is realized in the work of art remains essential to it: "If on this account we now continue to speak of a final end and aim, we must in the first place get rid of the perverse idea which, in the question about an end, clings to the accessory meaning of the question, namely that it is one about utility. The perversity lies here in this, that in that case the work of art is supposed to have a bearing on something else which is set before our minds as the essential thing or as what ought to be, so that

candidates for objective realization: "These [external] purposes thus in general have a restricted content; their form is the infinite self-determination of the concept, which has restricted itself to external singularity. The restricted content renders <u>these purposes inadequate to the infinity of the concept, relegating them to untruth</u>…" (457/666; underlined). It looks as though some purposes are unfit for objective realization, and some objects are only incidentally realized purposes, so that they can serve as mere means. Both cases restrict the scope of Conceptual Transparency.

Thirdly and finally: not all objects that are constituted by purposes of a non-external sort are "successfully" realized. I noted above that a realized purpose (with a suitable conceptual basis) becomes what Hegel calls an "idea." An idea is a concept that has been realized in an object. But such objects, it must now be added, do not always perfectly realize their concept. For this reason, there is "untruth" within an idea. Some objects are relatively covered by the idea and conform to their concept to some degree, but they are not complete realizations of the idea. Hegel affirms this very clearly:

> That actual things are not congruent with the idea constitutes the side of their *finitude*, of their *untruth*, and it is according to this side that they are *objects*, each in accordance with its specific sphere, and, in the relations of objectivity, determined as mechanical, chemical, or by an external purpose. <u>That the idea has not perfectly fashioned their reality, that it has not completely subjugated it to the concept</u>, the possibility of that rests on the fact that <u>the idea itself has *restricted content*</u>; that, as essentially as it is the unity of the concept and reality, just as essentially it is also their difference…. (465/672; underlined)

It is easy to explain why the idea is both the "unity of the concept and reality" *and* "their difference" when we take seriously the genesis of <*idea*> in the teleological process. Teleology both explains how something *can* be the exact realization of a concept, but since

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then the work of art would have validity only as a useful tool for realizing this end which is independently valid on its own account outside the sphere of art" (*VA* 82/55).

this is a process of realization, it this explains the possibility of non-conformity between the two. Since the world is full of imperfect conceptual realizers, ideas have "restricted content." Hegel's illustration of this point as the passage continues is highly suggestive for present purposes:

> But if a subject matter, say the state, *did not at all conform* to its idea, that is to say, if it were not rather the idea of the state; if its reality, which is the self-conscious individuals, did not correspond at all to the concept, its soul and body would have come apart; the soul would have taken refuge in the secluded regions of thought, the body been dispersed into singular individualities. But because the concept of the state is essential to the nature of these individualities, it is present in them as so mighty an impulse that they are driven to translate it into reality.…The worst state, one whose reality least conforms to the concept, in so far as it still has concrete existence, is yet idea; the individuals still obey the power of a concept. (465-66/672-73).

The example of a "state" is so pertinent for present purposes because we will explore in the final chapter how the notion of social ontology – the realm of things whose existence is accounted for by human aims and intentions – is the best illustration of Hegelian Conceptual Transparency. Hegel's observation here is that even a bad state still belongs to an "idea," is still the realization of a concept, at least to some extent for it to be in power at all. Imperfectly put, even a bad or corrupt state must be implicitly believed in to exist: "the individuals still obey the power of a concept." On the other hand, if all the inhabitants and physical objects remain present in a territory without any effective governing power, the state has died. Its "body" alone – the means with which the state had come to be – cannot survive without its "soul" – the living concept that is realized by its citizens and in its institutions.

This last restriction on Conceptual Transparency is only a partial one, for it seems to involve only cases in which some object *could* be the perfect realization of a concept or

purpose, but are in fact not.[54] This possibility of imperfection must be built-in to the idea, for otherwise, it risks severing its explicit connection to a subjective starting point in conceptuality as such. Hegel reminds of this, again very clearly:

> [T]he subject does not possess objectivity immediately in it (it would then be only the totality of the object as such, a totality lost in objectivity) but is the realization of the purpose – an objectivity *posited* by virtue of the activity of the purpose, one which, as *positedness*, has its subsistence and its form only as permeated by its subject. (466-67/673-74)[55]

Remarkably, Hegel is not providing any guarantees with his metaphysics of teleology and the idea.[56] If it is within the realm of realized purposes that Conceptual Transparency obtains, there is no telling at the outset how large is its province. Hegel has only shown what must be the case for it to have a province at all.

Before moving on to test this idea in Hegel's *Realphilosophie*, I wish to recall again of the distinction between Hegel's idealism and rationalism, as I outlined it above. Hegel's rationalism is restricted because he does not believe that conceptuality makes everything intelligible, but only those things which are constituted by purposes. Hegel's idealism is unrestricted, because it implies only that everything falls under a general concept in some way, without implying that a concept can explain it or make it intelligible. It is allowable on my view for Hegel to speak as if "everything" is "idea," so long as one realizes that this has in many cases a purely subjective ground: the universal power of thought, the self-conscious

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[54] Hegel makes this very explicit later on in discussing how definitions must cover "bad specimens," and how this rules out a purely empirical discovery of conceptual content: "A bad plant, a bad animal, etc., remains a plant, an animal just the same. If, therefore, the bad specimens [*das Schlechte*] are also to be covered by the definition, then the empirical search for empirical properties is ultimately frustrated, because of the instances of malformation in which they are missing … If the concept is maintained despite the contradicting instance and the latter is declared, as measured by the concept, to be a bad specimen, then the attestation of the concept is no longer based on appearance" (*WL* II: 518/712). The importance of this theme for Hegel is explored by Rand (2015a).

[55] Another striking case: "But the idea is at first again only *immediate* or only in its *concept*; the objective reality is indeed conformable to the concept but has not yet been liberated into the concept, and it does not concretely exist *explicitly as the concept*" (*WL* II: 468/674).

[56] This point is likewise emphasized by de Boer (2010a, 167f. and *passim*).

I, sets itself no limits. But this means only that everything conforms to conceptual

apprehension in some way or other, even if by failing or resisting conceptual *comprehension*. This

universal dimension is a part of Hegel's view, but it is not a theory of reality. By contrast,

Hegel's restricted rationalism is a theory of reality, but of a reality that has its basis in us.

4.5. The Province of Rationalism in Hegel's *Realphilosophie*: Test Cases

Certainly "Teleology" and "The Idea" are not the last chapters of the *Logic*, and there

would certainly be more to say to fill in the path from here to the end of Hegel's work,

especially as it connects the basic metaphysical ideas with the topic of philosophical method.

Yet for present purposes, we have gone far enough exegetically to establish the interpretive

claim that Hegel provides the basis for a rationalist metaphysics with a restricted range.

The German rationalists allowed an unrestricted application of a conceptual method

to follow their unrestricted conceptual metaphysics. If I am right about Hegel, we should

expect that the application of his philosophical method is restricted at the same point as his

metaphysics. The restrictedness of "the idea" should require a province of conceptual

reason. For our purposes, this implies a limitation of the effective scope of philosophy itself.

However, the latter is a claim that may seem especially not to square with the Hegel

of the encyclopedias (either his or ours). In this final section of this chapter, I seek first show

that Hegel's teleological explanation of Conceptual Transparency provides the justification

for his philosophical treatment of the human world, especially in his *Philosophy of Right*

(=*GPR*). Admittedly, this is to be expected on the basis of what I've said. The challenge then

is to explain how my conception of Hegel's metaphysics-*cum*-method coheres with the

existence of a *Philosophy of Nature* (=*EN*) at all. The second piece of the section is to explain

why this text (and others like it in the *Realphilosophie*) does not constitute a counterexample to

my work thus far. Inserted between these two cases is Hegel's discussion of the place of

aesthetics in philosophy, which occupies something of a border-position between nature and

the political world.

4.5.1. The Realization of the Concept in the Philosophy of Right and the Aesthetics

The result of Hegel's putting teleology at the fore of his explanation of Conceptual

Transparency is his prioritization of the 'products' of the human world. Yet it is clearly

possible to preserve this point of focus without explicitly making the *conceptual* dependence

of human products the point of emphasis. The unique conviction of Hegel's *Realphilosophie*,

at least as it concerns the realm of "spirit" or "mind" (*Geist*),[57] is that the human world *can* be

structured conceptually, and thus can be conceptually explicated *post hoc*.[58] The final chapter

will explore at greater length the role of this conviction in Hegel's thought, as well as its

philosophical relevance today. At this point, I only want to draw attention to the fact that

this conviction is clearly apparent in Hegel's *Realphilosophie*, and especially in the *GPR*. Before

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[57] For present purposes, I won't delve into the contentious issue of what Hegel means by "*Geist*." What is important here is only that the realm of *Geist* overlaps extensionally with the humanly made, though also with some psychological characteristics (which won't concern us). Whether this overlap occurs because *Geist* is a kind of supra-human singular entity, or because it is a kind of collective cultural consciousness, or something else, shouldn't affect the issue here.

[58] My emphasis here on the possibility of the conceptual structure of the human world should be noted. Hegel's thesis about social ontology (to be presented more fully in the next chapter) is not that all human cultural artifacts are conceptually constituted. Instead, it is especially the modern world which has made this possibility historically available. Conceptual explication can only rationally explicate what has already been conceptually constituted, and this is dependent on one's historical location. Hence, Hegel's famous "Owl of Minerva" approach to philosophy: "As the *thought* of the world, [philosophy] appears only when actuality has completed its process of formation and attained its finished state" (*GPR* 28/16/Preface).

convincing us that the science of right is a science of philosophy, Hegel has to show that it stands within the domain of conceptuality.

As we should expect, <*right*> is covered in philosophy because it is a *concept* or *idea*. The first line of the *GPR*'s Introduction states, "The subject matter of the philosophical science of right is the *idea of right*, i.e. the concept together with the actuality of that concept" (*GPR* 29/17/§ 1; underlined). We are equipped now to see why Hegel would not understand a concept *alone* (especially according to the standard conception thereof) to be the subject of a science. A concept *qua* universal has nothing specific for its content. The content of a concept comes from the negative determining of *means* to the point of constituting singular actualities. Philosophy must treat "*ideas*," purposes which are realized to some extent, since only *en route* to realization can a concept have content.[59] Hegel explains in a Remark just following,

> Philosophy has to do with ideas, and therefore not with what are commonly dubbed 'mere concepts'. On the contrary, it exposes such concepts as one-sided and without truth, while showing at the same time that it is the *concept* alone (not the mere abstract category of the understanding which we often here called by that name) which has actuality, and further that it gives itself actuality to itself. All else, apart from this actuality established through the working of the concept itself, is ephemeral existence, external contingency, opinion, unsubstantial appearance, untruth, illusion, and so forth. (29/17/§ 1R).

Hegel's idea of the concept "giving actuality to itself" (when considered apart from such contexts) has often vexed commentators.[60] It sounds like magic. However, when we realize

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[59] Regrettably, Woody Allen's spoof of such Hegelian usage hits the mark rather well: "[MAN AT L.A. PARTY:] Right now it's only a notion, but I think I can get money to make it into a concept and later turn it into an idea." From *Annie Hall* (1977).

[60] Cf. Pippin (2015; 2018), where an attempt to avoid the Neo-Platonic connotations of this phrase is carried out. Unfortunately, Pippin's attempt to explain this phrase by appeal to Hegel's supposed denial of the concept-intuition distinction is highly inadequate. For Pippin, a concept giving itself actuality describes *any* application of a concept thanks to the activity of spontaneous apperception: "So, contra Kant on what we might call thought's absolute discursivity, Hegel thinks that thought is always already giving itself its own content" (2018, 91). Pippin does not consider reading this phrase with an emphasis on its practical-teleological importance (apparently, he does not recall its occurrence in the present context of the *GPR*).

that a concept in the relevant sense is identical to a purpose that must realize itself to be a specific purpose at all, this phrasing seems not unfitting. For in explaining why the sculpture took the form it did (to revert to a previous example), we might appeal to the concept or intention behind the sculpture. The concept of something demands that its realization take this form and not another. Or: it "gives itself" this form.

Hegel uses the same metaphor of "translation" in this context, which he did in discussing the general way that teleology translates concepts into objectivity. Since this is a decidedly practical context, the entity doing the translating is the "will," but the structure is the same as teleology in general:

> (*b*) In so far as the determinations of the will are its *own* or, in general, its particularizations reflected into itself, they are its *content*. This content, as content of the will, is, according with the form described in (*a*), its *purpose*, either its inward or subjective purpose when the will merely represents its object, or else its purpose actualized and achieved by means of its activity of <u>translating its subjective purpose into objectivity</u>. (59/34/§ 9; underlined)

Of course, as the latter part of the passage above suggests, there is a 'remainder' in the world that is *not* the "translated" purpose: ephemeral existence, untruth, and so on. This, too, works with our teleological emphasis. We said that the existence of teleological objects requires the existence of non-teleological objects, at the very least in the form of means out of which (or in contrast to which) a purpose is realized. Just so, finding the "idea" or realized concept in the world will require holding fast to what is the product of "the working of the concept itself," and discarding what is not. A discussion of the concept of right must restrict its exemplification to those things which actually do realize the concept. This procedure will of course depend on showing how genuine conceptual realizers interact negatively with non-purposive elements.

The above can be regarded as Hegel's meta-argument that the philosophy of right belongs within the reach of Conceptual Transparency, at least potentially. For it shows that

the realm of ethical life potentially realizes purposive concepts. But this doubles as a methodological claim: it shows that the domain of "right" will be susceptible to a specifically conceptual explication, since it was the product of a conceptual constitution (see 5.4.3. for a further development of this idea). Thus, the *Philosophy of Right* ably illustrates Hegel's restriction of philosophical method to a domain that is marked out as conceptually transparent. Before turning to show why there can be a philosophical consideration of *nature* on Hegel's view, I wish to draw attention to a fascinating and relevant discussion in Hegel's lectures on aesthetics (=*VA*). While it may be that the inclusion of political philosophy under the rubric I've provided is the most obvious choice (and natural philosophy is the apparent problem-case), the inclusion of aesthetics – the philosophy of art – may seem uncertain. Should we think that works of art as realizations of a concept?

What is important about Hegel's methodological remarks at the beginning of his *Lectures* is that he sets this very question as the criterion for the inclusion of aesthetics in philosophy at all. If the above question is answered in the negative – so that art, rather than being the realization of a concept, is the pure expression of sensuality, or the unfurling inner genius of nature, etc. – , then, Hegel says, it has no business being discussed philosophically, and thus not conceptually. This text makes it clear that a given objective domain must be plausibly considered as conceptually constituted *before* one treats it as a suitable subject for philosophy.

To simplify, there are two basic points Hegel needs to establish to certify the place of aesthetics in philosophy. First, he has to show that the beauty at interest in art is other than the beauty of nature, so that the specifically *made* dimension of art provides its unique character; second, he must show that this made dimension derives from the intellect, reason, or the concept.

Hegel's attitude on the first point is straightforward but remarkable. Rather than

seeing the beauty of art as derivative from the beauty of nature, Hegel sees the latter as

depending on the former:

> On the contrary, spirit [or mind] is alone the *true* comprehending of everything in itself, so that everything beautiful is truly beautiful only as sharing in this higher sphere and generated by it. In this sense the beauty of nature appears only as a reflection of the beauty that belongs to spirit… (*VA* 14-15/2).

This conviction of Hegel's allows him plausibly to expect that aesthetics will not be, as it

were, a branch of the philosophy of nature, as though it considered natural aesthetic qualities

shared by natural objects and their artifactual derivatives alike. Instead, he argues, artistic

beauty can be defined independently of natural beauty and thus deserves its own discipline.

At the very least, aesthetics is properly considered among the *Geisteswissenschaften* (a term

which postdates Hegel, but whose roots arguably lie within his thought).

But this is not enough to secure aesthetics as a philosophical science. For Hegel sees

the basically Romantic conception of art as contradicting its *wissenschaftlich* potential, even

were it to endorse the priority of artifactual beauty:

> [I]t is still more likely to seem that even if fine art in general is a proper object of philosophical reflection, it is yet no appropriate topic for *strictly* scientific treatment. For the beauty of art presents itself to *sense*, feeling, intuition, imagination; it has a different sphere form thought, and the apprehension of its activity and its products demands an organ other than scientific thinking. (18/5)

So runs the then-popular, Romantic conception of art, in Hegel's view. And so much the

worse for philosophical aesthetics if it is true. Yet Hegel does not concede that it is. Though

Hegel does not deny that artworks are (typically) sensuous objects that affect our feeling and

imagination, it is not this which makes them works of fine art. Instead, it is precisely their

connection to thought and conceptuality that gives them unique significance as fine art (23-

25/9-11). Works of art are indeed realizations of a concept:

> In the products of art, the spirit has to do solely with its own. And even if works of art are not thought or the concept, but a development of the concept out of itself, a shift of the concept from its own ground to that of sense, still the power of the thinking spirit lies in being able not only to grasp itself in its proper form as thinking, but to know itself again just as much when it has surrendered its proper form to feeling and sense, to comprehend itself in its opposite, because it changes into thoughts what has been estranged and so reverts to itself. … Thus the work of art too, in which thought expresses itself, belongs to the sphere of conceptual thinking … (27-28/12-13).

In sum: if conceptuality 'goes in' to the work of art, it is reasonable to expect that philosophical reflection by means of conceptuality can 'get something' out it. This is a very simplistic version of Hegel's view, but it suffices to make our point. Hegel sees as a necessary preliminary to his work in the *Aesthetics* to vindicate this realm for the concept. Were he convinced otherwise, this work would have no place in the *Realphilosophie*. There may well be a non-conceptual dimension of art, but, if and when that is so, that dimension is also outside the plausible scope of a philosophical treatment.

4.5.2. The Weakness of the Concept in the Philosophy of Nature

Hegel's meta-argument for the conceptual nature of aesthetics is quite revealing of his underlying convictions about what admits of philosophical treatment in general. However, Hegel's answer as I outlined it may seem to exasperate our problem when it comes to the *Philosophy of Nature*. It is quite clear how we can recognize our own concepts in the products of art if we concede Hegel's idea that these products can be realizations of concepts; it is not at all clear how *nature* should or could be thought of as the realization of a concept – not, that is, unless we attribute a kind of creationist monism to Hegel: the world

as a whole is the realization of cosmic or theological "Concept." But this would seem to

involve giving up the idea that Hegel's rationalism is at all 'provincial'.

One of the clearest signs that Hegel is not, as it were, a conceptualist creationist is

how clear he is in insisting that nature does not altogether conform to "the concept."[61] The

theme is present in the talk of the "impotence of nature" (*Ohnmacht der Natur*) and its

"conceptless" (*begrifflos*) character. It is worth assembling a litany to secure this as an

interpretive *datum*.

> This is the impotence of nature, that it cannot abide by and exhibit the rigor of the concept and loses itself in a blind manifoldness void of concept. We can *wonder* at nature, at the manifoldness of its genera and species, in the infinite diversity of its shapes, for wonder is *without concept* and its object is the irrational. It is allowed to nature, since nature is the self-externality [*Außersichsein*] of the concept, to indulge in this diversity…. (*WL* II: 282/536; cf. 525-25/717 relatedly)

> Since nature is the idea in the form of otherness, the idea according to the concept[62] of the idea is not present in nature as it is in and for itself, although nevertheless, nature is one of the ways in which the idea manifests itself, and must occur therein. (*EN* 25/15/§ 247Z; modified)

> [O]n the one hand there is the *necessity* of [nature's] forms which is generated by the concept, and their rational determination in the organic totality; while on the other hand, there is their indifferent *contingency* and indeterminable irregularity. … This is the impotence of nature, that it preserves the determinations of the concept only *abstractly*, and leaves their detailed specification to external determination. (35/22-23/§ 250)[63]

> Here [in "Physics"] the concept is concealed; it shows itself only as the connecting bond of necessity, while what is manifest is conceptless. (110/86/§ 273Z)

> It would be unphilosophical to try to show that a form of the concept *exists universally* in nature in the determinacy in which it is as an abstraction. Nature is rather the idea in the element of mutual externality [*des Außereinander*], so that like the understanding

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[61] It is one of the weaknesses of traditional "monistic" readings of Hegel that they must both claim that the world is a product of a kind of theistic conceptual emanation *and* to claim that this emanation occurs imperfectly, and even with contingency (as Hegel often allows). As I wrote in an earlier piece (2018), reacting to Charles Taylor's (1975) monistic reading, it is hard to see why there should be failure in what such an entity "deploys."

[62] In further quotations from the *EN*, I will modify Miller's "Notion" to "concept" without noting it (in addition to de-capitalizing some words).

[63] It is noteworthy for present purposes that Hegel adds in the following remark that "This impotence of nature *sets limits to philosophy* and it is quite improper to expect the concept to comprehend—or as it said, construe or deduce—these contingent products of nature" (*EN* 35/23/§ 250R; emphasis added).

> it, too, holds fast to the moments of the concept as *dispersed* [*zerstreut*] and presents
> them thus in reality…. (203/163/§ 312R; modified)

And, finally, he writes candidly in a letter:

> For spirit [or: the mind], in conceptualizing nature, has to change *the very opposite of
> what is conceptual* into something conceptual, a feat of which thought is capable only
> when it has grown strong. (Hegel 1984, 278; Letter to Niethammer, Oct. 23, 1812;
> emphasized)

Though one is always inclined to assume with Hegel that there are equal and opposite sides

of an issue, while I have only presented one side, it is important to note similar remarks are

not made about sciences of "spirit," like aesthetics or the philosophy of right. In these fields,

it is *methods* that are sometimes called "*begrifflos*" or "without the concept," but not the

objects themselves.[64] There is another side to the story about nature, but not one that cancels

the frequently repeated idea that nature is somehow external to, or does not conform to,

"the concept." There is a special problem here.

The place of the philosophy of nature in Hegel's philosophy is one of the most well-

worn and contentious issues in the literature.[65] Coming up with a fully adequate solution to

the problem in general will be beyond my task here. Instead, I wish only to make Hegel's

inclusion of a philosophy of nature within his system intelligible given the interpretation of

conceptuality I have put forth. On that interpretation as presented so far, the objectivity of

conceptuality and its content in a more typically "logical" sense go together. The objectivity

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[64] E.g., "Even the object that is richest in content, as for example spirit, nature, world, even God, when non-conceptually [*ganz begrifflos*] apprehended in a simple representation of the equally simple expression: 'spirit,' 'nature,' 'world,' 'God,' is of course something simple at which consciousness can stop short without proceeding to extract the proper determination or a defining mark" (*WL* II: 291/542). "…[Mathematics] cannot [demonstrate the quantitative determinations of physics], for the simple reason that this science is not philosophy, does not proceed *from the concept*, and therefore anything qualitative…falls outside its sphere" (*WL* I: 321/234; underlined). "The empirical way of considering spirit remains stuck with being familiar with the appearance of spirit, without the concept of it…" (W 11: 524; underlined).

[65] A much-discussed issue (though one whose significance is overrated by those who take a linear view of Hegel's philosophy) is the transition from the *Logic* to nature. This will not be within my present purview. See Gerhard (2015, Ch. 3) for a recent account that correctly notes that this moment is not a "transition" (*Übergang*) in the normal "logical" sense, and so does not carry the weight of "necessity" as proper transitions do (157).

is what is constituted in the realized purpose, which itself determines the logical contours of a concept. In my view, what distinguishes the philosophy of nature from the *geistige Realphilosophie* (such as the philosophy of right and aesthetics) is that the co-determining aspect of the subjective and objective content of concepts falls away. That is to say that the philosophy of nature deals with concepts that are less adequately "ideas." In our terms, this means that the philosophy of nature is not "transparent" to its objects in the manner of either *geistige* or purely logical philosophy. I think this is what Hegel means in repeatedly calling nature "the idea in the form of otherness," which he even sees as its defining feature: "Now the metaphysics of nature, i.e. nature's essential and distinctive characteristic, is to be the idea in the form of otherness, and this implies that the being of nature is essentially ideality, or that, as only relative, nature is essentially related to a first" (*EN* 25/15/§ 247Z). The "idea in its otherness" seems to imply a separation of the ideal concept and its object.

Perhaps surprisingly, Hegel suggests that this means that the philosophy of nature will be *more* "idealizing" than other areas in philosophy. As many of the quotations provided above suggest, there is a lack of conformity, perhaps even in the best known cases, between our concept of natural things and those we witness in experience. This aspect of Hegel's view seems to be suggested to him by his post-Newtonian understanding of the relationship between ideal mathematical theory and empirical observation. Hegel is staunchly critical of the Baconian empiricist conception of science, according to which conceptuality and a theoretical apparatus only blind the true scientific task of raw sensory observation. (Recall 2.1.4. above.) Instead, despite his frequently critical reception of Newton, Hegel thinks Newton correctly apprehends that there is a level of autonomy in the ideal, mathematical layer of physical thought, a layer which may be exemplified and supported by observations,

but which is not a product of observational induction. For Hegel, the involvement of "thought" (concepts, theory, etc.) is a necessary aspect of good physics:

> The fact is, however, that the principle charge to be brought against physics is that it contains much more thought than it admits and is aware of, and that it is better than it supposes itself to be; or if, perhaps, all thought in physics is to be counted a defect, then it is worse than it supposes itself to be. (*EN* 11/3/§ 244Z)

However, much as Hegel approves of the pure/theoretical dimension of physics, he recognizes that this dimension has its most immediate justification not in the objects themselves, but in the idealities. The initial science discussed in the *Philosophy of Nature*, "Mechanics," arises for Hegel from the most limited, purely conceptual resources (cf. 53-54/38-39/§ 259R), extended through additional, quantitative formulae. The basic subject of mechanics, <*matter*>, is for Hegel "the concept of the conceptless [*der Begriff der Begrifflosen*]" (63/47/§ 262Z). Not only this, but purely as bodily matter, Hegel argues, nothing conforms to its concept. Conceptualizing <*matter*> is for Hegel an attempt to derive a purely quantitative concept of body, one with no conceptual features but only quantitatives ones: "Body *qua* body means this abstraction of body" (65/48/§ 264R). Here, Hegel's *realphilosophische* treatment of mechanics instantiates his logical treatment of the mechanical object (recall the discussion above in 4.3.2.). Both cases treat objects which are purely ideal posits, yet which are too generic to have a conceptually explicable essence.

This implies, for Hegel, that natural science logically *begins* not with a direct contact with things in their concrete objectivity, but rather with an attempt to abstract from things to the extent that they conform with our ideal mathematical resources (which themselves depend on, though are underdetermined by, logico-metaphysical concepts).[66] This bodes well

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[66] Recall the vivid quotation provided above: "For spirit [or: the mind], in conceptualizing nature, has to change the very opposite of what is conceptual into something conceptual, *a feat of which thought is capable only when it has grown strong*" (Hegel 1984, 278; Letter to Niethammer, Oct. 23, 1812; emphasized).

for the ability of philosophy to reconstruct and understand natural science, since science trades in concepts that can be derived on non-empirical grounds; it does not bode as well for the *objectivity* of mechanical concepts, since there is no guarantee of the conformity of these idealizing abstractions and the objects they are supposed to represent. Hegel is quite clear that we should not think of our conception of laws as constituting nature itself:

> The laws of nature simply are what they are and are valid as they are; they are not liable to wither away, though they can be infringed in individual cases. To know the law of nature, we must learn to know nature itself, since laws are correct and it is only our ideas about them that can be false. The measure of these laws is outside us… (*GPR* 15-16/6)

Thus, we certainly cannot assume that idealized constructions conform to nature "in itself." Moreover, as we saw, Hegel seems to argue that even the idea of a purely quantitative concept of matter 'conforming' to something is a confusion. In this way, the philosophy of nature (at least in its "pure part") is possible roughly in the way that Kant argued: namely, through the pure mathematical "construction" of pure concepts in intuition (cf. Ak. 4: 470/2002, 185).[67] But there is no guarantee that these constructions represent the laws of nature themselves.

Thus, a quasi-subjectivist ground for the philosophy of nature does not go far enough, for it only explains the entryway into the subject, and not its ultimate destination. This initial entry, moreover, does not really rely on the teleological explanation for conceptual content that I have stressed as essential to Hegel's view. Nevertheless, Hegel is alive to the need to base the philosophy of nature on a teleological conception, as my interpretation predicts. This teleological conception coincides, for Hegel, with the extent to

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[67] Kant argues that the metaphysics of nature, and thus the pure foundation of natural science, can be completed (just as any other metaphysics) because "in metaphysics the object is only considered in accordance with the general laws of thought," which he proved to be limited to the table of categories (cf. Ak. 4: 473 and 475n.).

which the philosophy of nature can be considered a *practical*, rather than a strictly *theoretical* science. Hegel explains:

> Our approach to nature is partly practical and partly theoretical. An examination of the theoretical approach will reveal a contraction which, thirdly, will lead us to our standpoint; to resolve the contradiction we must incorporate what is peculiar to the practical approach, and by this means practical and theoretical will be united and integrated into a totality. (13/4/§ 244Z).

We have already witnessed in outline what Hegel sees as the "contradiction" of the theoretical approach to nature. Roughly, it is the idea that the closer we attempt to achieve pure objectivity about nature, the more our own subjective abilities and conceptual resources are involved. In the theoretical approach, "[I]nstead of leaving nature as she is, and taking her as she is in truth, … we make her into something quite different. In thinking things, we transform them into something universal…. We give them the form of something subjective, of something produced by us and belonging to us…" (16/7/§ 246Z). This presents in clear terms the quasi-subjectivism that Hegel sees as the first step in the philosophy of nature, especially in the science of mechanics.

Yet it is clear from Hegel's presentation that this theoretical-*cum*-subjective conception of the philosophy of nature is insufficient. What would it mean to add a "practical" consideration of nature to this? The most obvious possibility is one Hegel rules out of court. That would be a conception according to which the philosophy of nature is practical because it is considered with constant reference to *our* purposes and ends. It is this conception that can be found, for example, in Christian Wolff's text *Vernünftige Gedanken von den Absichten der natürlichen Dingen* (*Rational Thoughts on the Intentions of Natural Things*, 1724). Here, Hegel clams, the purpose or end is something outside of nature itself and furthermore dependent on the interest of the human subject observing nature, "as it is, for example, when I say that the wool of the sheep is there only to provide me with clothes" (14/5/§

245Z) rather than a means for the sheep's own end of self-preservation. Purposes in this

sense are not constitutive or essential to the things, and so they cannot play a role in

determining the concept of those things.[68]

The alternative conception of a practical consideration of nature, in keeping with the

form of teleology Hegel advocates in the *Logic*, is one that treats purposes internal to things,

such that the purposes are constitutive of them.

> The purposive concept [*Zweckbegriff*], however, is not merely external to nature…. The purposive concept as immanent in natural objects is their simple determinateness, e.g. the seed of a plant, which contains the real possibilities of all that is to exist in the tree, and thus, as a purposive activity, is directed solely to self-preservation. This concept of purpose was already recognized by Aristotle, too, and he called this activity the *nature of a thing*; the true teleological method—and this is the highest—consists, therefore, in the method of regarding nature as free in her own peculiar vital activity. (ibid.; modified)

The philosophy of nature is teleological and thus "practical" insofar as it considers things as

self-determining purposive entities.[69] Things have "internal" purposes, Hegel claims in

agreement with Aristotle. These purposes are not supposed to be anything spooky or

supernatural, but rather whatever motivates the activity of living beings.

However, there is a major difference between the putative purposes of natural things

and the purposes discussed previously in this chapter. In the case of the purposes involved

in law and politics or in art, the human subject can hope to have an immediate or direct

access to the "universal" shape of these purposes. To be sure, we saw that the content of a

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[68] Incidentally, Hegel argues that biological species should be defined precisely by those characteristics by which life-forms are able to preserve and perpetuate themselves: "For example, in the case of animals, the instruments for eating, the teeth and claws, are used in the systems as a far-reaching criterion of division…[T]he differentiation embodied in those organs is not one that pertains just to external reflection; such organs are rather the vital point of animal individuality, where the latter posits itself as self-referring singularity by cutting itself loose from the otherness of its external nature and from continuity with the other" (*WL* II: 526/717-18).

[69] Hegel affirms this quite definitely in lectures of 1810: "Even animals have a practical relation to what is external to them. They act purposively [*zweckmäßig*], and thus rationally [*vernünftig*]. Since they do this unconsciously though, one can speak of an action in their case only improperly [*uneigentlich*]" (W 4: 217).

purpose is not completely immediately given subjectively, since the realization of a purpose is necessary to specify its determinate content. Yet even so, Hegel is right to say that in these cases, the human being has "in himself the measure [*in sich den Maßstab*]" with regard to these purposes (cf. *GPR* 16/7/Z. in Preface). Part of the appeal of Conceptual Transparency in the case of human constructions is that we can see how the ideal concept can have a role in the 'making' of the object. With nature, Kant himself suggested that natural purposes would have to be something like concepts guiding forms of life (cf. Ak. 5: 373) – but the suggestion made him recoil. It could seem that Hegel requires something like panpsychism as a *presupposition* of the philosophy of nature (cf. Kant's repudiation of "hylozoism", Ak. 5: 392ff.), for this would make it clear how natural things could be guided by concepts in the same way as artifacts are.

Instead,[70] Hegel seems to require that there is 'transparent' access to at least one form of natural purpose, namely the form that we share with the animal kingdom, a form of purposiveness necessary for our own mindedness. It is not that things have human-like purposes, nor that human beings are the purposive goal of nature, but that as part of nature ourselves, we human beings understand 'from the inside' what it means to have a natural purpose. Human mindedness is the great thaw of the implicit "frozen" intelligence of nature:

> A rational consideration of nature must consider how *nature is in its own self this process of becoming spirit, of sublating its otherness*—and how the idea is present in each grade or level of nature itself; estranged from the idea, nature is only the corpse of the understanding. Nature is, however, only implicitly the idea, and Schelling therefore caller her a petrified intelligence, others even a frozen intelligence… (25/14-15/§ 247Z; emphasized)

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[70] Hegel clearly and repeatedly denies that nature (apart from us) "thinks." E.g., "In thinking things, we transform them into something universal; but things are singular and the Lion as Such does not exist. We give them the form of something subjective, of something produced by us and belonging to us, and belonging to us in our specifically human character: *for natural objects do not think, and are not presentations or thoughts*" (*EN* 16/7/§ 246Z).

Hegel thus treats nature as purposive unto itself, but also as a means for the realization of *Geist*. The trajectory toward the self-knowledge of nature in the human being seems to offer the prospect of treating the 'lesser' stages of nature – such as mere matter in motion or geology – as internally necessary *means* for the realization of nature's own purposes. Since we have some conception of our own natural purposes, we have a *prima facie* hope of understanding how prior aspects of nature belong within the unfolding of these purposes. This explanation is not needed to justify *all* the concepts of the philosophy of nature, but only the fact that at least some portion of that philosophy will have its basis on 'transparent' grounds.

On the one hand, then, Hegel attempts to situate the philosophy of nature within his general teleological conception of conceptual content, for he argues that there is at least one living purpose in nature with which we are immediately acquainted – ourselves. On the other hand, Hegel does not pretend that this gives us the right to claim rational insight into the workings of nature *in toto*. At best, the philosophy of nature will be an idealizing attempt to make sense of the way that such a purpose can arise in the natural world, a conceptual genealogy of self-determining purposiveness. But the many remarks Hegel makes about the *begrifflos* character of nature still hold. Nature does not literally obey the concepts we have of it, nor the "concepts" derivable from the purposes nature has for itself.[71] This means that the philosophy of nature is a ripe field for rational investigation, but not one for which we can rely on Conceptual Transparency obtaining. For Hegel, nature contains a tenuous overlap with the "province of conceptual reason" but is not its center.

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[71] In logical terms, natural *singulars* are not adequate to their (type) *universals*. Cf. the case of animals: "In this relationship [namely, instinct], the animal comports itself *as an immediate singular*, and because it can only overcome single determinations of the outer world in all their variety…its self-realization is *not adequate to its concept* and the animal perpetually returns from its satisfaction to a state of need" (*EN* 475/390-91/§ 362). This fits with the idea that since universals do not "exist" in nature (cf. the quotation in the previous note), there cannot be a fully satisfied unity of conceptual form in nature.

4.6. Conclusion

In closing this chapter, it is worth recounting how the interpretation I have provided

leads to a somewhat different picture of Hegel than is current in the literature. Most current

accounts of Hegel's "concept" have interpreted it in terms of what I have called his *idealism*,

and thus suggest that the concept is something all-encompassing, whether as a real "cosmic"

entity, or as a epistemological precondition to all our knowledge. On either reading, there is

no place for a limitation on the reach of the concept. Since conceptuality will be a

precondition on all thought ("the content appropriate to the conceptual capacities required

for the thought of anything at all…anything's being the case, anything's being such and such,

anything happening" [Pippin 2018, 16]), including all thought about the world, it will be an

immediate consequence of such accounts that "everything is conceptual" ("the structure of

reality is conceptual, *is* its intelligibility" [ibid.]). Moreover, the proof for such a thesis could

be found merely by discerning a kind of necessary pre-condition of all thought within

thought. As Pippin argues, for example, the denial of the involvement of "pure thought,"

such as is supposed to be disclosed in the *Logic*, always involves a reference to such thought:

"Any such criticism [of pure thought], in so far as it is a thinking, a judging, a claim to know,

is always a manifestation of a dependence on pure thinking and its conditions…" (7).

Holistic "epistemic" idealism would fall out of any attempt to be thoroughly self-conscious

in one's thinking.

While I think this sort of argument can be found in Hegel, and is correct as far as it

goes, when taken to explain what Hegel could be seeking to establish in his *Doctrine of the*

Concept, and what he could mean by speaking of concepts which are "the nature, the specific

essence, that which is permanent and substantial in the manifold and accidentality of appearance and fleeting externalization" (*WL* I: 26/16), it fails badly. Not only does it seem tenuous indeed to so boldly identify a concept with the essence of an 'external' thing, if such an account is based only on the necessary role of conceptuality for *all* experience, it is hard to see how a restriction on such essentialism could be reasonably introduced, nor how a privilege could be granted to the world of *Geist*. Yet Hegel's recognition of a restriction on the reach of conceptuality's ability to make everything intelligible, and a corresponding privilege of *geistige* intelligibility, is an interpretive fixed point.

My account has attempted to make sense of the way that Hegel's treatment of logical forms culminates in an explanation of the specific pathway of concept-to-essence knowledge. According to this explanation, Hegel is trying to argue that there is no *global* opposition between concepts and the essences of things, rather than arguing *for* a global isomorphism between them. There is no global incompatibility between concepts and essences of things because any realized purpose (especially human purposes) is *eo ipso* an object that realizes an essence that is also a concept. This creates a principled class of exceptions to Kant's skepticism about concepts of real essences, even if it does so on grounds that are highly amenable to Kantian considerations. In particular, Hegel's explanation of Conceptual Transparency exploits Kant's own thoughts about the uniqueness of *practical* concepts. Hegel's innovation is to suggest that we can have theoretical knowledge about practical achievements. This leads to a notion of *social ontology* as the paradigm case of Conceptual Transparency. To this theme the final chapter of this work will be devoted.

Chapter 5: The Conceptual Transparency of Social Ontology:

Hegelian Foundations

5.1. Introduction

In this final chapter, I wish to extend the general view of Conceptual Transparency I have attributed to Hegel to see how it both explains, and is explained by, a paradigmatic *realphilosophishe* application. The paradigm case of Conceptual Transparency for Hegel is what is today called social ontology. Roughly speaking, "social ontology" refers to the domain of entities that exist because they are recognized by social actors.[1] This use of the term is potentially wider than, but included in, what Hegel calls *objective spirit* or, more specifically, *ethical life* (*Sittlichkeit*).[2] It is arguable that, historically speaking, Hegel was among the first to recognize the existence of a distinct domain of social ontology.[3] That is, he realized that the social world, though perhaps an "artifact" of some kind, and thus conformable in some way to the traditional distinction of natural and artificial, involved entities that are markedly different from typical examples of (material) artifacts like tools or works of art. The social world contains beyond these *institutions*, all of which involve spatio-temporal localization in

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[1] "Social ontology" can also refer to the study of such entities (cf. Epstein 2018). Context should make it clear which sense is at issue.

[2] Hegel defines objective spirit or mind as "the absolute Idea, but it is only so *in itself*" (*EG* 303/217/§ 483), but he explains it more helpfully in the following paragraph: "But the purposive activity of this will is to realize its concept, freedom, in the externally objective realm, making it a world determined by the will, so that in it the will is at home with itself, joined together with itself, the concept accordingly completed to the Idea" (ibid., § 484). Hegel says that "ethical life" (*Sittlichkeit*) is the culmination of objective spirit. Cf. *EG* § 513. See Thompson (2014) for more on the relation between social ontology and "objective spirit."

[3] Predecessors would certainly include figures like Hobbes, Pufendorf, and Vico. Hegel apparently did not own a work by Vico (cf. GW 31/1), so the latter's influence can be at best indirect. He was read by Herder, with whom Hegel was familiar. Cf. Bergel (1968) for a historical overview of Vico's influence in Germany in "the age of Goethe." I am indebted to Luft (2015) for seeing Vico as a forerunner of the "artifactual" dimension of Hegel's thought.

some way, but none of which are reducible to this kind of material localization.[4] We can say of a tool 'here it is', but we cannot do so for a *law* or *money* or a *language*. Even those who refuse to accept any supernatural metaphysics can agree that there is, at least apparently, something strangely 'immaterial' about such institutions. Hegel, I believe, was uniquely aware of this oddity.

How is social ontology 'produced', and how is it sustained? How does it differ from other types of entity? Hegel's insight, I believe, is that we should see social ontology – at least at a certain stage of its historical development – both as the product of a realized system of general *concepts*, and as the sustained by the conceptual attitudes of members a social practice. The historical qualification is essential for understanding the uniqueness of Hegel's view. While it has always been true that human communities were guided, at least implicitly, by goals and purposes that were reflected in their institutions, it has not always been true (at least in Hegel's view) that these goals and purposes were, or even could be, articulated by communities' leaders or members in a conceptually explicit way. Hegel's early work sees the ancient concept of *fate* as a demonstration of this.[5] Even the institution of justice in Athens (as recounted in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*) was not the product of human intentions but the clever plan of the goddess Athena to prevent the outbreak of the Furies. In general, the religious justification of institutions, if not supplemented by a conceptually explicit one, shrouds the existence of the institutions in mysteries and images.[6]

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[4] The specific addition of "ethical life" (*Sittlichkeit*) to objective mind, Hegel tells us, is that overcomes the dependence on external "things." Cf. *EG* § 513.

[5] See "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate" (approx. 1797), in Hegel 1948, 182; 228ff..

[6] René Girard (1977), for example, offers a compelling story about the justification of sacrificial violence in early religious communities in which it is essential to that justification that community members misunderstand it. Sacrificial myths, for example, cover up past scapegoating victimizations by treating victims as gods and heroes. Myths and rituals, he argues, reproduce this motivated misunderstanding.

In Hegel's view, it is historically the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) (as inspired by the Lutheran wing of the Reformation) that offers both philosophically and popularly the view that our institutions (and thus an import province of social ontology) can be solely the product of "our" intentions, and thus fall within our responsibility. In particular, we can accept the existence of some institution only if it follows rationally from the goals we accept, and if that rational justification can be explained without appeal to arcane authorities. That is, the Enlightenment offers the chance not only for there to be a social ontology that can be *criticized* rationally or conceptually (which was always at least retrospectively the case), but one that can be so *constituted*.[7] Social ontology can now become thoroughly *comprehensible* (*begreiflich*). We can be, in our understanding, at home in the world (cf. *EG* § 484). Calling social ontology *conceptually* constituted is not a trivial qualification because the truth of that claim depends on there being a rationally explicable justification for the existence of institutions of social ontology, rather than being a merely causal outcome of human needs and desires.

Though I will provide some further historical background to Hegel's acceptance of social ontology, it is not at all controversial to claim that he affirms social ontology.[8] Nor is it controversial that he adopts a *sui generis* conception of its uniquely modern form. The focus of the present account is not on reestablishing these claims, but in showing how social ontology is explanatory for Hegel's acceptance of Conceptual Transparency, as well as how Conceptual Transparency is illuminating for Hegel's unique conception of social ontology. Most central for my argument here is the interpretive gains that follow from seeing Hegel's

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[7] See Jonathan Lear's (2017) "What Is a Crisis of Intelligibility?" for a helpful account of the reverse process: where our concepts and purposes no longer constitute our world and thus cease to be intelligible to us.

[8] See especially recent work by Kevin Thompson (2014; 2018) and Part 1 of Testa and Ruggiu (2018). For an older representative of this point of emphasis, see Lukács (1978).

social ontology and theory of Conceptual Transparency as going hand-in-hand. Otherwise

puzzling ideas, such as that we have absolute knowledge, that conceptual knowledge is non-

sensory, that conceptual knowledge must be historically late, etc., become comprehensible

when we recognize the paradigmatic status of social ontology for Hegel's theory of concepts.

Recognizing this status thus becomes a way to vindicate in a concrete way many of the

claims and implications already contained in the previous chapters.

Take, for example, a seemingly egregiously "metaphysical" statement of Hegel about

the concept, one that we have already seen (2.1. below):

> Instead, the concept is what truly comes first, and things are what they are through
> the activity of the concept that dwells in them and reveals itself in them. …
> [T]hought and, more precisely, the concept is the infinite form, or the free, creative
> activity that does not need material at hand outside it in order to realize itself. (*EL*
> 313/241, § 163Z(2)).

I argued in chapter 2 that Hegel is a conceptual theorist *stricto sensu*, and that thus such

statements must be using "concept" to refer to something "recogniz[able] in whatever else is

adduced as such a concept" (*WL* II: 252/514), as Hegel himself says. However, it is hard on

its face to see how that view can be defended when confronting such a quotation as the

above. Even if one could avoid a "Cosmic Spirit" reading of such a passage *à la* Taylor

(1975) (which admittedly seems the most natural fit), it would be hard to see an alternative to

a severe kind of idealism in which concepts created the objects of experience, say, rather

than representing them. The passage seems to represent what Bubner (1980, 116) calls "the

false dream of generating the world out of the concept."

However, a social-ontological reading will help show how such a quotation could be

quite literally true. Consider: Conceptuality "comes first" in the realization of objective

purposes, since without the shape of a purpose, there would be no such realization.

Conceptuality "dwells" in such realized purposes, since it is only with reference to the

purpose and its means that such an object can be recognized as the object that it is. Conceptuality "does not need material at hand outside it" at least in the sense that the actual material basis of a realized purpose is not specifically necessary to it. Money, a favorite example of contemporary social ontologists, helps show this: while most money has some physical basis, it is in principle possible to eliminate this material (as now seen in "cryptocurrency") without eliminating the "object," money itself. Likewise, in the case of the state, it exists in a place or territory, but the existence of the *state* in that territory depends on the recognition of its sovereignty by citizens: again, something that does not exist in "material at hand outside" the state (for in another sense, the people *are* the state).

Thus, this chapter does not rehash the popular views that Hegel has an interesting social theory *and* that he has an interesting theory of concepts. Here I try to show how each is essential to the other. There would not be a unique theory of social ontology without its conceptual grounding, and there could hardly be a province of conceptual reason if social ontology were not extant.

Before demonstrating the interpretive significance of recognizing social ontology as paradigmatic, I will begin by showing why it is reasonable to see social ontology as a uniquely Hegelian development of post-Kantian themes (5.2). This will make it seem plausible that social ontology can play as significant a role as I assign to it. This historical component of the chapter will show how the theory of *practical reason* of Kant and Fichte nearly approximated a theory of social ontology. I then show more specifically how social ontology begins to figure in Hegel's early thought up to the *Phenomenology* (5.3.). The remainder of the chapter (5.4.) uses social ontology to explain three rationalistic dimensions of Hegel's thought – metaphysical, epistemological, and methodological –, each of which depends on seeing Conceptual Transparency as the source of his approach to social ontology.

5.2. From Practical Reason to Social Ontology: Kant and Fichte

5.2.1. Practical Concepts and the Waning of Kant's Aesthetic Constraint

Perhaps surprisingly given what we have said about Kant so far, it is nevertheless in Kant's philosophy that we can find the origin of Hegel's insight into social ontology. We saw in the first chapter of this work that Kant placed a severe limitation on what could count as the objective content of a concept. Human cognition is dependent on our *receptivity* – we cannot ourselves be the source of the objects of our knowledge – and *sensibility* is the form of our receptivity. For this reason, all our concepts must be exemplified through empirical intuitions:

> For every concept there is requisite, first, the logical form of a concept (of thinking) in general, and then, second, the possibility of giving it an object to which it is to be related. Without this latter it has no sense, and is entirely empty of content, even though it may still contain the logical function for making a concept out of whatever sort of *data* there are. … Thus all concepts and with them all principles, however *a priori* they may be, are nevertheless related to empirical intuitions, i.e., to *data* for possible experience. (A 239/B 298)

We called the principle expressed here the "Aesthetic Constraint" on conceptual content, and we tried to motivate some skepticism about such a principle by mentioning some concepts Kant himself uses that do not seem to fit: <*cognition*>, <*morality*>, <*justice*>, etc. Surely philosophy itself depends on such concepts, and it presumes that they express objective content. Otherwise, what would be the force of Kant's own statements *qua* philosophy? For example: "If cognition is to have objective reality, i.e., to be related to an object, and is to have significance and sense in that object, the object must be able to given in some way" (A 155/B 194). The statement 'Cognition has objective reality only if it relates

to an object that is given to it in some way' does not itself relate to an object that is given to it, at least not by means of a sensible object as the context stipulates. Can it itself be cognition, then?

The problem of the status of Kant's own "meta-concepts" of the first *Critique* (like <*cognition*>) is a somewhat notorious one,[9] and apparently one to which he did not give much attention. However, Kant was well-aware that a certain class of concepts of interest to him did not conform to the Aesthetic Constraint, namely, *moral* or, more generally, *practical* concepts. Moreover, Kant clearly thought it would be morally deleterious to suppose that moral concepts could be (adequately) exemplified in experience:

> Whoever would draw the concepts of virtue from experience, whoever would make what can at best serve as an example for imperfect illustration into a model for a source of cognition (as many have actually done), *would make of virtue an ambiguous non-entity, changeable with time and circumstances, useless for any sort of rule*. On the contrary, we are all aware that when someone is represented as a model of virtue, we always have the true original in our own mind alone, with which we compare this alleged model and according to which alone we estimate it. (A 315/B 371-72; emphasized)

Following Plato's usage, Kant reserved the term "idea" (*Idee*) to refer to pure concepts which necessarily transcend experience, among which moral concepts are to be counted.[10] Most discussed in the first *Critique*, however, are those "transcendental ideas," which serve to unify the basic aims of reason in its empirical use. These do not violate the Aesthetic Constraint because they are not properly "about" some object: "the transcendental ideas are never of constitutive use, so that the concepts of certain objects would thereby be given, and in case one so understands them, they are merely sophistical (dialectical)" (A 644/B 672). For example, the concept of a "transcendental ideal" arises naturally from reason's need to unify

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[9] The *locus classicus* is the "Metakritik" of Hamann and Herder at the end of the eighteenth century, nicely summed up in Beiser's slogan "criticism itself must submit to criticism" (1987, 39). In their case, it was a matter of linguistic metacritique.

[10] Specifically, an idea is a pure concept that is "made up of," or inferred from, other pure concepts ("notions") (A 320/B 377).

all of experience in a single conceptual system, derived from the ability to use disjunctive

syllogisms (A 323/B 379; A 576f./B 604f.). The valid use of this concept is only to mark out

this scientific aim. When used "objectively," however, the concept is reified and thus seems

to refer to a transcendent "being of all beings," namely God.[11] Such a transcendent use of

the concept is forbidden by Kant,[12] for it violates the Aesthetic Constraint.

However, Kant realizes that he needs a more than "regulative" use of ideas in the

practical domain. For if moral concepts are *binding* on rational wills, they must *determine* such

wills, and thus be objective in some sense. The question is how Kant can say something like

this in a way that is compatible with his empirical restrictions on theoretical philosophy.

Kant raises this question, and tries to answer it, in his *Critique of Practical Reason*:

> Here, too, the enigma of the critical philosophy is first explained: how one can *deny*
> objective *reality* to the supersensible *use of the categories* in speculation and yet *grant*
> them this *reality* with respect to the objects of pure practical reason; for this must
> previously have seemed *inconsistent*, as long as such a practical use is known only by
> name. (Ak. 5: 5/5).

The basic line of Kant's solution to this problem is to show how pure reason can be a

"determining ground" of the will. If pure reason can do this, then the *object* of the will (what

it seeks to achieve through action) has an "intelligible" origin, in pure reason itself, rather

than an empirical one, such as the object of sensible inclination.

This feature of practical reason is already marked out in the first *Critique*, and it re-

opens a possibility Kant forecloses in the case of theoretical reason, namely, that of the

understanding "creating" the objects of its cognition.[13] We do not create the objects of

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[11] "[F]rom the totality of conditions for thinking objects in general insofar as they can be given to me I infer the absolute synthetic unity of all conditions for the possibility of things in general; i.e., things with which I am not acquainted as to their merely transcendental concept, I infer a being of all beings…" (A 340/B 398).

[12] Famously, Kant requires that a version of "God" and "immortality" must be posited for practical purposes, despite the fact that we can neither "cognize" nor "have insight into" such ideas, "even the possibility of them" (cf. Ak. 5: 4/4).

[13] This is what Kant calls "original" intuition, "through which the existence of the object of intuition is itself given" (B 72), which can only pertain to "the original being" (God), so it is irrelevant in theoretical

theoretical knowledge, but in the case practical reason, he writes, "Now this 'ought'

expresses <u>a possible action, the ground of which is nothing other than a mere concept,</u>

whereas the ground of a merely natural action must always be an appearance" (A 547-48/B

575-76). Kant calls the general "faculty" to cause an "object" by means of a representation

"desire" (*Begierde*): "The *faculty of desire* is a being's *faculty to be by means of its representations the*

cause of the reality of the objects of these representations" (Ak. 5: 9/8). There is thus an inversion

between practical reason and theoretical cognition, since in the latter case representation

depends on the reality of the object, while in the former (as it depends on desire) the

representation is the cause of the object.

However, what is of interest to Kant is not the desire which produces an object

because of a sensible representation (such as an inclination), but because of a *pure* one:

> In [laws of nature to which a will is subject] objects must be the causes of
> representations that determine the will, whereas in [a nature which is subject to a
> will] the will is to be the cause of the objects, so that its causality has its determining
> ground solely in the pure faculty of reason, which can therefore also be called a pure
> practical reason. (44/39)

Only if a will is determined through pure reason alone is a non-empirical causality possible

that is necessary for the existence of morality. Once such a causality is granted as possible,

however, then (given Kant's proof of the possibility of the logical possibility of "noumena"

in the first *Critique*[14]) it becomes possible to suggest that in the practical causality of pure

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philosophy. It is controversial the extent to which Kant is a "constructivist" about practical norms (see the useful account of the debate in Bagnoli 2017, sec. 2.1.). But whatever the status of Kantian norms *qua* general (whether, for example, there is an objective list of norms that the Kantian discovers, as a non-constructivist would accept), in the case of *acting*, the object of a norm is supposed to be *caused* to exist by the determination of the moral law (see following quotation in the main text). So the creative dimension has at least that local validity even if constructivism about norms is not Kant's position.

[14] "The concept of a **noumenon,** i.e., of a thing that is not to be thought as an object of the senses but rather as a thing in itself (solely through a pure understanding), is not at all contradictory; for one cannot assert of sensibility that it is not the only possible kind of intuition" (B 130).

reason (namely, through moral action) an "intelligible world" comes into being, namely, the

world as determined by pure practical reason:

> On the other hand, the moral law, even though it gives no such *prospect*, nevertheless provides a fact absolutely inexplicable from any data from the sensible world and from the whole compass of our theoretical use of reason, a fact that points to a <u>pure world of the understanding</u> and, indeed, even *determines* it *positively* and <u>lets us cognize something of it</u>, namely a law. (43/38; underlined)

Clearly, such an intelligible world is not something that enters our *intuition*, which Kant

maintains is impossible (cf. 45/50), but it is nevertheless an object of "cognition," as the

above quotation suggests.

"Cognition" (*Erkenntnis*) is, of course, a somewhat slippery Kantian word.[15] Kant is

decidedly *not* saying we mystically apprehend a world hidden beneath the sensible world, a

world consisting of all and only morally determined actions. What Kant seems to mean is

that we cognize this intelligible world *as* an aim of our acting *in* our acting, insofar as it is

governed by moral laws. He says this quite straightforwardly later in the text:

> [O]f all the intelligible absolutely nothing [is cognized] except freedom (by means of the moral law), and even this only as it is a presupposition inseparable from that law; and … *moreover, all intelligible objects to which reason might lead us under the guidance of that law have in turn no reality for us except on behalf of that law* and for the use of pure practical reason… (5: 70/61; emphasized).

Thus, we cognize certain "objects" such as an intelligible world governed by pure practical

reason (as well as others such as immortality as the representation of our never-ending moral

perfectibility), but these are seemingly "cognized" as *goals to be sought in (or presupposed by) our

action*. Nevertheless, in representing them thus, our cognition is not dependent on sensible

objects. The concepts of morality thus seemingly transcend the "Aesthetic Constraint," but

this is because their object is not represented as actual in an intuition, but as possible (and

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[15] See recently, for example, Tolley (2014) on the debate between psychological and object-related (Fregean) conceptions of cognition. Tolley also reminds that, unlike <*Wissen*>, <*Erkenntnis*> does not imply truth (ibid., 204-5).

indeed practically necessary) as the end of action. Kant avoids the Constraint without succumbing to Conceptual Transparency.

Thus, once Kant has clarified the nature of practical reason, he can disambiguate the Aesthetic Constraint as follows:

Aesthetic (Theoretical) Constraint: Concepts do not have cognitively significant *theoretical* content apart from a relation to spatio-temporal appearances.

Despite this, there are apparent exceptions, or at least ambiguities, in Kant's oeuvre to even this constraint. For present purposes, an especially suggestive case comes from Kant's discussion of *property* (*Eigentum*) in the *Doctrine of Right* in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797). In this passage, Kant seeks to come to terms with what is means for someone to possess something. He realizes that merely empirical *holding*, or presumably any other merely empirical relation (e.g., an object being located in my home for a length of time), will not be sufficient to ascribe the legal right of possession to someone. Instead, he posits a "noumenal" conception of possession:

> [*I*]*ntelligible possession* (*possessio noumenon*) must be assumed to be possible if something external is to be mine or yours. Empirical possession (holding) is then only possession in *appearance* (*possessio phaenomenon*), although the *object* itself that I possess is not here treated, as it was in the Transcendental Analytic, as an appearance but as a thing in itself; for there reason was concerned with theoretical knowledge of the nature of things and how far it could extend, but here it is concerned with the practical determination of choice in accordance with the laws of *freedom*, whether the object can be known through the senses or through the pure understanding alone, and *Right* is a pure practical *rational concept* of choice under laws of freedom. (6: 249/71).

For readers primarily familiar with Kant's theoretical philosophy, this quotation must come as a shock. Kant is affirming that we have knowledge of "objects" that are "things in themselves," what Kant called "noumena in a positive sense," since they are objects of the

intellect but not of the senses (cf. B 307-8). In this case, however, such an "object" is as familiar as can be in modern society: one person's rightful "having" of a piece of property.[16]

Kant insists in this context that possession is a "thing in itself" but only as the object of *practical* reason.[17] We can avoid trying to resolve this issue in terms of Kant interpretation. Regardless of how Kant would see things, however, it does not seem obvious that <*possession*> should be seen as a practical concept to the exclusion of being a theoretical one. That is, while there is an undeniably *normative* component to the judgment "The Museum possesses the original print of Keaton's film," it is also an attempt to state a *fact* (what is) and not just what *ought* to be: it is, in that sense, a "theoretical" proposition. This, despite the fact that it refers to a non-sensible action ("possession"), to say nothing of its reference to a non-sensible institution ("The Museum" – such entities are not confined within buildings) and an abstract object ("Keaton's film" as apart from its printing). While one may grant that possession could only exist as the object of practical reason – 'persons (or institutions) ought to possess what they rightly acquire' etc. – it is now the case that possession exists *simpliciter*. Kant seems to acknowledge such entities, but he does not have the conceptual tools to understand them. He stands on the precipice of a social ontology.

5.2.2. Fichte on the Reality of Practical Concepts

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[16] Kant claims that "having" is not spatio-temporal in the way that "holding" is: "So the concept to which the concept of a right is directly applied is not that of *holding* (*detentio*), which is an empirical way of thinking of possession, but rather the concept of *having*, in which abstraction is made from all spatial and temporal conditions and the object is thought of only as *under my control* (*in potestate mea positum esse*)" (Ak. 6: 253/74-75).

[17] He says much the same about the "Idea" of a "rightful [civil] constitution among men" as well: "Every actual deed (fact) is an object in *appearance* (to the senses). On the other hand, what can be represented only by pure reason and must be counted among *Ideas*, to which no object given in experience can be adequate – and a perfectly *rightful constitution* among men is of this sort – is the thing in itself" (Ak. 6: 371/176). Recall from above (1.4.3.) his incidental remark from the *KrV* about civil laws: "But here the laws are only limitations of our freedom to condition under which it agrees thoroughly with itself; hence *they apply to something that is wholly our work* [*unser eigen Werk*]*, and of which we can be the cause through that concept*" (A 301-302/B 358; emphasized).

Though Kant occasionally speaks of practical reason as involving the causality of a *concept*, he is primarily bound to the framework of *laws*. Indeed, the notion of a practical law serves an ineliminable role in Kant's practical philosophy, since only a pure practical law can determine the will without the contribution from any inclination. Though he does not eschew the Kantian focus on law, it was nevertheless Fichte who more fully developed the notion that practical reason involved the causality of a concept itself.[18] Understanding Fichte's generalized conception of practical reason is essential for understanding Hegel's view of Conceptual Transparency as applied to social ontology.

Much like Kant, Fichte distinguishes between the practical and theoretical use of a concept by the respective priority the concept has vis-à-vis the object. Unwittingly echoing Kant's famous letter to Hertz,[19] Fichte opens his *Das System der Sittenlehre* (*The System of Ethics*) of 1798 with the question: "[H]ow can something objective ever become something subjective; how can a being for itself ever become something represented [*vorgestellten*]?" (FW IV: 1/7). He notes that modern philosophical attention has focused on the case of theoretical cognition, where "what is subjective follows from what is objective" (2/7). However, he claims that the alternate case of a practical agreement of subject and object has been almost completely taken for granted (2/8). Yet in this case, namely when "I act" (*ich wirke*), the opposite order of agreement is effectuated. Here, "[W]hat is objective is supposed to follow from what is subject; *a being is supposed to result from my concept* (the concept of an end [*Zweckbegriff*])" (ibid.; emphasis). This concept of objects agreeing with "representations" is

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[18] We can see that Hegel himself adopts this Fichtean "causalist" view of practical reason in lectures of 1810: "Here [in practical consciousness] I determine the things or am the cause of alterations of given objects" (W 4: 204)

[19] "I asked myself this question: What is the ground of the relation of that in us which we call 'representation' to the object?" (Ak. 10: 130/Letter to Herz, February 22, 1772).

recognizably similar to Kant's concept of "desire," though here Fichte ascribes this property

to all "concepts of an end" or teleological concepts.[20]

Fichte sees a kind of perfect mirroring between theoretical and practical cognition,

and thus he wants to show how practical reason leads to the same result as theoretical reason

from a different side: namely, the agreement of subject (here as concept) and object.

Whereas Kant's concept of a concept relies on the case of theoretical cognition as its

paradigm, against which the case of practical cognition has to be further justified, Fichte

seeks to understands concepts in a more general way such that moral and practical concepts

are included from the start. Building on ideas of Salomon Maimon,[21] he re-introduces the

rationalist idea that it is the mere *determinateness* of a concept that is necessary to its

application, not any special determinateness provided by the special condition of, e.g.,

sensible intuition. Fichte writes:

> To say that a concept possesses reality and applicability means that our world … *is in some respect determined by this concept*. The concept in question [sc. morality] is one of those concepts through which we think objects; and, because we think objects by means of this concept or in this manner, the object possesses certain distinctive features for us. To seek the reality of the concept thus means to investigate how and in what way it determines an object. (FW IV: 63/2005, 65; emphasized)

Concepts of morality "determine" actions by *specifying* them out of indeterminate possibilities

(cf. 137f./131). They do not have content because there is a sensible intuition that can be

correlated with the action, but because an object can be determined by an end. Though he

does not go into detail here, the same is true for theoretical concepts. They have content

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[20] Notice that not *all* acting should be classified as involving the causality of a concept. In the case of acting for the sake of enjoyment (a species of what Kant calls inclination), Fichte writes: "To the extent that a human being aims at mere enjoyment, he is dependent on something *given*: namely, the presence of the objects of his drive…" (IV: 130)

[21] Maimon resurrected a form of Leibnizian rationalism by claiming against Kant that objects can be individuated conceptually, through an infinite determination rather than through sensible intuition alone. Cf. Maimon (2010 [1790], 103-04). See Beiser (1987, Ch. 10) for an account of Maimon's influence on German Idealism, much of it through Fichte.

because they "determine" objects, without any necessary condition that they do so through sensible intuition.

This leads to a purer kind of symmetry between the relation of concepts and objects in the theoretical and practical cases respectively. The distinction can be made simply (though perhaps rather crudely) with reference to relations of priority ("*vor-*") and posteriority ("*nach-*"):

> How might we ever come to assume such a remarkable harmony between a concept of an end and an actual object outside us, the ground of which is supposed to lie not in the object itself but in the concept? – Let me make this question clearer by contrasting it with another one. A cognitive concept is supposed to be a *copy* [*Nachbild*] of something outside us; a *concept of an end* is supposed to be a *model* or *pre-figuration* [*Vorbild*] for something outside us. … So, … in our present case we are asking about the ground for assuming a harmony *of the thing, as what comes second, with the concept, as what comes first*.[22] (FW IV: 70-71/2005, 72-73)

A practical concept corresponds to its object because it 'prefigures' the object in advance. Fichte accordingly sees a teleological concept as a "design" (*Entwurf*) for an object.[23] Just as the design comes before an object and determines it accordingly, so does the concept of an end determined in action.

This does not mean that a practical concept *qua* design cancels the difference between concept and object. For many practical concepts do not become (or determine) objects. Fichte follows Kant here in calling practical concepts "ideas":

> When one speaks of the reality of the concept of morality, then this cannot – at least not *to begin with* – mean that something is immediately realized in the world of appearances simply by thinking this concept. The object of this concept, i.e., what arises in us when we think in accordance with the concept of morality … can only be an *idea* [*Idee*], a mere thought *within us*, with no claim that anything in the actual world *outside us* corresponds to this concept. FW IV: 65/2005, 67)

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[22] Recall Hegel's remark (quoted above) that "the concept is *what truly comes first*, and things are what they are through the activity of the concept that dwells in them and reveals itself in them" (*EL* 313/241, § 163Z(2); emphasized).

[23] "A free being acts as an intellect, which is to say that it acts in accordance with a concept of an effect, a concept *designed prior to the effect in question* [*voher…entworfenen Begriffe*]. What is to be brought about must therefore be so constituted that it can at least be thought of by an intellect…" (IV: 66/2005, 68).

This allowance of a reality of morality that is *only* a "thought *within us*" is where Fichte stands in harmony with Kant. Hegel will later refer to this dimension as the mere "ought" (*Sollen*) that is without actuality. But unlike Kant, and in anticipation of Hegel, Fichte recognizes that if practical ends (concepts) *are* carried out, then to that extent "reality" is determined by that concept, and it is not a reality with sensory conditions. Accordingly, practically determined reality can be also cognized theoretically, and non-sensibly.

Unfortunately, at least from Hegel's perspective, Fichte typically treats this as a *conditional* and *subjunctive* possibility:

> Were this conjecture – that is, *the conjecture that a part of the world we find is determined through freedom,* as a theoretical principle – to be confirmed, and were it to turn out that it is precisely this part of the world that constitutes the sphere of objects of our duties, then it would follow that the law of freedom … would only be a continuation of what that same law of freedom, as a theoretical principle, had already initiated… (IV: 68-69/70; emphasized).

Fichte is clear that it would be a kind of theoretical knowledge to know that the world is determined through practical reason. If the world is so determined, then there is a different kind of reality to be cognized, what he calls "products of freedom": "A reality that has its ground in a concept is called a product of freedom" (FW IV: 134/128).

Are there such products? If Fichte affirms this conditionally, this is at least because whether are such products depends not on a theory but on the actual acting of beings self-determined by free purposes. But given the reality of such action, it seems clear that Fichte can affirm such products of freedom:

> The concept (of an end) immediately becomes a deed [*wird…zur That*], <u>and the deed immediately becomes a (cognitive) concept (of my freedom)</u>. … It would have been quite correct to deny that freedom can be an *object* of consciousness; freedom is indeed not something that develops by itself, without any assistance from a conscious being, in which case the latter would only have to be an observer. Freedom is not the object but the subject-object of a conscious being. (FW IV: 137/130-31; underlined)

Fichte both agrees and disagrees with Kant here. He agrees that freedom is not an object of

consciousness *simpliciter*. We cannot merely observe freedom in the external world. However,

he disagrees that freedom cannot *become* an object of cognition. It becomes an object of

cognition as the subject-object, which we might gloss as the concept the subject of a deed

has in the realization of the end or aim of the deed. (One is reminded of Anscombe's (1963)

conception of intention as involving non-observational knowledge.) Subjects can know *that*

an end has been carried out in a deed: and this involves practical reason becoming

"theoretical" (propositional) knowledge. We will see shortly (5.3.2.) that this is, in essence,

Hegel's formula for the knowledge of social ontology.

5.3. Hegel's Route to Social Ontology

5.3.1. Hegel against the "Absolute Concept"

Hegel's rationalism is "post-Kantian" (as the title of the present work claims)

because both the influence of Kant and Fichte on Hegel's conception of concepts is

manifest. But I am suggesting that we should look for this influence largely in the *practical*

philosophy of Hegel's predecessors. As we will see, the basic insight of Fichte on practical

concepts – that they can actively determine objects which can then be cognized theoretically

– is the foundation of Hegel's view that there can be Conceptual Transparency in the case of

the social world.[24] Hegel simply made a broader and more consequential use of this insight

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[24] Pippin also remarks on the role that Fichtean practical reason can play in illustrating Hegel's view: "And most suggestively for the entire enterprise of the *Logic*, practical reason can determine the form of a rational will that is also itself a substantive content. … [Practical reason] legislates because in knowing what ought to be done it is not affected by some object, "what is to be done," about which it judges. It determines, produces, what is to be done. … [T]he self-legislation of the moral law can serve as a fine example of what it is for a concept to give itself its own content, as it did for Fichte—practical reason determines the content of practical

than Kant or Fichte did. Before seeing how Hegel developed this view, it is worth registering

Hegel's confrontation in his early Jena years with the "Kant-Fichte" perspective on practical

reason. (He characteristically treated them together as "subjective idealists," or as

representatives of "the Critical philosophy.") This will provide some helpful background for

understanding the positive view he developed in his mature works. What is most significant

about this background is that Hegel begins to use the term "the concept" (*der Begriff*) or "the

absolute concept" in a characteristically singular way to refer *derisively* to the Kant-Fichte

perspective on practical reason. This is best seen in the *Essay on Natural Law* (=NR or

Naturrecht) from 1802-03.[25]

In *Naturrecht*, Hegel tries to steer a theory of natural right between what he perceives

as the Scylla of empiricism and the Charybdis of apriorism. The "apriorism" he has in mind

is the practical philosophy of Kant and Fichte, and Hegel's critique is meant to be general

enough to cover both thinkers. The basic problem Hegel poses is how *content* is introduced

into the "formalistic" approach to natural right. The problem of content for an empirical

approach to natural law, among which Hegel counts Hobbesian social contract theories (cf.

NR 445-46/63-64), is a different one. In that case, the empiricist has to select some feature

of experience to single out as the normatively relevant one for the construction of a theory

of rights (cf. 440-41/60): whether, say, natural aggressiveness, or the need to settle disputes

about property. Hegel suggests that this normative treatment of this empirical aspect will be

arbitrary on empirical grounds alone: "[E]mpiricism lacks in the first place all criteria for

drawing the boundary between the accidental and the necessary" (445/64). Moreover, the

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reason as itself, as the form of practical reason…" (Pippin 2018, 90). Surprisingly, though Pippin takes this as "a fine example," he does not treat the example as illustrating the general notion of a concept giving itself reality.

[25] A similar point of emphasis can also be found in Hegel's *Differenzschrift* of 1801 (W 2: 9-138).

"organic unity" of the institutions of ethical life cannot result from this empirical beginning.[26] But where the content of the norm so treated comes from is no mystery at all. It is some selected feature of human nature or the empirical world.

Kant and Fichte avoid this problem by refusing to grant 'material' empirical facts a role in determining norms. They are "formalists" because of this refusal. But how, without such material, will they find specific content for their norms? Hegel provides their answer in his own terms. Formalists determine norms through "the absolute concept" or "the negative absolute." That is, they construct concepts that stand over and above empirical facts; the young Hegel begins to thematize such construction as yielding that single 'meta-concept' recognizable throughout his work. Yet we find Hegel here suspicious of "the concept." He suggests that the purity from the empirical world that Kant and Fichte achieve is only a function of determining norms solely by an *opposition to* or *negation of* the empirical world:

> This real opposition puts complex being or finitude [sc. the empirical world] against infinity [sc. pure thought] as the negation of multiplicity and, positively, as pure unity; the absolute Concept thus constituted provides in this unity what has been called "pure reason." (454/71)

Here, Hegel applies this conception specifically to Kantian morality:

> The absolute law of practical reason is to elevate that specification [of the will] into the form of pure unity, and the expression of this specification taken up into this form is the law. If the specification can be *taken up into the form of the pure Concept*, if it is not cancelled thereby, then it is justified and has itself become absolute through negative absoluteness as law and right or duty. (460/75; emphasized)

Hegel thinks that Kantian-Fichtean duties are constructed only through an opposition to the empirical world. They are "pure," but only derivatively so. The form that they achieve in this opposition to the empirical, as we have seen, is "the concept" (in some variant). The

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[26] "But the totality of the organic is precisely what cannot be thereby attained, and the remainder of the relation, excluded from the determinate aspect that was selected, falls under the dominion of this aspect which is elevated to be the essence and purpose of the relation" (*NR* 440/60).

"absolute Concept" in this nascent form is simply the empty construct of "pure unity" that creates an opposition to empirical multiplicity.

Hegel's rebuke to this formalist conception is that it achieves purity not only as a function of a *negative* opposition to the finite and empirical, but also at the *cost* of emptiness. Already in *Naturrecht*, Hegel offers his famous "empty formalism" critique of Kantian ethics.[27] The basic idea is that the moment a Kantian maxim achieves legitimacy through universalization, it also becomes a tautology.[28] It would too much detain us to offer a full reading of this suggestive and controversial critique. What matters for us is where Hegel's reading of Kant and Fichte goes from here. The problem Hegel sees is that if a duty or obligation, through its elevation into "pure" conceptual form, is *always* negatively related to the empirical world, then the idea that an obligation as such could be realized in the world will be impossible: "Thus it is a self-contradiction to seek in this absolute practical reason a moral legislation which have to have a content, since the essence of this reason is to have none" (461/76). To realize the obligation would be to negate its obligatory (i.e., *negative*) character. The consequence of this in Kant (but especially Fichte) is to conceive practical norms as "infinite tasks," always to be approximated, but never to be realized.

Though we have seen that Kant and Fichte had the resources to recognize the existence of realized conceptual norms (as in the example of property for Kant, and purposes generally for Fichte), Hegel thinks the primary role of practical concepts for them is to create negative, unrealizable ideals, which are the origin of absolute moral duties.[29] He

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[27] This is perhaps the aspect of Hegel's thought most frequently referenced by contemporary Kantians. See Ameriks (2000, Ch. 7), Korsgaard (1996, 86-87), McCumber (2014, 163-68) for discussion.

[28] A famous example from the *Phenomenology*, also tried out in *Naturrecht*: the maxim not to steal assumes a law of property, but it cannot decide whether property itself is a legitimate institution. The norm reduces to 'property is property' (cf. *NR* 462ff./77ff.).

[29] Though it may not be correct, it is worth pointing out that to this day it is a common criticism of Kantian ethics that it can provide rigorous justification only of *negative* duties (prohibitions) rather than positive ones. See the discussion (and criticism) in Baron (1995, Ch. 1).

summarizes their practical philosophy as "the false attempt to exhibit a true absolute in the negative absolute" (459/75). Instead, Hegel thinks that the "negative" power that he calls the concept should not only be used to erect unreachable standards, but also to *constitute* institutions of "ethical life" (*Sittlichkeit*). Already he argues that the negative absolute becomes a positive one in a "people" (*Volk*):

> [T]he moment of the negatively absolute or infinity (which is indicated in this example as determining the relation of crime and punishment) is a moment of the Absolute itself and must be exhibited in *absolute ethical life*. …. [We] presuppose the positive principle that the absolute ethical totality is nothing other than a *people*… (480-81/92)

This, we will argue in the next section, is the origin of Hegel's social ontology. A people is "absolute" precisely because they are (or can be) what they know (or can know) themselves to be.[30] This is possible if and when a people's institutions are conceptually transparent.

5.3.2. The Form of Social Ontology: The Objective Results of Practical Achievement

The move beyond the critique of Kant and Fichte for Hegel is a relatively simple one. Both Kant and Fichte recognize the uniqueness of practical reason, and that it is 'unconditioned' by sensibility in a way that theoretical reason is not. Yet Hegel thinks that the results of practical reason, practical achievements, have themselves an objective status, and Kant and Fichte have not properly exploited this possibility for their conceptions of conceptual cognition; for this means that we can have some objective, theoretical cognition of 'things' that are practically constituted through effective actions. Before looking to his

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[30] Incidentally, then, the absolute can be known about in "experience" (taken in a broad sense): "Philosophy can exhibit its ideas in experience; the reason for this lies directly in the ambiguous nature of what is called experience. For it is not immediate intuition itself, but intuition raise into the intellectual sphere, thought out and explicated, deprived of its singularity, and expressed as a necessity, that counts as experience" (*NR* 511-12/118).

earlier expression of this view, I want to point out where it is stated most clearly in the *Logic* itself. In this passage, Hegel corrects the view of practical reason that would make it incompatible theoretical knowledge.

The immediate predecessor to Hegel's concept of the "absolute Idea" in the *Logic* is the section called "The Idea of the Good" or, alternatively, the "practical idea" (*WL* II: 541/729). Before that, Hegel works through a series of features of theoretical cognition. He suggests there is a problem with theoretical cognition, considered on its own, that is similar to the one that can be found in Kant: theoretical cognition cannot explain how it can succeed on its own terms. For example (and to greatly simplify the issue), if cognition is supposed to be true only in the case of a cognition of something *outside itself*, how can this be represented *within itself* and still be just such a (true) cognition?[31] As Hegel puts it, "For this reason the idea does not as yet attain truth in this cognition: it does not because of the disproportion [*Unangemessenheit*] between object and subjective concept" (541/728; modified). Hegel thinks theoretical cognition tends to make this problem insoluble for itself.

The issue is tackled at first by repeating the move that Kant and Fichte make: treating "the good" as the object of cognition which is not similarly opposed to the subject that thinks it. Practical, not theoretical cognition then appears to be genuine cognition; the good, not the true the object of knowledge. Hegel defines the good as "the determinateness which is in the concept, is equal to the concept, and entails a demand for a singular external actuality" (542/729). The good, we can say, is a purely conceptual ideal that at the same time creates a demand that "external actuality" conforms to it. This means that initially, the good only entails an "impulse" (*Trieb* – a term integral to Fichte's practical philosophy). In taking

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[31] Finite theoretical cognition, Hegel says, "is the contradiction of a truth that is supposed at the same time not to be truth, of a cognition of what *is* that at the same time does not know the thing-in-itself" (*WL* II: 500/698).

the form of the impulse, the practical idea incorporates the form of external purposiveness, and Hegel reminds us of the relevance of his earlier account of teleology (543/730). The problem with external purposiveness was that its result was unequal to the purpose, as the merely finite tool is to the need to work. However, Hegel already showed that there is an additional possibility, internal teleology, in which the result is an adequate expression of the purpose. Hegel now incorporates this insight to show how a new kind of practical realization is possible. He first restates the problem:

> But what the practical idea still lacks is the moment of real consciousness itself, namely that the moment of actuality in the concept would have attained or itself the determination of *external being*. – This lack can also be regarded in this way, namely that the *practical* idea still lacks the moment of the *theoretical* idea. That is to say, in the latter there still stands on the side of the subject concept – the concept that is process of being intuited in itself by the concept – only the determination of *universality*; cognition only knows itself as apprehension, as the identity of the concept with itself which, for itself, is *indeterminate*; the filling, that is, the objectivity determined in and for itself, is for this identity a *given*; what *truly exits* is for it the actuality present there independently of any subjective positing. (545/731-32)

Despite the fact that Hegel is critical of the "theoretical idea" on its own terms, he is here suggesting that it has (or at least requires) something practical cognition, considered on its own, is missing. Theoretical cognition works with purely *universal* concepts which are meant to be "filled" by a given that is posited independently of the cognition. Without this additional element, theoretical cognition would be merely "indeterminate." (Perhaps we can hear a Kantian echo here: concepts without intuitions are empty.) Though theoretical cognition cannot explain how this determinate element is added, it requires it to be posited. His claim now is that practical cognition also needs this determinate element: "The idea of the good can therefore find its completion only in the idea of the true" (545/732).

How can practical cognition have an element of objectivity without re-introducing the same incoherence of purely theoretical cognition (namely, the incoherence of positing

the object of cognition as something essentially alien to the subject)? As anticipated in the last chapter, Hegel's answer relies on teleology:

> But [the idea of the good] makes this transition through itself. In <u>the syllogism of action</u>, one premise is the *immediate reference* of the *good purpose to the actuality* which it appropriates and which, in the second premise, it directs as external *means* against the external actuality. <u>The good is for the subjective concept the objective</u>; …[T]he realization of the good in the face of another actuality is the mediation which is essentially necessary for the immediate connection and consummation of the good. (545-56/732; underlined)

Hegel sees that "action" (*Handlung*), taken in a broad sense, always includes within its purpose the bringing about of the real conformity of "external actuality" to the purpose. The good, as the goal of action, could not be at all if there were no "consummation" of the good in the realization of a purpose.[32] Thus, the idea of the good depends on there being objectively realized purposes.

The result of such objective practical realizations, once effected, is the possibility of a new kind of theoretical (or "speculative") knowledge. For if theoretical knowledge first seeks to know objective "immediacy"[33] in an inaccessible or conceptually incoherent form, there is now a form of immediacy that is itself determined by conceptuality itself (in the form of realized purposes). As Hegel writes in the Preface of the *Phenomenology*: "[T]he actual is the same as its concept only because the immediate [e.g., what results from the concept], as purpose, has the Self or pure actuality within itself" (*PG* 26/12/§ 22). Hegel does not hesitate to call this new immediacy a "world." Here is the significant passage that explains the transition from this stage into the "Absolute Idea," itself the final chapter of the *Logic*:

> The idea of the concept that is determined in and for itself is thereby posited, <u>no longer just in the active subject but equally as an immediate actuality</u>; and conversely,

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[32] See de Boer (2010a, 167-71) for a similar point of emphasis.

[33] In the "Objectivity" chapter of *WL*, Hegel recalls that there are different forms of <*immediacy*>, including <*existence* [=*Dasein*]> and <*concrete existence* [=*Existenz*]> in the *Doctrine of Being* and *Essence* respectively, whereas <*objectivity*> is immediacy "as which the concept has determined itself" (*WL* II: 406/628). Imprecisely, Hegelian "immediacy" includes different ways to determine what is called "reality" in a more colloquial sense.

this actuality is posited as it is in cognition, <u>as an objectivity that truly exists</u>. The singularity of the subject with which the subject was burdened by its presupposition has vanished together with this presupposition. Thus the subject now exists as *free, universal self-identity* for which the objectivity of the concept is a *given* [*eine gegebene*], just as immediately *present* [*vorhandene*] to the subject as the subject immediately knows itself to be the concept determined in and for itself. Accordingly, in this <u>result</u> <u>*cognition* is restored and united with the practical idea</u>; the previously discovered reality is at the same time determined as the realized absolute purpose, no longer an objective of investigation, a merely objective world without the subjectivity of the concept, <u>but as an objective world whose inner ground and actual subsistence is rather the concept.</u> This is the absolute idea. (548/733-34; underlined)

All this is a perfect, if condensed version of Hegel's theory of Conceptual Transparency.

Conceptual Transparency can be true because the conceptual is not only pure subjectivity

("no longer just in the active subject"), nor an ideal Platonic world, but it has constituted an

objective world.[34] In earlier writings, Hegel called precisely this an "intelligible world" in

contrast to the sensible one.[35] Once practical reason has so constituted a world, then that

world becomes a new object of cognition. That world is then, insofar as it is conceptually

constituted, rationally accessible to us, *intelligible*, in a way that the previous conception of

immediate objectivity was not.

Hegel does not restrict this "world" to that of social ontology; he means to include

anything that is practically constituted and then theoretically known.[36] However, my

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[34] A parallel passage in the *EL* also makes this point clearly: "It is equally important, on the other hand, that philosophy should be quite clear about the fact that its content is nothing other than the basic import that is originally produced and produces itself in the domain [*im Gebiete*] of living spirit, the content that is made into the *world*, the outer and inner world of consciousness; in other words, the content of philosophy is *actuality*" (*EL* 47/29/§ 6).

[35] In lectures of 1810: "Our knowledge contains in part objects that we cognize through sensory perception, but in part objects that have their ground in the mind itself [*in dem Geist selbst ihren Grund haben*]. The former make up the *sensible*, the latter the *intelligible* world. <u>Legal, ethical, and religious concepts belong to the latter</u>" (W 4: 204; underlined). This shows of course that Hegel does not have a transcendent "world" in mind as the intelligible world.

[36] See note 45 in Chapter 4 above for some further examples. This "world" is not restricted to *social* ontology, because not every purposively constituted entity is necessarily socially constituted. Thomasson (2014) argues for public artifacts that are distinct from social ontology, and works of art are a key example. Nor would Hegel say that the purposive character of art is dependent entirely on its social context. More broadly yet, *functional* accounts of phenomena (say of the mind) involve using the public realization of a purpose as criteria for a concept. This is the strategy Ryle (1971, vol. 1, 192-93) pursues: "Our theories of knowledge, inference, and perception are, *ex officio*, concerned with, among others, concepts of intellectual achievement and failure; so a great deal depends upon our distinguishing the logical behavior of verbs of trying from that of verbs of

suggestion is that social ontology is the most fitting paradigm of what he is alluding to here. This will be bolstered by now looking at an earlier version of Hegel's social ontology.

5.3.3. *Ethical Substance in the* Phenomenology

There are good reasons to expect that Hegel's account in the *Logic* has in view something like social ontology because of the way the latter figures in his earlier (1807) account in the *Phenomenology* (*PG*). The account of social ontology in the *PG*, moreover, alludes to some of the same "logical" features that Hegel's account in the *Logic* more systematically articulates. Thus, it is not surprising that his later account of conceptuality is particularly well-suited to handle these features.

Giving a detailed account of social ontology in the *Phenomenology* is beyond my scope here.[37] However, I at least want to show that the constellation of issues I discussed above, namely the conceptual basis of practical reason, are exhibited in that work. The part of the work I have in mind is the transition from the "Reason" chapter to the "Spirit" chapter. From subsection B ("The Actualization of Rational Self-Consciousness through Itself") of "Reason" forward, Hegel has in view something he calls "ethical substance" (*sittliche Substanz*) and "ethical life" (*Sittlichkeit*). I take the following passage as programmatic for the remainder of the "Reason" chapter:

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succeeding and failing." In this approach, even "subjective mind" can be a part of the purposively constituted world. I am not prepared to argue that Hegel's own account of subjective mind follows this pattern (see Forster 1998, 94ff. for such an argument), though it seems worth pursuing.

[37] Though he does not use the term (which was not then in popular currency), an influential account which emphasizes this dimension in the whole of the *PG* is Pinkard (1994). Similarly, one could argue that Brandom's (2019) interpretation of the *PG* is an attempt to use the work for an argument that language itself is a product of social ontology. (As that work arrived after the completion of this one, I do not discuss it here.) One could argue that his (1994) is already just such an account. I will attempt to steer away from such controversial examples in my interpretation.

> [I]f we bring out this still inner spirit as the substance that has already advanced to its existence [*Dasein*], then in this concept *the realm of ethical life* opens up. For this is nothing else than, in the independent *actuality* of individuals, the absolute spiritual *unity* of their essence… This <u>ethical substance,</u> the *abstraction of univesality*, is only the law *in thought*, but it is just as immediately actual *self-consciousness*, or it is *custom* [*Sitte*]. <u>The *singular* consciousness, conversely, is only this unity being insofar as it is consciousness of the universal consciousness in its singularity as its own being,</u> insofar as its doing and existence is the universal custom. (*PG* 264/141/§ 349; slightly modified, underlined)

Here, Hegel describes how the "actualization of self-consciousness" (264/141/§ 350) results in a new "realm" of ethical life, or "the life of a people" (ibid.). I take this passage as programmatic because the last underlined phrase seems to be a preemptive gloss on the concept of spirit itself: the "*I* that is *We*, and *We* that is *I*" (145/76/§ 177). The question will be *how* can reason lead to or "open up" the "realm of ethical life" in a way that leads to this concept of spirit.

We can see that this is where the chapter is heading by comparing the early account of spirit in the "Spirit" chapter proper. At this point, Hegel takes himself to have established the basis of ethical substance, or now "ethical actuality," which is (*nota bene*) taken as an objective world:

> Its [spirit's] spiritual *essence* has already been designated as the *ethical substance*; but spirit is the *ethical actuality*. Spirit is the *Self* of the actual consciousness which it confronts, or rather which confronts itself as an <u>objective actual *world*</u>, but a world that has, for the Self, entirely lost the significance of something alien…Spirit is the *substance* and the universal, permanent essence equal-to-itself, —it is the unshakeable and indissoluble *ground* and *starting-point* for the doing of everyone,—and it is their *purpose* and *goal*, as the *in-itself*, in thought, of all self-consciousness. <u>This substance is equally the universal *work* [*Werk*] that generates itself through the *doing* of all and everyone as their unity and equality,</u> for it is the *being-for-itself,* the self, the doing. (324/174/§ 438)

Incidentally, it is hard to miss in this passage that the Hegelian version of "substance" (the one that is famously announced in the Preface (23/10/§ 17) as "just as much" *subject*) is the self-constructed *work* of a collective activity, that also becomes the basis of further activity ("*ground* and *starting-point*"). There is no question here of a metaphysical entity realizing itself

through the work of humans; no such entity has been introduced. But more directly to the

point is the way that Hegel describes the work of spirit in terms that clearly resemble the

basic conception of social ontology I started with above: a domain of entities that exist

because they are recognized by social actors. Among those entities discussed in the context

are the people (*Volk*) itself, law, and custom (cf. 329/30/177/§§ 447-49). (Hegel also seems

to think that even *individual* actors are also essentially the work of social ontology, but we will

leave that difficult issue aside.)

The path of the second half of the "Reason" chapter is determined to show how

practical reason, or simply *acting*, can lead to this new result, a new objective world. The

problem is joined with the issue of how the work of multiple actors is coordinated to achieve

this result. What I wish to draw attention to is the way that Hegel sees this in "concept"-

laden terms. Much as Fichte would say, Hegel writes that even for the individual purposive

actor, "[t]his its concept becomes, by its doing, its object" (281/151/§ 377). The problem

becomes how to articulate how and when this can happen, especially in face of the view that

morality is unachievable ideal, so that it is "a virtue only of representation and words, words

that lack content" (290/155/§ 390). The transitional concept crucial to articulate the

achievable purpose is precisely *work* (*Werk*).[38] Work represents a third stage in practical

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[38] It should be observed that Hegel uses "work" (*Werk*) and "labor" (*Arbeit*) in clearly distinct ways. This is perhaps clearest in his separate treatment of the topics in a pre-*Phenomenology* (1803/04) sketch (*JS1* 224f. treats *Werk*; *JS1* 227f. treats *Arbeit*). Just as Hannah Arendt (1958) writes about common linguistic usage in many languages (79-93), a work refers to an abiding product of activity, while labor may be an endless and unproductive process (e.g., 'slave *labor*' is the correct usage). Thus, in the quotation above, Hegel is treating the universal work of spirit as a product of activity (*Tun*), rather than a toilsome and endless process. Translators have uniformly failed to note this difference. For example, though the activity of the famous bondsman is described as "*Bearbeitung*" (151/§ 191) and "*Arbeit*" (153/§ 195), Inwood has these as "working on" and "work" respectively. (Pinkard and Miller do much the same; nor is the difference mentioned in a recent essay on the topic [Renault 2018].) These are otherwise reasonable translations unless Hegel recognizes a clear difference (and he does). The translators lead us to treat the work of spirit and the labor of the bondsman as similar. A further reason to suspect Hegel sees the difference is the special significance of this linguistic series for him: *Werk, wirken, wirklich, Wirklichkeit*. The "*wirklich*" is rational because (and insofar as) it is the product of rational activity, *wirken*. In any case, "works" are relevant for social ontology in a way that laboring is not obviously so.

reason that, as we saw, Kant and Fichte did not adequately consider.[39] If the first stage is the abstract purpose, the second the means of achieving it. "The *third* moment is, finally, the object, no longer as purpose, of which the doer is immediately conscious as *its own*, but as it is out in the open [*aus ihm heraus…ist*] and an *other* for the doer" (295/158/§ 400). The purpose is realized, and it can then be a concrete object, accessible and assessible as such by more than just the original doer. This is what Hegel treats as "the work" just a few paragraphs later:

> The work is the reality which consciousness gives itself; it is that in which the individual is for consciousness what he is *in himself*, and in such a manner that the consciousness *for which* the individual becomes in the work, is not particular consciousness, but *universal* consciousness; in the work in general, consciousness has ventured forth into the element of universality, into the space of Being, devoid of determinacy. (300/161/§ 405)

Now Hegel suggests that the concept of work is itself problematic on its own. It invites a disparity between the author of the work and its 'audience' (the universal consciousness) (300-1/161-2/§§ 405-6). The work *as intended* is "vanishing" and marked with "contingency" (302-3/162/§ 408). Suggestively: here "concept and reality again separate from each other" (302/162/§ 407). But the solution is not to admit that there are no practical achievements, no works, that concepts do not constitute realities, but instead to articulate a notion of "true work," or the "Thing itself" (*die Sache selbst*).[40] Unsurprisingly (according to our account of Hegel's move beyond Kant and Fichte), the Thing itself, the true work, comes when the concept is again affirmed in the object:

> [T]he *true work* is only that unity of *doing and Being*, of *willing* and *achieving*….In this way, then, consciousness <u>affirms its concept and certainty as what *is* and *endures* in the face of experience of the contingency of doing</u>; it experiences in fact its concept,

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[39] Notably, Kant uses "*Werk*" in a passage we have already seen to explain the application of concepts to civil laws: "But here the laws are only limitations of our freedom to condition under which it agrees thoroughly with itself; hence they apply to something that is wholly our work [*unser eigen Werk*], and of which we can be the cause through that concept" (A 301-302/B 358). This concept is not treated systematically, however.

[40] Inwood translates "*Sache*" with "Thing," "*Ding*" with "thing." I will leave *Sache* untranslated in my own text.

in which actuality is only a moment… This unity is the true work; the work is the *Thing itself* [*die* Sache selbst], which affirms itself completely and is experienced as that which endures, independently of the Thing that is the *contingency* of the individual doing as such, the contingency of the circumstances, means, and actuality. (303-4/163/§ 409; underlined)

The *Sache selbst* is the work that is recognized as an achievement according to its own concept, and thus separated from the contingencies of the subject. It is an "object" but a "spiritual" (*geistige*) one (304/163/§ 410). It is especially a conceptually produced object. The context makes clear that such *Sachen* are precisely the kind of entities that are properly described as social ontology.[41]

There are plenty of allusions to conceptuality in the passages I have just recalled, but they may not seem as impressive as one might hope to establish the idea that social ontology provides the paradigm case for Hegel's articulation of Conceptual Transparency in the *Logic*. In any case, so far I have only told one side of the story: how *there are* entities that are conceptually constituted. And this can be explained only by showing that practical reason itself has objective results, which Hegel explains as "work" and "*die Sache selbst*." Conceptual Transparency proper comes when there are theoretical concepts *about* such practically constituted objects. Since I will return to this issue in more detail later on (5.4.2.), I will here only note that we should see the "Absolute Knowing" chapter as filling precisely this role. A necessary ground of absolute knowing is precisely the fact that there *is* an "ethical substance" (social ontology) that is conceptually constituted; but absolute knowing is this conceptual knowing of what has been so constituted. Social ontology is our own doing, so that knowledge of social ontology is a form of self-knowledge. When we understand social

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[41] The *Sache selbst* is "an essence whose *Being* is the *doing* of the *single* individual and of all individuals, and whose doing is immediately *for others*, or is a *Thing* and is only a Thing as the *doing of each* and *everyone*; the essence which is the essence of all essences, the *spiritual essence*" (310/167/§ 418). The difference between the *Sache selbst* and spirit proper is that spirit is the essence "which is at the same time actual as consciousness and represents itself to itself" (324/174/§ 438).

ontology *rationally*, we understand it *conceptually*, and that is absolute knowledge. Accordingly, absolute knowledge is nothing other than the formula I drew from the *Logic* suggested: theoretical knowledge of the results of practical achievement. This is the conceptual transparency of social ontology.

5.4. Dimensions of Hegel's Rationalism in Social Ontology

So far in this chapter, I have tried to show how Hegel's commitment to social ontology can be explained by his development of a logico-epistemological idea implicit in the Kantian theory of practical conceptuality. This development provides simply a different angle on the teleological explanation for conceptual content from the previous chapter, but it shows how that idea could open up social ontology as a wide field of objective inquiry, a promised land that Kant and Fichte glimpsed but did not enter. Now I wish to see the opposite side of the explanation: how Hegel's adoption of social ontology can help make intelligible certain paradigmatic dimensions of his rationalism, which for our purposes is his adoption of Restricted Conceptual Transparency. Simply put, what can we learn about Hegel's rationalism from his understanding of social ontology? I will explore this question across three dimensions: the metaphysical, epistemological, and methodological. As I present the rationalist consequences of Hegel's social ontology for each dimension, I will occasionally refer to some contemporary work on social ontology, which will help make Hegel's position clearer by way of comparison. My aim will not be to provide a fully satisfactory challenge or modification to contemporary social ontology on a Hegelian basis. It is more valuable here, in my view, to show that many of Hegel's insights are recognized by

other philosophers on non-Hegelian grounds. This shows that Hegel's rationalism may not be as arcane as often thought.

5.4.1. The Metaphysical Dimension

Hegel, we have seen, is a metaphysical rationalist to the extent that he accepts that the expression of logical-conceptual relationships always entail certain metaphysical entitlements. To restrict the scope of this section, I will focus on two related metaphysical claims that can be made intelligible by Hegel's conception of social ontology. Both of them are paradigmatically "rationalist." First is Hegel's affirmation of a "singular" *substance*.[42] Second is his affirmation of plural *essences*. And of course it will be worthwhile to see how both of these commitments are consistent.

It will useful to see how social ontology explains Hegel's affirmation of substance by first looking at the whole line of argument at once, much of which relies on material from earlier chapters:

(1) *<substance>* supervenes on (the realized) *<universal concept>*. (From Logical Supervenience; cf. 3.2.3. and 3.3.1. below)

(2) *<universal concept>* is realized through teleological processes which give it content. (cf. 4.4.1)

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[42] Hegel does not (*pace* Pippin 2018, 54, 143 and *passim*) speak of individuals things as substances, in the manner of Aristotle. Certainly Spinoza's usage is more in the background. However, as we will see, the way that Hegel concretely affirms substance is so different than Spinoza's that a more exact comparison would be more misleading than illuminating.

(3) A social ontology[43] is, for a given community, a unified group of entities (e.g., institutions) that realize teleologically its commonly held practical purposes. (Assumption)

(4) A social ontology is the concrete realization of <*universal concept*>. (2, 3)

(5) Now <*substance*> supervenes on a social ontology. (1, 4)

(6) So: if there is a social ontology (as described in (3)), there is substance. (5, the meaning of "supervenes on")

(7) Corollary: All the features that abstractly characterize <*substance*> should be concretely exhibited in a social ontology.

Certainly this argument requires some unpacking. Before doing so, we should remove any doubt about its *conclusion* (6) as a Hegelian view (as well as its corollary (7)). Already my discussion of ethical substance in the previous section should show that Hegel is willing to speak of the social realm as substance. In addition, Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, much of which is uncontroversially described as a social ontology, contains (according to a search) 46 uses of the term *Substanz*. Not all are technical uses, of course, but many of them clearly are. Among them are references like the following:

> The teaching of the concept[44] [*Dies, was der Begriff lehrt*], which is also history's inescapable lesson, is that it is only when actuality is mature that the ideal first appears over against the real and that the <u>ideal grasps this same real world in its substance and builds it up for itself into the shape of an intellectual realm</u>. (*GPR* 28/16/Preface)

> The objective ethical order, which comes on the scene in place of good in the abstract, <u>is substance made *concrete* by subjectivity</u> as *infinite form*. (293/154/§ 144).

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[43] I will explain below why I am treating social ontology as a 'count noun' here.

[44] The reference of "concept" here is unclear to me in the context, though it does not affect the reference to substance. It could mean the teaching of the *Doctrine of the Concept* (which would have been available at this time), or to some specific concept, say <*actuality*>.

> In the whole of ethical life the objective and subjective moments are alike present, but both of them are only its forms. <u>The good here is substance</u>, i.e. the objective is filled with subjectivity. (294/154/§ 144A; modified)

> The substance [*Die Substanz*], in this its *actual self-consciousness*, knows itself and so is an object of knowledge. This ethical substance and its laws and powers are, on the one hand, an object over against the subject, and from the latter's point of view they *are*—'are' in the highest sense of self-subsistence. This is an absolute authority and power infinitely more firmly established than the being of nature.[45] (294-95/155/§ 146; slightly modified)

This much is established: Hegel thinks of the institutions of ethical life as being in some way "substance." This was his view in the *Phenomenology*, and it remained his view in the *GPR* (1820), published after the *WL* (1812-16) and first edition of the *EL* (1817). The task now is to explain more clearly how it is the specific social-ontological character of Hegel's view that leads to this result.

Premise (1) has been discussed at length in Chapter 3 (3.3.1.). There I pointed out that Hegel treats "the concept" (qua *universal*) as inheriting the characteristics of <*substance*>, much in the way that Fichte also saw the "*Ich*" as inheriting those characteristics. For example, substance (on Spinoza's view) is *causa sui*, while the Fichtean *Ich* is self-positing. In that context, I suggested that the *content of the concept* should be seen in the same way: for all conceptual content, on Hegel's account, is in some way self-produced: the singular content, even if 'provoked' by real objects, comes through the particular self-determination and limitation of the universal (see also 2.2.2.3.). Moreover, the account of teleology gives us a further framework to see how such "self-producing" singular content may not be as obscure as it first sounds; for teleological processes are able to produce content in a 'top-down'

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[45] The passage should be continued so that one does not think that Hegel sees this "substance" in *wholly* objective terms: "On the other hand, they [sc. the laws and powers of ethical substance] are not something alien to the subject. On the contrary, his spirit bears witness to them as to *its own essence*, the essence in which he has a *feeling of his selfhood*, and in which he lives as in his own element which is not distinguished from himself. The subject is thus directly linked to the ethical order by a relation which is closer to identity than even the relation of faith or trust" (295/155/§ 147).

manner (premise 2 above). Nevertheless, at least on my account of the *Logic* (following Klaus

Hartmann and others), this is all still a *subjunctive* characterization: it shows what the concept

would have to be in order to be self-producing, substance as *causa sui*. The *Logic* does not

prove that *there are*, for example, singular existents that realize concepts in the way that

<*teleology*> requires. This means that we can still ask, after the *Logic*, whether *there is*

substance, even if we already accept that <*substance*> supervenes on <*concept*>.

The remainder of the argument above is meant to use social ontology to provide an

affirmative answer. Substance can exist only if "the concept" is realized. But according to

Hegel the concept *is* realized in the social ontology of modern ethical life.[46] Here, the

singular usage of "concept" is somewhat important. Hegel does not say that there are

substanc*es* for every concept that is realized.[47] Instead, a social ontology is uniquely

"substantial" insofar as it is the realization of the most universal ethical concept. In Hegel's

GPR, this concept is <*concrete freedom*>, or practical conceptuality as such. Each institution is

conceptually justified only to the extent that it can be shown to be organically and

systematically connected to the teleological realization of this concept. This systematic

dimension is important to stress, for even if a case of teleology, considered as a single

purposive action, for example, could illustrate the meaning of a concept becoming an object

(as in Fichte, for example), it would not show what it means for "the concept" to be realized

simpliciter. In order for that to be shown, we must see how the content is produced from

purely conceptual means. Yet in the case of a single action, the content of the purpose may

be determined independently of other purposes, so that it could not be said that the specific

content of the purpose itself had a purely conceptual origin. By contrast, Hegel's argument

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[46] See the following section for the significance of the adjective "modern" here.

[47] Pippin (2018) frequently (and misleadingly) assimilates Hegel's usage of substance to Aristotle's. Cf. ibid., 54, 143, 219-20.

in *GPR* is that the whole system of institutions involved in the modern state, such as the family, the market, the legislature, etc., receive their *content* and *justification* from the fact that they realize "the concept" alone (in the form of the will; recall 4.5.1. above). When these institutions come to exist, then, Hegel can think of them as self-caused by their concept, free conceptuality as such. Thus, the whole group of social-ontological institutions of modern ethical life realize what Hegel called substance: the concept that is the cause of its own reality.

The above argument, then, explains *why* Hegel feels justified in calling modern ethical life "substance."[48] This explanation credits Hegel with this rationalist metaphysical concept, which is justified solely because of its realization in the logical relations of teleology. It is this practical-teleological conception of social ontology that allows this concept to be realized.

We have also seen that Hegel often speaks of concepts as the essence or nature of things (cf. *WL* I: 25/16); indeed this has been our primary way of understanding the metaphysical aspect of Conceptual Transparency. This way of speaking does not conflict with the one about substance just described. The distinction between substance and essence is the same type as (and depends on) the distinction between the universal concept and 'lower' particular concepts (recall 2.2.2. above). While the whole people or state realizes "the concept" *qua* universal so that it is their "substance," particular concepts or purposes are the essences or natures of lower, more determinate objects or institutions of social ontology. This feature has been discussed above in my account of "the idea" (see 4.4.2.). In the *GPR*, Hegel connects this concept with essentiality when introducing ethical life. The concept, in ethical life,

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[48] Contrast more traditionally metaphysical readings of this terminology. The state is substance, e.g., because "man is the vehicle of cosmic spirit, and the corollary, that the state expresses the underlying formula of necessity by which this spirit posits the world" (Taylor 1975, 387).

> having acquired reality precisely through this positing of its moments, is now present as Idea—<u>as the concept which has developed its determinations to</u> reality and at the same time is present in their identity <u>as their essence in itself.</u> (287/152/§ 141R).

One complication here, which would too much detain us to spell out, is the way that the concepts of ethical life are not only the essence of those institutions, but at the same time the essence of the actors (individuals) who constitute the institutions. As Hegel says,

> On the other hand, they [sc. the institutions of ethical substance] are not something alien to the subject. On the contrary, his spirit bears witness to them as to *its own essence*, the essence in which he has a *feeling of his selfhood*, and in which he lives as in his own element which is not distinguished from himself. (295/155/§ 147).

It is a complication indeed that individuals are required for the existence of the institutions, but the institutions (Hegel here suggests) are also required to produce subjects of a certain sort, so much so that the institutions constitute the individuals' essence and even self.[49] My point here is only that, however that issue is addressed in detail, the social-ontological reading explains that Hegel sees essentiality, just as substance, as a product of the conceptual constitution of both the objective social realm and its actors.

Social ontology also helps explain the kind of "reality" that is required here for the existence of ethical substance and its correlative essences. Recall this passage quoted above, which says that the institutions of ethical substance "*are*—'are' in the highest sense of <u>self-subsistence</u>. This is an absolute authority and power infinitely more firmly established than the being of nature" (295/155/§ 146; underlined). Hegel affirms here another feature of metaphysical substance as characteristic of ethical 'being,' namely that it has "self-subsistence" (*Selbstständigkeit*). In what does the self-subsistence of the ethical substance consist? A commonly accepted characteristic of social ontology helps explain this. For social ontology is generally held to be dependent, at least at some point, on the thoughts,

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[49] Recently, Alznauer (2016) has cited this seeming paradox as a challenge to views which treats subjects as "always already" constituted by objective spirit.

intentions, and attitudes of people.[50] Indeed, that is what makes it "social." It is a small step from here to see that social ontology is "self-subsistent" in the sense that it arises and passes away only through its own resources, namely the thought of social actors. Nothing *outside* the thoughts of social actors is necessary for it to "be"; these thoughts are also, at some level of organization, sufficient for social ontology to be.[51] This does not mean that social ontology is a fiction[52] or "*Gedankending*." For there *is* a difference between an imagined and merely possible or proposed law (e.g.) and one that is actually instituted, but that difference does not consist in one law being the product of thought, and another law stepping outside of thought. Law is realized *in* and *through* thought.[53] The same holds *mutatis mutandis* for all the institutions of a social ontology.

Thus, the "reality" of ethical substance is not a strange kind of being which we can only postulate, a kind of occult cause or force. It has the reality that we ascribe to it through the self-actualization and authorization of thought. In this, Hegel is not offering a unique

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[50] As Searle writes, "In a sense there are things that exist only because we believe them to exist. I am thinking of things like money, property, governments, and marriages" (1995, 1).

[51] If this sufficiency claim is too strong, it is at least plausible to say, as Amie Thomasson does, that no *specific* material object is necessary for such institutions to exist: "Corporations, laws and governments all seem to depend on the physical world for their existence, and are created by real and intentional acts of writing, voting, etc. Yet none of these abstract social entities is identifiable with some particular physical object or brute fact" (2003, 277). This suggests that no physical feature of these institutions is itself constitutive of the institution.

[52] A point made crudely by Yuval Harari in his *Sapiens*: "Judicial systems are rooted in common legal myths. Two lawyers who have never met can nevertheless combine efforts to defend a complete stranger because they both believe in the existence of laws, justice, human rights – and the money paid out in fees. Yet none of these things exist outside the stories that people invent and tell one another" (2014, 27-28). Such a position seems to depend on assuming that only brute material things exist, so that anything else is "mythic," thus begging the question against Hegel. Recall Hegel's repudiation of a concept of being "as something graspable only by hand, not by spirit [or: the mind], essentially visible to the external and not the internal eye; in other words, if the name of being, reality, truth, is given to that which things possess as sensuous, temporal, and perishable" (*WL* II: 404/627).

[53] To make a crude addition here: it does matter that the institution is thought (*recognized*) by 'many' thinkers: "Spirit is actual only as that which it knows itself to be, and the state, <u>as the spirit of a people</u>, is both the law *permeating all relationships within the state* and also <u>at the same time the customs and consciousness of its citizens</u>. It follows, therefore, that the constitution of any given people depends in general on the character and development of its self-consciousness. <u>In its self-consciousness its subjective freedom is rooted and so, therefore, is the actuality of its constitution</u>" (*GPR* 440/263/§ 274; underlined). It is through this self-consciousness of the people that Hegel distinguishes a genuine constitution from a "*Gedankending*" in the same context (§ 274R).

conception of social ontology, but one well-within the contemporary mainstream (see the

following section). Keeping social ontology in view thus helps us understand how a cryptic

statement such as the following (from the 1831 Preface to the *WL*) does not demand a

purely subjective idealism:

> Thus, inasmuch as subjective thought is our own most inner doing, and the objective concept of things constitutes the Thing itself[54] [*Sache selbst*], we cannot step away from this doing, cannot stand above it, and even less can we step beyond the nature of things. We can, however, dispense with this last claim; inasmuch as it is symmetrical with the one preceding it, it says that our thought has a reference to the Thing; but this is an empty claim, for the Thing would then be set up as the rule for our concepts whereas, for us, the Thing can be nothing else than the concepts we have of it. (*WL* I: 25/16; modified)

The passage says more than that our access to things is conceptually mediated; it says that

our concepts constitute the "Thing itself" in its nature or essence.[55] But how can our

concepts *be* "the Thing itself" or the "nature or essence" of something, so that the concept

itself provides the rule for what that *Sache* or essence is? Social ontology provides a clear

paradigm for a case in which this kind claim is true: in social ontology, our concepts provide

the standard for "what it is to be" something, so that when that thing is realized and thus

recognized in thought, it is that thing. Nothing outside thought (both realized and

recognized) is necessary for this to be objectively true. Thus, if Hegel here sees (part of) the

world as "generated out of the concept" it does not seem to be, *pace* Bubner (1980, 116), a

"false dream."

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[54] Di Giovanni translates "*Sache*" as "essence of things" throughout here. This may be conceptually acceptable (on the same page Hegel also calls the "*nature* or *essence*" of a thing its "concept"), but I thought it best not to prejudice that identification here. Nevertheless, the original "*Sache*" suggestively resonates with the treatment of the *Sache selbst* in the *PG*, described above.

[55] This is to say that the passage should not be read simply in "impositionist" terms (to use Pippin's (2018) term). If we impose concepts on external reality (as some read Kant as saying), that does not allow us to credit ourselves with knowledge of things' natures. But if subjective thought becomes the basis of an objective reality, essential knowledge of those objects comes in view without any such imposition.

In discussing <*substance*> and <*essence*>, I have of course only scratched the surface of the many topics of metaphysics that are illuminated when viewed in light of Hegel's social ontology. The above should at least be sufficient to illustrate the potential fruitfulness of this perspective. Before moving on, however, an important point must be emphasized. I am not suggesting that Hegel *independently* adopts a social ontology, and then ascribes a certain metaphysical characterization to it.[56] On the contrary, the earlier chapters of this work show that the ground for Hegel's metaphysics is his conception of conceptual content. My point rather is first that Hegel's social ontology is explained by the picture of conceptual content he provides, and therefore it illustrates the same metaphysics that is outlined in general terms in the *Doctrine of the Concept*. Nevertheless, the picture of conceptual content that the *Logic* provides is tailormade to explain the existence of entities that are produced through the realization of concepts; and this is the general framework within which Hegel's social ontology should be understood as well.

5.4.2. The Epistemological Dimension

Recognizing the prominence of social ontology in Hegel's understanding of the domain of Conceptual Transparency also illuminates the epistemological consequences that Hegel draws from this view. Most famously, Hegel speaks of "absolute knowing" (*absolute Wissen*) in the *PG*, and what he calls "the absolute idea" is a variant on the same idea: "the infinite idea in which cognizing and doing are equalized, and which is the *absolute knowledge of*

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[56] This criticism is levelled by Thompson (2014) to approaches like Pippin (2008), in which (according to Thompson) the social world is treated as something *given*, and then Hegel's social ontology describes it (he calls this the "culturalist" framework of social ontology). By contrast, Thompson emphasizes that Hegel's account is also meant to explain how the normatively social can exist at all. My emphasis on Hegel's concept of "work" and "ethical substance" above (5.3.3.) should reveal that I agree with and attempt to meet Thompson's demand.

itself" (*WL* II: 469/675). Absolute knowledge is still a puzzle to commentators. Recently, Tolley (2018) has argued that "the *Phenomenology*'s conception of absolute knowing bears much closer affinities with the idea, not of any sort of human knowing, but of the knowing by the divine infinite intellect that Hegel thinks Kant himself had already hit upon" (145). Of course, then such a divine knowing becomes itself mysterious, something *we* don't know.[57] In the same way, the rationalists articulated an ideal of "adequate knowledge," but claimed that it was (at least mostly) reserved for God.[58] But this conception of knowledge would leave Hegel's central task of "leading the individual…to knowledge" (*PG* 31/14/§ 28) completely unsolved. On the other hand, Pippin's anti-realist reading of the issue is also clearly insufficient:

> [B]y Absolute Knowledge Hegel is not referring to a knowledge of an absolute substance-Subject, a Divine Mind, or a Spirit-Monad. As he has since the latter half of his Jena years, he is referring to the conditions of human knowledge "absolutized," no longer threatened by Kant's thing-in-itself skepticism. (1989, 168)[59]

This account is insufficient because (as I argued above in 4.6) eliminating Kantian "skepticism" does not permit us to credit ourselves with *knowledge* about objects, only their

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[57] As Tolley admits, his interpretation "is not at all sufficient to determine what either absolute comprehension itself actually is, for Hegel, either considered 'in itself' as to its concept (as 'absolute idea'), or considered as to how it is fully realized (as 'absolute spirit')" (2018, 166). Nor does this seem to be a contingent defect in an account that describes a knowing that exists in a divine being but not in us. Tolley's attempt to take Hegel's theological language seriously ends up taking literally what Hegel often describes as the language of "*Vorstellung.*" Just prior to the "Absolute Knowing" chapter, Hegel describes the *mistake* of religious consciousness as the reification of God: "[Religious consciousness] grasps this aspect, in which the pure internalization of knowledge is *in itself* absolute simplicity or the substance, as the representation [*Vorstellung*] of something which is so, not in virtue of the *concept,* but as the action of an *alien* satisfaction [sc. God]" (*PG* 573/311/§ 787). The same chapter, famously, refers to the 'death of God' and describes it as "the death of *the abstraction of the divine essence* which is not posited as Self" (572/310/§ 785). Hegel could hardly be clearer that his "clear" (Tolley 2018, 146) talk of God should not be taken literally.

[58] Leibniz is explicitly agnostic about human adequate knowledge: "When everything that enters into a distinct notion is, again, distinctly known, or when analysis has been carried to completion, then knowledge is *adequate* (I don't know whether humans can provide a perfect example of this, although the knowledge of numbers certainly approaches it)" (1989 [1684]), 24). Clearly, God is supposed to have this complete knowledge of a notion. Cf. ibid., 41 (=*Discourse on Metaphysics* [1686], § 8).

[59] Similarly, though as a reconstruction of "absolute idealism" rather than a strict interpretation of Hegel, Rödl (2018) argues that "absolute knowledge is nothing other than empirical knowledge and empirical knowledge nothing other than absolute knowledge" (18).

necessary thinkability, what I called Hegel's idealism in contrast to his rationalism. What I want to show is that the involvement of Conceptual Transparency in social ontology demonstrates a concrete case in which absolute knowledge is conceivable (*contra* theological readings) but also remains plausible as a case of objective knowledge (*contra* deflationist readings).

Before looking at Hegel's view more closely, it is worth laying out some of what contemporary social ontologists say concerning the epistemology of social ontology. John Searle and Amie Thomasson presents views that are particularly suggestive for present purposes. Searle explains the existence of social ontology on the basis of collective intentionality ("we"-representations) that institute "constitutive rules" for social objects. These rules have the form: "*X* counts as *Y* in context *C*" (1995, 28). In this formula, *X* is a material object, while *Y* is the "status function" that the material object receives by the collective intentionality. There are "*Y*'s," or social objects, only because there is a group of people who treat *X*'s as *Y*'s. There is money, for example, because both buyers and sellers of goods accept pieces of paper (or the number listed in our bank accounts) as valid currency. What does this mean about the knowledge of such objects? Because these objects exist in virtue of our attitudes and our use of language, Searle thinks a global ignorance of these objects is impossible: "For these sorts of [social] facts, it seems to be almost a logical truth that you cannot fool all the people all the time" (1995, 32). That is, if there are such social 'facts' at all (e.g., that I have $20 in my pocket), there must be *someone* (and probably more than one person) who *knows* and *recognizes* such facts, for otherwise, there is no fact to be known.[60] More accurately, no global ignorance about *types* of social fact (e.g., that authorized

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[60] Searle treats social ontology as "epistemically objective" because it does not depend on the attitudes of any one individual. In the right context, my wallet with a certain piece of paper in it contains $20 whether I accept it or not. Nevertheless, it would no longer contain $20 if the US ceased accepting the dollar as currency

bills are currency) is possible: "About particular tokens it is possible for people to be systematically mistaken. But where the type of thing is concerned, the belief that the type [e.g.] is a type of money is constitutive of its being money…" (ibid., 33). Our beliefs about social "types" (let us just say *concepts*) are necessarily true because our mutual believing is necessary to make them so.

Suggestively, the metaphysics and epistemology of social ontology are almost impossible to pry apart.[61] The being of these things is also a knowing (of someone). But the epistemological consequences of this metaphysics become even more friendly to Hegel if we follow Thomasson (2003) in challenging Searle's view that "there must be an initial x term," namely a "brute" physical object on which the functional status is socially imposed (272). She writes: "Corporations, laws and governments all seem to depend on the physical world for their existence, and are created by real and intentional acts of writing, voting, etc. Yet none of these abstract social entities is identifiable with some particular physical object or brute fact" (277). In these cases, Thomasson argues, it is not as if there is first some physical object upon which a status then is *imposed*. She clarifies that some abstract social entities exist through our acceptance of *conditional* rules, such as "For all x, we collectively accept that (if x meets all conditions in C, then Sx [i.e., there is a social fact involving x]" (281).[62] Thomasson's more general talk of "conditions" does not stipulate that the conditions are brutely physical, and what physical objects may be involved are instantiations of formal rules that could replace those objects with others (e.g., my bank statement *or* the dollar bills I've

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(in this sense, this fact is "observer relative." Then it would be only a piece of paper. See Searle (1995, 9-11) for the relevant taxonomy of objectivity and subjectivity.

[61] It is no wonder that Searle feels the need to disavow any connection to Hegel (surely knowing him only by reputation). Cf. Searle 1995, 25; 2007, 9.

[62] Searle's original unquantified version of the formula suggests that there is some *specific x* (a material object) on which a status function is imposed. This would require that the *x* in some way precede the imposition.

withdrawn from my checking account can represent my wealth). These conditions can even

be 'bootstrapped' simply from nothing more than the attitudes of participants: a *contract*

seems to be a case in point.

This leads Thomasson to ascribe a strong "conceptual transparency"[63] to social types

that are constructed by these formal rules:

> [F]acts of these kinds remain conceptually transparent; indeed certain facts about the nature of the kinds of social entities constructed by means of the last two kinds of rules must be known. For each social kind S, necessarily there is something that is S only if some constitutive rule is collectively accepted that lays out sufficient conditions for something to be S (or for there to be an S). Since those rules *establish* the relevant conditions, they must be correct. Thus nothing of the kind S can exist without there being S-regarding beliefs (indeed without members of the relevant society collectively knowing of certain sufficient conditions for something to be S, or for there to be an S)" (2003, 283; underlined).

Thomasson does not require this knowledge to be explicit in every case (279-80). In fact, this

would be rare. Moreover, unlike Searle, she does not think *every* social kind can be explained

according to constitutive rules and thus that *every* social kind is conceptually transparent (287-

89). We will return to this important idea in the following section. But if there is a social kind

that instantiates and is governed by a constitutive rule, then some individuals must

adequately *know* what this kind essentially is, because its existence depends on their beliefs

being effectively realized.

Before attempting to show how this view is close to the one that Hegel himself holds

about our knowledge of social ontology, I first wish to emphasize how unusual this

epistemic situation is. We do not typically get to credit ourselves with knowledge about the

"nature" of things in this way. Indeed, it is unusual enough that commentators on Hegel do

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[63] Recall (from 1.1.) that the original source of my use this term was Anderson (2015) and, less directly, Fine (2012). It is a suggestive coincidence that Thomasson uses it too, though her meaning is primarily epistemological, while mine is primarily metaphysical. Even so, the topics are so conjoined in such a way that our usage is very close.

not usually think of such knowledge as a candidate for his target at all. To be sure, we do not usually get to have essential knowledge of things so "easily," and this may lead us to devalue social-ontological knowledge as a paradigm of knowledge. Yet it should not be dismissed out of hand as trivial knowledge just because of the apparent ease of its access. After all, this knowledge is not easier than is the historical process of *realizing* constitutive norms (something not emphasized in Searle's or Thomasson's account). For to know such social facts *objectively*, there have to be such facts,[64] and that involves more than thinking up concepts in the space of pure possibility. In any case, there is no reason knowledge must be defined as something difficult or even impossible, and no reason that knowledge of the non-human world must serve as the paradigm of knowledge.

I won't here propose that we *identify* Hegel's "absolute knowing" with the epistemic access to social ontology just described, for absolute knowing should include whatever can be known philosophically,[65] including (on Hegel's view) the principles of art, the theoretical edifice of natural science, the teleological structure of human history, and more. Nevertheless, at the very least Hegel's conception of absolute knowing includes the knowledge of "ethical substance" or social ontology, in my view paradigmatically so. Treating that as a paradigm will help show that absolute knowledge is plausible as a humanly accessible form of knowledge.

Here again is a very simple argument from which to begin:

(1) If *x* is conceptually transparent, absolute knowledge of *x* is possible

(2) If an institution is conceptually constituted, then it is conceptually transparent

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[64] As Hegel says quite strikingly in the Preface of the *GPR*: "However we look at it, the *truth* about *right*, *ethical life*, and the *state*, is as old [*ebensosehr alt*] [or new! -WCW] as its recognition and formulation in public laws and in public morality and religion" (*GPR* 13-14/5).

[65] Cf. Kojève (1969, 31): "This 'absolute Knowledge' is nothing other than the complete System of Hegelian philosophy or 'Science,' which Hegel expounded later in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*." See also Collins (2013, 440ff.) for a similar view.

(3) If an institution is conceptually transparent, then absolute knowledge of it is

possible.

This conclusion is a modest one, since it only speaks to the possibility of absolute

knowledge. Clearly sufficient conditions for the *actuality* of absolute knowledge, what Hegel

wants to bring about in the reader of the *Phenomenology*, would be more involved, but that

would take us too far afield. It is enough of interest to us to see that absolute knowledge

becomes intelligible on the present basis.

To see that premise (1) conforms to Hegel's conception of absolute knowledge,

consider the way the term is introduced in the Introduction to the *PG*:

> In pressing on to its true existence, consciousness will reach a point at which it sheds
> its semblance of being burdened with alien material that is only for it and as an other,
> a point where the appearance becomes equal to the essence, where consequently its
> presentation coincides with just this point in the authentic science of spirit; and
> finally, when consciousness itself grasps this its essence, it will signify the nature of
> absolute knowledge itself. (*PG* 80-1/42/§ 89).

This seems to be a new expression of the "goal" of knowledge, stated just earlier:

> [The goal] is situated where knowledge no longer needs to go beyond itself, where
> knowledge finds itself, and the concept corresponds to the object an the object to
> the concept. (74/38/§ 80)

Absolute knowledge is a case in which the distinction between concept and object

evaporates, or equally, where the consciousness grasps the essence without it being alien to

it. These are simply epistemological implications of my account of Conceptual Transparency:

where a concept adequately expresses the nature of something. This becomes

epistemological as soon as we grant that a singular subject's grasp of a concept can (though

not always will) express that same essence, and that seems to be what Hegel is suggesting

here. Thus, (1) is true as a matter of definition.

We have already seen evidence in the last chapter (cf. 4.4.2.) and earlier in this one

(5.3.2.) that something's conceptual transparency can follow from its being conceptually (or

teleologically) constituted (premise 2). But I owe some evidence that this is what Hegel may have in mind in this chapter. One thing that is clear in Hegel's discussion of absolute knowledge is that it involves a content becoming self-conscious which was formerly only the object of consciousness (585/317-18/§ 802). As he describes it earlier,

> This last shape of spirit—the spirit which at the same time gives its complete and true content the form of the Self and thereby realizes its concept while remaining in its concept in its realization—is absolute knowing; it is spirit knowing itself in the shape of spirit, or *conceptual knowing*. …. The truth is the *content*, which in religion is still unequal to its certainty. But this equality consists in the content's having received the shape of the Self. As a result, that which is the very essence, viz. the *concept*, has being the element of being-there, or has become the *form of objectivity* for consciousness. Spirit *appearing* to consciousness in this element, or what is here the same thing, produced in it by consciousness, *is science*. (582-83/316/§ 798; modified)

Hegel refers here to a "content" that is represented (inadequately) in religion, but which also has a "form of objectivity" that it receives from the concept itself. Absolute knowing, or science, is the consciousness of this content in conceptual form: it "realizes its concept while remaining in its concept in its realization."

In this context, Hegel uses the term "substance" to refer to this content that is not explicitly present in scientific knowledge: "Now, in actuality, the knowing substance is there earlier than its form or its conceptual shape" (584/317/§ 801). Hegel then tells us that the "movement" of achieving self-knowledge of this "substance" is "actual history." One of the key events of this history is the movement from a religious consciousness of substance, which does not recognize the self, to one in which the self is recognized:

> The religious community, insofar as it is first the substance of absolute spirit, is the uncultivated consciousness whose being-there is the harsher and more barbarous the deeper its inner spirit is, and the deeper its spirit is, the harder the labour that its torpid self has with its essence, with the alien content of consciousness. It is only after consciousness has given up the hope of sublating that alienness in an external, i.e. alien, manner that it turns to itself, because the sublation of that alien mode is the return into self-consciousness; <u>only then does it turn to its own world and present, discover it as its property,</u> and has thereby taken the first step towards coming down out of the *intellectual world*, or rather towards inspiriting the abstract element of that world with the actual self. (586/318/§ 803)

The defining feature of the religious consciousness, Hegel says, is that it treats the content of the self as "alien" from itself, namely as God. When it is freed from this alienation, however, "it turns to its own world and present." Notice also that the identity of the "substance" or content of the self that becomes self-conscious is the religious *community* itself. This, too, is a *social* (or ethical) substance. The representation of God in a religious community is a misrepresentation of its own self.[66]

The representation of self that culminates in a specifically conceptual account of the "substance" is one in which what it knows is something it does.[67] Hegel writes that it is "[t]hrough this movement of *action* [*Handelns*]" that "spirit has emerged as pure universality of knowing, which is self-consciousness" (582/316/§ 796; emphasized). The knowing of spirit as absolute knowing is coeval with a consciousness of itself as doing: "The same thing that is already posited *in itself* now therefore repeats itself as consciousness's knowledge of it and as conscious doing" (ibid.). Following the pattern we have already seen, absolute knowing is the theoretical knowledge of practical achievements. And the concept is what is identical across the deed and the knowledge itself: "the concept is the bond that makes the *content* the *Self*'s own *doing*" (582/316/§ 797).

Why does social ontology in particular help illuminate such formulations? Recall an undoubtedly social-ontological characterization of spirit (from earlier in the *PG*) already quoted:

> Spirit is the *Self* of the actual consciousness which it confronts, or rather which confronts itself as an objective actual *world*, but a world that has, for the Self, entirely lost the significance of something alien…Spirit is the *substance* and the universal,

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[66] Herein lies the genuinely Hegelian origin of Feuerbach's (1881 [1843]) left-Hegelian (and atheistic-humanist) interpretation of religion.

[67] Hegel would not be completely original in this doctrine. It bears a striking similarity to the "makers' knowledge" tradition of epistemology (see esp. Pérez-Ramos (1988) and Hintikka (1974), essays 2, 4, 6, and 8). The succinct formulation of this view (though here it concerns truth rather than knowledge), is Vico's "*verum-factum*" principle: "the criterion of the true should be to have made the thing itself" (Vico (1988 [1710], Ch. 1, iv).

> permanent essence equal-to-itself, —it is the unshakeable and indissoluble *ground* and *starting-point* for <u>the doing of everyone</u>,—and it is their *purpose* and *goal*, as the *in-itself*, in thought, of all self-consciousness. This substance is equally the universal *work* [*Werk*] that generates itself<u> through the *doing* of all and everyone as their unity and equality</u>, for it is the *being-for-itself,* the self, <u>the doing</u>. (324/174/§ 438)

The language in this passage is too close to that in the "Absolute Knowledge" chapter to ignore. From this passage we have learned that social ontology is the substance that is the product of the "universal work" of a community. Now, at the end of the *PG*, we learn that absolute knowing is a self-consciousness of that world as the product of oneself and others. Absolute knowledge is possible in our case, but it depends on there being a world that has actualized purposes (i.e., "their *purpose* and *goal*") we can identify as our own "doing." Insofar as we can identify the purposes that create the institutions of our world as our own, our knowledge of the purposive or conceptual shape of those institutions is a form of self-knowledge. In this case, there is no difference between the *essence* of those institutions and our *concept* of them.[68] Such knowledge is absolute: for here "knowledge no longer needs to go beyond itself…knowledge finds itself, and the concept corresponds to the object and the object to the concept" (74/38/§ 80). This is true in the case of social ontology because the object is dependent on the realization of the concept (premise 2). Knowledge does not "go beyond itself," because (as Searle and Thomasson argue) true beliefs must already be effective if social ontology exists.

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[68] For Hegel's use of "essence" language in this regard, note his allusion to absolute knowledge from the Preface: "What seems to proceed outside substance, what seems to be activity directed against it, is its own doing, and substance shows itself to be essentially subject. When it has shown this completely, *spirit has made its Being-there equal to its essence;* it is object to itself, just as it is, and the abstract element of immediacy, and of the separation of knowledge and truth, is overcome. Being is absolutely mediated;—it is substantial content which is just as immediately property of the I, it is the selfish or the concept. With this the phenomenology of spirit is concluded" (*PG* 39/19/§ 37; emphasized).

Though I have found no specific attempts in the literature to connect absolute knowing with social ontology *per se*,[69] the above interpretation is consistent with a number of other accounts. This is welcome, since it is not my goal to provide a completely novel view of absolute knowing here, but only to see how an intelligible account of knowledge flows from my own framework. In commenting on this chapter, for example, Kojève writes, "As for the goal of History—it is *Wissen*, Knowledge of self—that is, Philosophy (which finally becomes Wisdom). Man creates an historical World only in order to *know* what this World is and thus to *understand* himself in it" (1969, 162; underlined). Here, it is especially the "historical world" of which one has philosophical and thus absolute knowledge. Terry Pinkard influentially emphasizes the social aspect of this historical world, and thus of absolute knowledge: "Absolute knowledge is the internal reflection on the social practices of a modern community that takes its authoritative standards to come only from within the structure of the practices it uses to legitimate and authenticate itself" (1994, 262). Such knowledge is "absolute," we can add, because the institutions are just the actualizations of these (self-knowing) authoritative standards.

We have seen that contemporary accounts of the epistemology of social ontology present strikingly similar views of the privileged conceptual access we have to the world that is constituted by realized concepts. With this connection in mind, we can see that Hegel's view is no less intelligible than these. However, it is worth emphasizing a final point to show

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[69] In an essay (Pippin 2008b) that deviates from the emphasis of his earlier (1989) conception of absolute knowing (see the beginning of this section), Robert Pippin sees "action" in a more ordinary sense (i.e., the actions of individuals as interpreted by communities) as the locus of Hegel's account of absolute knowing. This is compatible with the texts we have seen, since they speak of "doing" and "action," without always referring to the way purposive deeds and actions constitute institutions or social ontology. However, Pippin here interprets the feature of action relevant for action as the "self-loss" of an action's intention: the fact that it is not "up to us" what our action means (ibid., 221, 226, *passim*). While this is a feature of Hegel's earlier account of action, it is unclear from Pippin how this feature is supposed to enable positive *knowledge*, and especially an "absolute" form of it.

how the Hegelian conception of absolute knowledge would differ from the kind of account

given by contemporary social ontologists. As the quotations from both Kojève and Pinkard

above suggest, on Hegel's view absolute knowledge is available only at a late (modern)

historical stage. As Pinkard writes,

> It is only when the form of life has incorporated into its essential self-understanding
> a conception of self-reflection on ourselves as cultural beings - only in a *self-grounding,*
> *reflective historicist* culture when the social practices of reason-giving have been turned
> on themselves – that such absolute reflection is possible and that this type of
> dialectical philosophical reflection can appear and can understand itself for what it is.
> (Pinkard 1994, 266)

Pinkard points to special features of modern culture that are relevant to Hegel's account of

absolute knowledge: that it is a "self-grounding, reflective historicist" culture. Simply put,

modern culture aspires to determine its practices according to its own, reflectively adopted

norms; it is "historicist" in that it recognizes its situation as historically novel.[70] I don't wish

to comment on the historical accuracy or exclusivity of this characterization. But granting it

as the kind of characterization that Hegel would adopt,[71] we can see how Conceptual

Transparency, and absolute knowledge along with it, is not a concomitant of mere sociality

as such. For there may be social arrangements which are attempts to realize social norms

(concepts) that are imposed from outside a culture's self-understanding. In that case, an

inhabitant of that society could not recognize as his or her *own* purposes in the institutions

that he or she inhabits.[72] Prototypically, a society that treats the justification of its practices as

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[70] This is implicit in the use of the term "modern" as a self-description, from the Latin *modernus* ("present time" and *modo* ("just now") (from the *OED*).

[71] See "The Eclairissement [*Aufklärung*] and Revolution" in the *Philosophy of History*. E.g., "This formally absolute principle brings us to *the last stage in History, our world, our own time*. Secular life [*Die Weltlichkeit*] is the positive and definite embodiment of the Spiritual Kingdom—the Kingdom of the *Will* manifesting itself in outward existence" (W 12: 524/1956, 442). "[T]he fact is that the formal principle of philosophy in Germany encounters a concrete real World in which Spirit finds inward satisfaction and in which conscience is at rest" (525/444).

[72] Hence, the importance of Hegel's concept of *alienation* (*Entfremdung*). Cf., e.g., *PG* 359ff./§§ 487f. There can be both subjective and objective grounds for alienated consciousness to exist. It may either be that the conceptual standards of an individual are too lofty or abstract to be satisfied with its social world (as in the

relying on theological grounds will not necessarily recognize that its institutions are the realizations of its own purposes. Or a society cannot become clear about its institutions, since it employs inconsistent concepts.[73] Nevertheless, there will be a "social ontology" in such societies. There will be exchange, government, laws, familial structures, etc. But these will be (on Hegel's view) not accurately described as the realization of concepts that belong to the society's own self-understanding. This shows that social ontology is not sufficient for Conceptual Transparency to hold.[74] A social ontology must be recognizable as the realizations of determinate and self-consciously available concepts for this to be the case. Where such realization has not occurred, conceptual thinking can only be "dialectical" or critical, rather than yielding objective and absolute knowledge.

The preceding account of absolute knowledge reconciles a traditionally "rationalist" (theological) characterization of such knowledge and a squarely modernist one, which sees knowledge as the achievement of subjects. Hegel *does* think of absolute knowledge as a God-like knowledge: absolute knowledge is thus "adequate knowledge" in the rationalist sense, which knows something completely and without remainder.[75] But that of which we have such God-like knowledge is that of which we are properly (and even relatively uncontroversially) regarded as co-creators.

"unhappy consciousness"; *PG* §§ 207ff.), or that the social world is not sufficiently suited to otherwise achievable conceptual norms (as in the appeal to "divine law" to counter human law; *PG* §§ 464ff.).

[73] For example, Hegel points out that Roman law itself could not contain a consistent definition of <*human being*>: "Thus, in Roman law, for example, there could be no definition of 'human being', since 'slave' could not be brought under it—the very status of slave indeed violates the concept of the human being; it would appear just as hazardous to attempt a definition of 'property' and 'proprietor' in many cases" (*GPR* 31/18/§ 2).

[74] In this, one can say that an account like Thomasson's presupposes a "late" stage of social institutions, one in which no ground outside the society's own commitments can be credited with the justification of its practices.

[75] Hegel implies we can have adequate knowledge of institutions of ethical life: "But *adequate knowledge* [*adäquate Erkenntnis*] of this identity [between self-consciousness and ethical life] depends on thinking in terms of the concept" (*GPR* 296/156/§ 147R).

5.4.3. The Methodological Dimension

In Chapter 1, I emphasized that a "dogmatic" method is endemic to classical German rationalism, and it follows from rationalist metaphysics. The rationalists believed that all truths are reducible to relations of conceptual containment. This implies that even empirical discoveries only reveal conceptual relations that could be deduced from the "concept of the subject" of empirical facts, even if no human mind could perform this deduction. Nevertheless, rationalist science was also eager to articulate the "first concept" of something, which expressed its essence (even if incompletely). For this, experience was not necessary. Instead, pure conceptual analysis was sufficient at least to reveal at least the most basic truths about the essence of something. Let us recall the analytical methodological approach of Moses Mendelssohn:

> Just as there is a purely theoretical mathematics which is not based upon any experiential proposition or actual existence and merely shows the coherence of concepts of quantity with one another, so there is a part of philosophy which, *all actuality having been set aside, merely unpacks our concepts of the qualities of things and teaches us how to see their intrinsic coherence.* All our concepts are like the seeds of grain of dying plants which, as bad as they look, are nonetheless full of inner virtue and conceal forests of beauty in their husks. … Who, then, would want to deny that the concepts of the qualities of things are linked with one another and with other sorts of knowledge and that the latter can be unpacked and derived from the former through undeniable inferences? … There is, therefore, a purely speculative part of philosophy in which, as was demonstrated above for pure mathematics, *attention is directed solely at the combination of concepts and their coherence.* (Mendelssohn 1997, 271-72; emphasis added)

Though Kant also recognizes the importance of analyzing concepts, he would not have admitted that through the mere analysis, comparison, and combination of concepts genuine (and presumably non-trivial) knowledge "can be unpacked and derived." This is what he called *dogmatism*, namely "the presumption of getting on solely with pure cognition from (philosophical) concepts according to principles" (B xxxv). As Kant famously criticizes, the

key failure of the rationalists was to see this dogmatic procedure as possible on a purely analytic basis.[76]

If Universal Conceptual Transparency leads to a universal dogmatism in the case of the rationalists, Restricted Conceptual Transparency leads to a restricted "dogmatism" in the case of Hegel. To avoid the pejorative connotations of that term, let us replace it with "analytical rationalism." Hegel's method apparently shares with Mendelssohn's the conviction that we can derive more determinate conceptual knowledge from less determinate concepts. This is his well-known tendency to speak about "deriving" some concepts from others.[77] He describes his method as one in which "the concept develops itself out of itself" (*GPR* 84/48/§ 31). While Hegel uses "dialectic" to refer to the critical side of this derivation procedure (namely, deriving contradictions from prior concepts), he uses "speculation" to refer to the positive, constructive side of the derivation.[78] Though "analysis" is not the most fitting metaphor for this positive, speculative side of the derivation, it is often not inappropriate.[79] Consider remarks such as the following: "[Q]uite generally, the whole course

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[76] A different though related (defensive) strategy was to admit that a class of propositions are synthetic, but to claim that there is still a purely logical ground for their truth, through the principle of sufficient reason. This was the proposal of J.A. Eberhard, which Kant ridicules at length in "On a Discovery Whereby Any New Critique of Pure Reason Is Made Obsolete by an Older One" (Kant 2002 [1790]).

[77] Hegel often speaks of the necessity to derive concepts. Cf. *WL* I: 16-17/9-10; 65-79/45-55. Hegel credits Fichte with this insight: "It remains the profound and enduring merit of *Fichte's* philosophy to have reminded us that the *thought-determinations* must be exhibited in their *necessity*, and that it is essential for them to be *deduced* [*abzuleiten* = derived]" (*EL* 117/84/§ 42R). It should be noted that not *all* Hegelian derivation appears to be of an analytical form. Yet this seems to be the case primarily in the *Realphilosphien*. Each one begins with a higher, indeterminate concept like <*nature*>, <*spirit*>, <*right*>, etc., and proceed to determine what is contained *an sich* in those higher concepts.

[78] The contrast between the dialectical and speculative is most concisely explained in the "More Precise Conception and Division of the *Logic*" in the *EL*. He writes there, "The *dialectical* moment is the self-sublation of these finite determinations on their own part, and their passing into their opposites" (172/128/§ 81). Yet: "The *speculative* or *positively rational* apprehends the unity of the determinations in their opposition, the *affirmative* that is contained in their dissolution and in their transition" (176/131/§ 82).

[79] Hegel does say that the derivation of concepts is (at least in some cases) "to [some] extent entirely *analytic*" (*EL* 188/141/§ 88 R), and he frequently uses the "containment" (*enthalten*) metaphor to describe conceptual content. Even so, it is perhaps unwise to assimilate Hegel's "containment" with Kantian analyticity. A recent account of Hegel on Kant's analytic-synthetic distinction (Werner 2018) is unfortunately inconclusive on this score, in part because the author does not clearly recognize the difference between the analytic-synthetic *methods* of cognition and analytic-synthetic *judgments* (cf. Ak. 4: 276/2002, 73n.). Hegel's discussion of

of philosophizing, being methodical, i.e., *necessary*, is nothing else but the mere *positing* of what is already contained in a concept" (*EL* 188/141/§ 88 R). Hegel sees the task of philosophy as showing that a concept is *necessary* on the basis of what precedes it, and that concept should be defined solely according to its derivation: "The truth is that in philosophical knowledge the *necessity* of a concept is the principle thing; and the path in which it becomes a *result* [*der Gang, als* Resultat, *geworden zu sein*] is its proof and deduction" (*GPR* 31-2/19/§ 2R; modified). A concept is "proved" when it has resulted with necessity from the concepts that precede it in a derivation.

Our task now, in keeping with the theme of this chapter, is not to explain Hegel's method of conceptual derivation as such, but to show how the paradigm case of social ontology helps elucidate the relevance of this method. In what sense is Hegel's "analytical rationalism" illustrated by his recognition of social ontology? The starting point for an answer lies again in recognizing the teleological presuppositions of social ontology. As we have seen, Hegel sees social ontology as a *product* or "work" of a teleological process. We have also seen that a teleological process exhibits the same transition of indeterminacy (or determinability) to determinacy that is reproduced in the explication of a concept. Similarly, recall that, for the rationalists, the transition from possibility to actuality occurred through the complete determination of a concept (cf. 1.2.2. above). This relationship of indeterminate possibility and determinate actuality characterizes all being for the rationalists, which is "determinable" (cf. *BM* § 34). Despite his arch-rationalist reputation, Hegel makes

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analytic and synthetic cognition (*WL* II: 502-41) is arguably more about the former than the latter. It seems to me that Hegel could see conceptual determination as analytic according to some of Kant's definitions, but not others. By *epistemic* criteria of "amplification, " clarity," etc. (see Ak. 4: 266), many of Hegel's conceptual determinations will be synthetic. By *logical* criteria of identity and contradictoriness, etc. (see A 150-3/B 190-2), Hegel's conceptual determinations will be analytic, since he aims to determine a concept according to what is necessarily 'under' it. See Anderson (2015, sec. 1.3.) and Hintikka (1973, Ch. VI) for the different possible accounts of analyticity.

no such universal claims about reality as completely determined according to concepts, and indeed, we have seen that he positively affirms an incompleteness to conceptual determination (cf. 4.5.2. above). However, teleology in particular exhibits the relationship between the indeterminate universal and determinate singular that the rationalists recognized as holding more generally. This suggests that the same kind of "analysis" that the rationalists accepted generally – which reconstructs the determinations constituting the determinate – is *at least* appropriate in the case of teleology. The final step is only then to show that social ontology exhibits this teleological structure from indeterminacy to determinacy.

If we bear in mind the connection of conceptual explication with the move from indeterminacy to determinacy, we can see traces of that connection throughout Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* in particular. His aim in that work is to show that the concrete institutions of modern ethical life are *conceptually derivable* from a higher (but still abstract and indeterminate) concept of *<freedom>* or *<free will>*.[80] He does this by arguing that all the relevant institutions are in fact determinations of abstract *<freedom>*, and thus necessary for freedom itself to be determined into existence. A more determinate concept can be derived from a previous, more indeterminate concept, because later concepts correspond to determinate means which realize the more determinate ends. A concept is justified if it is shown that without it, the purpose could not be adequately realized.[81] Hegel's higher-order argument that the philosophy of right belongs within philosophy at all (which we saw in

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[80] Hegel derives the concept *<right>* (*Recht*) from *<freedom>* or *<free will>* in *EG* §§ 484-86: "This reality in general, as *existence* [*Dasein*] of the free will, is *right*" (304/218/§ 486). Or, in the *GPR*: "[T]he system of right is the realm of freedom made actual" (46/26/§ 4).

[81] This suggests that Hegel's *GPR* might be read as progressing by leading to "practical" rather than "logical" or "conceptual" contradictions and their overcomings. David James (2017) puts forth such a proposal, which has its parallel in the Kant literature in Christine Korsgaard's reading of Kant's universalization test. See Korsgaard (1996, Essay 3). However, it is perhaps better to say that since the content of practical concepts *is* in part their means of realization, there is no proper contrast between logical and practical contradictions in their case.

4.5.1.) is thus conjoined to a first-order argument that shows that the central elements of modern social ontology are in fact determinations of an indeterminate abstract concept. This abstract beginning is "the will"; it is the practical correlate of the concept in general in its universal "moment." Accordingly, just as the concept *qua* universal is purely indeterminate with respect to content, so is the will "the unrestricted infinity of *absolute abstraction* or *universality,* the pure *thought* of oneself" (*GPR* 49/28/§ 5). Just as the pure concept receives content only through particularity, so the will requires "the transition from undifferentiated indeterminacy to the *differentiation, determination*, and *positing* of a determinacy as a content and object" (52/30/§ 6). Hegel thus treats the concept in the form of the will as "containing"[82] the further determinations of ethical life: "But at the start the concept is abstract, which means that all its determinations are contained within it [*in ihm enthalten*], but still only contained within it; they are only implicit [*an sich*] and not yet developed to be a totality in themselves" (93/53/§ 34Z).[83] Interestingly, just as one might expect from a traditional rationalist, Hegel here acknowledges that the contrast between deriving *concepts* and *existents* (institutions) from this abstract concept breaks down completely: "The determinations of the concept in the course of its development are from one point of view themselves concepts, but from another they take the form of existents [*sind sie in der Form des Daseins*], since the concept is in essence Idea" (85/49/§ 32). The "idea," we have seen, is just the concept that has become a reality, so that in deriving concepts that are ideas, we also derive

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[82] The "analytical" component of this is clear in the following linguistic illustration: "As an alternative to *etwas beschließen* [to resolve on something] the German language also contains the expression *sich entschließen* [to decide or disclose oneself]. This expresses the fact that the indeterminate character of the will itself, as itself neutral yet infinitely prolific, the original seed of all [its] determinate existence, <u>contains the determinations and aims within itself and simply brings them forth out of itself</u>" (*GPR* 63/36/§ 12R; underlined). The reference to "seed" is surely not a direct allusion to Mendelssohn, but the metaphor is used in the same way.

[83] See also: "This second moment—determination—is negativity and cancellation [*Aufheben*] like the first, i.e. it cancels the abstract negativity of the first. <u>Since in general the particular is contained in the universal, it follows that this second moment is already contained [*enthalten*] in the first and simply an explicit positing of what the first already is in itself</u>" (52/30/§ 6R; underlined).

the nature of their corresponding realities at the same time. This includes

concepts/institutions such as property, criminal punishment, the family, a market economy,

and the police.

The institutions of social ontology in the modern state, for Hegel, are

"determinations" of the will that wants to be concretely free. They are both the specification

of conceptual content and the concrete existents that realize that content. Just as we saw in

the case of purpose in general, the content of a free will is not fully explicable until it is

carried out: "[T]he will is not something complete and universal prior to its determining

itself and prior to its superseding and idealizing this determination. The will is not a will until

it is this self-mediating activity, this return to itself" (55-56/32/§ 7R). This suggests that the

conceptual explication of right is not *a priori* in the *simplistic* sense that would imply cognition

that does not rely on material from the actual world. Hegel does not mean to imply that

thought could spin concrete determinations out of itself if they were not actually carried out

in history.[84] We have already seen that the historical achievement is required for the

conceptual content to be objective at all. The analytical dimension simply involves

attempting to show which of the developmental consequences of modern social ontology

can be said to follow conceptually from the preceding, and more indeterminate purpose of

<*free will*>. Hegel divides this into two steps. First, to show that the content is "necessary on

its own account," that is, in a series of 'abstract' conceptual derivations. Second, "to look

round for what corresponds to it in our ideas [*Vorstellungen*] and language" (31-32/19/§

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[84] This is also very clear in Hegel's methodological discussion in the *Philosophy of Nature*. He writes, "Not only must philosophy be in agreement with our empirical knowledge of nature, but the *origin* and *formation* of the Philosophy of Nature presupposes and is conditioned by empirical physics. However, the course of a science's origin and the preliminaries of its construction are one thing, while the science itself is another. … [W]e must show that the [empirical] appearance does, in fact, correspond to its concept. However, this is not an appeal to experience in regard to the necessity of the content" (*EN* 15/6-7/§ 246R; slightly modified).

2R).[85] In some sense, the first step must be completed in the second, for if the conceptual

derivation yielded results that could not be exemplified in the actual world, then the

supposed determination of the concept would not follow the teleological pattern, in which

the actual *carrying out* of a purpose is necessary to give it content. In this way, there is no

opposition between the *a priori* determination of Hegel's social ontology – what its purposes

'in themselves' entail – and its *a posteriori* description – how institutions carry out these

necessary purposes.

  This is not meant to be a controversial or novel account of Hegel's method.[86] I only

wish to point out that the *a priori* side of Hegel's method coincides with an apparently

analytic one. Hegel's social ontology is subject to an "analytical rationalism" because the

specific institutions of that ontology are supposed to be themselves explications of the idea

of freedom. In this way, conceptual analysis is a method of developing the "thing itself,"

rather than being imposed on things from outside; for the things themselves are analyses of

the concept of concrete freedom or *Recht*.[87] However, does this mean that one can derive the

essence or nature of these things simply from an analysis of concepts as they function in

ordinary language? We also saw in Chapter 1 that such an assumption was possible in the

case of the German rationalists because they accepted "Semantic Givenness," namely that

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[85] See also: "But even if particular determinations of right *are* both right and reasonable, still it is one thing to *prove* that they have that character—which cannot be truly done except by means of the concept—and quite another thing to describe their appearance in history of the circumstances, contingencies, needs, and events which brought about their enactment. … [In the latter approach,] what is really essential, the concept of the thing, they have not discussed at all" (*GPR* 36/21/§ 3R).

[86] See especially Thompson (2017) for an account largely in agreement with the above, though he distinguishes his from "rationalism" by a narrower conception of the latter. He writes that Hegel's methodology "holds the justification of a normative claim to require showing that it is necessarily entailed as a moment in the immanent unfolding of the concept of freedom within a general systematic order of knowledge" (46). See also Nuzzo (2017), from the same volume, who treats the logical method of Hegel in the *GPR* as akin to the logic of action in general.

[87] As Hegel writes in explaining the unique character of right, "Since thought has [in right] risen to be the essential form, we must try to grasp right too as thought. It seems to be opening wide the door to contingent opinions to hold that thought is to be pre-eminent over right; yet true thought is not an opinion about the thing but the concept of the thing itself [*der Begriff der Sache selbst*]" (*GPR* 17/7/Z. to Preface).

the system of transparent concepts is given (though incompletely) in an analysis of ordinary thought and language (cf. 1.3.2.). For theological reasons – both the acceptance of "natural" logic "prescribed by God" and pre-established harmony more generally – they could complacently regard our "first concepts" of things as imperfect but accurate guides to the essences of things.

Most more contemporary conceptual analysts simply do not worry about the relationship between concepts and essences – recall the remarks about Strawson from the Introduction. So for them, we can take ordinary language as a starting point, without worrying that it will not suffice for some metaphysical correspondence. Now that we have established that Hegel takes a positive view about the relationships between concepts and the substance or essences of social ontology, it is worth considering whether he can share in the carefree attitude, however differently motivated, of the linguistic philosophers and German rationalists.

Clearly, Hegel does not accept Semantic Givenness in the strong form of the German rationalists (cf. 1.3.2.), and if he is trusting in the truthful character of concepts in ordinary language, it is for deeper reasons than the linguistic philosophers of the last century. However, something like the "naïve" procedure of conceptual analysis will hold in the case of social-ontological concepts. For, as we have seen, social ontology is constituted by human purposes, and in a post-Revolutionary "republican" society, these are purposes of citizens themselves. These purposes are inchoately understood in many cases, but (at least ideally) citizens *know what they mean* by words like "freedom," "legal recognition," "liability," and "fair exchange." The meaning of these terms, what is traditionally called their concept, coincides with a purpose that these concepts express, and which institutions are designed to achieve. We have seen that these institutions exist at all because subjects have and collectively realize

these purposes. So it is realistic to believe that the meaning of these terms as they are used

understandingly by citizens is reasonably similar to the meaning that the "philosopher"

(Hegel, in this case) will "derive" from more primitive sources. This is to say that the

achievements of modern political life (to the extent that they are achieved) make possible a

trust that the analysis of (many of) the concepts we have inherited can reveal the nature of

the institutions that make up our world.

 Hegel is often thought to disregard the thought of the individual in a way that would

make the appeal to the concepts of concrete citizens seem empty. However, it is important

to recognize that Hegel sees individual recognition as essential to the existence of the social

ontology of *Sittlichkeit*. He writes that *Sittlichkeit* is "The *concrete* identity of the good with the

subjective will, an identity which is therefore the truth of them…" (*GPR* 286/152/§ 141).

This implies that ethical life would not exist without the assent of subjective wills.[88] And a

passage we referenced for other purposes can be seen from this perspective as well. Speaking

of the laws and institutions of ethical life, Hegel writes,

> On the other hand, they are not something alien to the subject. On the contrary, his
> spirit bears witness to them as to *its own essence*, the essence in which he has a *feeling of
> selfhood*, and in which he lives as in his own element which is not distinguished from
> himself. The subject is thus linked to the ethical order by a relation which is closer to
> identity than even the relation of faith or trust." (295/155/§ 147)

This passage gives us reason to think that the ordinary citizen, whose very essence and self is

constituted by laws and institutions, has some insight into what these institutions are, and

ought to recognize them as satisfying his or her own purposes.[89] Indeed, this is confirmed

elsewhere in the *GPR* when Hegel speaks of "the highest right of the subject" as "the right

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[88] Likewise with the state. The state realizes concrete freedom in part because "personal individuality and its particular interests … achieve their complete development and gain recognition of their right for itself" (*GPR* 406/235/§ 260).

[89] In a parallel manner, H.LA. Hart (1961, Ch. IV) argues that legal authority is in part *constituted* by a "habit of obedience" on the part of subjects. If subjects did not recognize the law in some implicit manner, it would not exist.

of giving recognition only to what my insight sees as rational" (245/127/§ 132R).[90] Though Hegel would admit that most subjects of modern social life do not take advantage of this right of rational insight, often having at best a feeling or quasi-religious confidence in the institutions of social life, he thinks that an "*adequate knowledge*" of one's "identity" with ethical life is possible from "thinking in terms of the concept" (296/156/§ 147R). This conceptual thinking may be the unique task of philosophy, but it articulates something already implicit in the attitudes of modern subjects.

Odd as it may seem, philosophy as conceptual analysis can double as essential knowledge only at a late historical stage in which the thoughts and feelings of individuals (their "intuitions," in contemporary parlance) are implicitly in agreement with the concepts and purposes that constitute the existing institutions. At this stage, as Hegel says in the *Phenomenology*, "[P]ast existence is already acquired property of the universal spirit that constitutes the substance of the individual", so that the individual's education contains a "silhouette" of the past education of the world (*PG* 32-33/15/§ 28; slightly modified). We are naively inculcated into a system of concepts that can represent the rational historical achievements of a social ontology. Of course, this does not mean that *all* our concepts are good guides to the truth; the work of philosophy consists partly in sorting out what does and does not genuinely follow from our most general purposes. Indeed, some institutions are not the product of the concept at all, but perhaps some unthinking social force. Recall Hegel's remark:

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[90] Recall Hegel's "exotericism" from the Preface to the *PG*: "The intelligible form of science is the way to science, open to everyone and equally accessible to everyone, and to attain to rational knowledge through the understanding is the just demand of the consciousness that approaches science; for the understanding is thinking, is the pure I in general; and what is intelligible is what is already familiar and common to science and the unscientific consciousness alike, enabling the unscientific consciousness to enter science immediately" (20/9/§ 13).

> All else, apart from this actuality established through the working of the concept itself, is ephemeral existence, external contingency, opinion, unsubstantial appearance, untruth, illusion, and so forth. (*GPR* 29/17/§ 1R).

And further, he writes,

> In regard to spirit and its activity, we also have to be careful that we are not mislead by the well-meant striving of rational cognition into trying to show that phenomena that have the character of contingency are necessary…[C]hance indisputably plays a decisive role in [language], and the same is true with regard to the configurations of law, art, etc. (*EL* 286/219/§ 145Z).[91]

So not everything that there is in a social ontology will be justified by appeal to concepts in currency; some will be products of mere chance or contingency. Amie Thomasson helps illustrate how such "ephemeral" phenomena could exist even if social ontology is some cases a product of conceptuality. Though she thinks that some social institutions can be constituted conceptually, other socially constituted events can result from those primary institutions that are not themselves conceptually transparent. To use her example, an economic recession is undoubtedly a piece of social ontology, in the sense that no recession would exist except as a consequence of what people do and believe (Thomasson 2003, 276). Moreover, recessions occur within market economies which are (or can be) constituted according to explicit rules. Nevertheless, recessions are not constituted according to rules of which we are the author (thus the difficulty or inability for economic pundits to predict or explain economic crises like that of 2008). Similarly, Sally Haslanger (2012) speaks of the concepts of race and gender in their current forms as features of social ontology[92]; nevertheless, she argues that they are currently employed in an oppressive form, one that we should disavow (ibid., Ch. 7).[93] In Hegel's terms (his own views of race and gender

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[91] I am indebted to de Boer (2010a, 151) for this reference.

[92] Haslanger (2012, Ch. 2), discusses a large typology of distinct forms of social construction (which vary in their origin and degree of objectivity), so I am simplifying here by using the general category.

[93] Haslanger's conception of an "analytical" approach (2012, 223ff.) to a "What is…?" question (despite its being confusingly different from conceptual analysis as often understood) seems strikingly similar to Hegel's understanding of the relationship of concepts and language (recall 2.3.2. above). The analytical approach may

notwithstanding), these concepts are not themselves derived from "the concept": they are not justified according to the purpose of realizing concrete freedom that can be recognized by everyone. Hegel is thus not committed to saying that such institutions or constructions *are* conceptually derivable, just because they are a part of current social ontology. Indeed, the dialectical portion of philosophy often has to show that some apparent concept is "nothing in itself," so that the things that apparently correspond to it are accordingly untrue in themselves.

Nevertheless, Hegel's analytical rationalism bears genuine resemblance both to the classical German rationalists, in their conviction that conceptual truths can be derived by an analysis of the "first concept" we have of things, and of later linguistic conceptual analysts. Unlike the former, Hegel's method only applies where Conceptual Transparency holds, and thus only in a restricted domain, of which the teleologically constituted domain of social ontology is a paradigm case. For in teleology, the structure of indeterminacy to determinacy matches the more general rationalist pattern of conceptual explication. But unlike the later conceptual analysts, Hegel does not ignore the question of the objectivity of his method. Though in one sense, Hegel, too, is investigating "what we mean" when we use certain social and political concepts, this is because our meaning is also responsible for the objects in question.

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use a term with a certain function in ordinary language, but imbues it with meaning that is completely dependent on its role in a theory. The overlap with language then serves the role of modifying unreflective usage, but not altogether "changing the subject." Just so, Hegel writes, "It is the privilege of philosophy to choose such expressions from the language of ordinary life … as *seem to approximate* the determinations of the concept. There is no question of *demonstrating* for a *word* chosen from ordinary life that in ordinary life too the same concept is associated with that for which philosophy uses it…" (*WL* II: 406/628). Haslanger's approach is decidedly more politically revisionary than Hegel's, of course.

5.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to show that Hegel derived a conception of social

ontology by building on the practical philosophy of Kant and Fichte, and that by

understanding the origin of Hegel's social ontology in this way, we can see how his view

leads to a paradigm case of Conceptual Transparency. Subsequently, I showed how a

number of "rationalist" features of Hegel's view can be accounted for by understanding the

connection of Conceptual Transparency and social ontology. The metaphysical,

epistemological, and methodological dimensions are of course deeply intertwined in the case

of social ontology, just as we should expect from Hegel. In using social ontology as a

paradigm case, I have looked only for "proof positive" of Conceptual Transparency, rather

than providing a comprehensive defense of the role of that doctrine in Hegel's thinking.

Even so, in doing so, we can already see that many of Hegel's strange-sounding claims about

the concept, absolute knowledge, and "substance" can find a *sufficient* justification in the

realm of social ontology. That is, thanks to social ontology, a claim such as "the concept

gives itself reality"[94] even if not every case

Hegel recognizes would receive the same justification.[95] Moreover, since there is at least one

domain where Conceptual Transparency holds, all universal denials of the ability for

humanly accessible concepts to express the essence of something must be false, if Hegel's

defense of this domain is cogent. This implies that Kant's constraints on the content of

theoretical concepts would have to be modified to make room for the content that

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[94] That is, it does not say "Every concept gives itself its own reality," which would be subject to counterexamples.

[95] Recall that the domain of teleologically constituted entities is broader than the domain of socially constituted entities. The social side of social ontology is relevant insofar as social actors are purposively guided, but Hegel would not see the domain of the purposive as restricted to obviously social contexts. See Ch. 4, note 45 and note 36 above.

determines social institutions, though presumably much more as well. It also implies that we have at least one domain where "conceptual analysis" has an irreducible significance, because the objects in study are themselves conceptual constituted. Thus, though the ambitions of this chapter have been modest, especially in that social ontology is perhaps the easiest domain in which to see Hegel's theory of concepts hold sway, this paradigm helps us see the important and potentially revisionary consequences for our understanding of the role of concepts in philosophy.

Conclusion

If the line of argument I have presented in this dissertation is on target, one of the virtues of Hegel's thought is to point out to us something almost obviously true, but which we are inclined to disregard, if we notice it at all. Namely, that the concepts we use do not merely have a passive and representational function, but also an active and constitutive one; and sometimes our theoretical use of concepts presupposes a prior, active use. We do not have to be Hegelians to recognize this fact. But I think it is a uniquely Hegelian conviction that this fact is significant enough that we should re-organize many of our views about knowledge, reality, and philosophy in general around such a paradigm. If concepts are not only in us to represent an alien world, but also to constitute a world, this should change the way we think of conceptual knowledge as such.

Philosophy, one might say, wants to know not merely appearances, but rather the *essences* of things. But where shall we look to find them? Are they not hidden behind the veil of appearances, or at perhaps put off to the idealized end of inquiry? Not according to Hegel. We should recall this striking passage:

> Thus, inasmuch as subjective thought is our own most inner doing, and the objective concept of things constitutes what is essential to them [*die Sache selbst*], we cannot step away from this doing, cannot stand above it, and even less can we stand step beyond the nature of things. We can, however, dispense with this last claim; inasmuch as it is symmetrical with the one preceding it, it says that our thoughts have a reference to the essence of things; but this is an empty claim, for the essence of things [*die Sache*] would then be set up as the rule for our concepts whereas, for us, that essence can only be the concepts that we have of the things. (*WL* I: 25/16)

Hegel retorts to our modern anxiety about knowledge and reality with the pastoral conviction of St. Paul, if for other purposes. In effect he proclaims, 'Do not say in your heart "Who will ascend to the Platonic heaven?" (that is, to bring the *Sache* down) or "Who will

descend into the abyss of sensory matter?" (that is, to draw the *Sache* out).' Instead: 'The *Sache* is near you, it is in your language and in your concept.'[1] On the account I have provided, the *Sache* is near us, and contained in our concept of it, but on non-subjectivist grounds. Yes, the essences that things have depends (in many cases) on "our own subjective doing." Yet not in the manner of traditional idealism, nor post-modern constructivism. We do not have essential 'knowledge' of things because we impose our concepts on things, or because <*reality*> is itself a construction of ours. We have essential knowledge of things because (or if and when) they are the product of an activity that is intrinsically intelligible, namely the determination of a purposive concept. Here there is no difference between a concept and an essence to speak of.

This solution lies comfortably between both traditional rationalist and Kantian ideas. It is an affirmation of a restricted form of Conceptual Transparency, but just where the rationalist version of that view relies on theological support, Hegel's version replaces it with a non-theological, teleological explanation of objective conceptual constitution. Hegel's view thus does not rely on any presupposed affinity between concepts and things, but an affinity that is the product and result of prior purposive activity. Hegel can affirm central convictions of rationalism, tongue-out-of-cheek, because these products of activity are real "things" just as brute physical objects are. And in such cases, we know what things are "in themselves."

To speak in this way may seem unfair to Kant. For Kant's general denial of our knowledge of things in themselves is evidently not directed to our knowledge of such "things" of which Hegel wants to affirm our knowledge. But if this is so, then Kant's critique lacks its pretended generality. This is what we have seen in regard to Kant's strongly

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[1] Cf. Romans 10: 6-8.

stated Aesthetic Constraint on conceptual content. Kant's Constraint cannot be applied to all the concepts that have objective content. While Kant recognizes important exceptions in the case of practical concepts, he does not adequately consider how a consideration of practical concepts (including a recognition of their objective realization) should force him to abandon utterly the Aesthetic Constraint. Simply put, the apparently straightforward idea that our concepts have content because of their direct connection with sensible objects turns out to obscure rather than illuminate the character of many concepts recognized by all parties to the dispute.

Despite this challenge to Kant, my account of Hegel's position remains faithful to the spirit of Kant's project. Kant's restrictive account of conceptual content was meant to serve his project of rejecting unlawful inferences about objects beyond all experience, and nothing I have said about Hegel contravenes this project, if taken in a broad sense. In particular, one of Kant's abiding marks on philosophical thought is to prevent the naïve assumption that mere logical or conceptual possibility is in general a good guide to how things are. Hegel does not re-introduce any such naivety. He only prevents Kant's restrictions on one use of concepts from determining the bounds of concepts *überhaupt*.

While I believe there is genuine importance to Hegel's appeal to teleological concepts to mend this defect in the Kantian account, the formal or logical ground of Hegel's alternative view of conceptual content is not as clear as one would like. Against Kant's appeal to sensory intuition to explain conceptual content, Hegel tells us that concepts have content solely through the negativity of their interrelated determinations. The 'negativity' of purposive singulars specifies a particular means to realize a universal end. Through a system of such mutually related purposes, our representations are determined acquire genuinely conceptual content. Can this 'right kind' of nothing produce something after all? To be sure,

it seems correct to say that purposive activity is not represented by aesthetic or sensory content. To this extent, whatever our account of teleological concepts will be, the Kantian restriction should be modified, and Hegel seems to offer a promising direction on this score. But whether negativity itself carry bear the necessary burden, or is instead a promissory note, remains unclear in my view. I have not tried to provide a complete philosophical reconstruction of this dimension of Hegel's thought, precisely because it seems to be based on a partial insight. Nevertheless, whatever Hegel's success in his endeavor to explain conceptual content on non-aesthetic grounds, I hope at least to have made it clear that this project was in view. Hegel's views about the metaphysical reach of concepts was greatly based on his attempt to rethink their formal dimension. Even if his attempt is underdeveloped, it points in a valuable direction.

The same holds, I believe, with the question with which we began, namely, the place of 'conceptual conceptions' of philosophy. Hegel can, after all, be counted as a great ally for those who wish to determine the nature and scope of philosophy in terms of its uniquely conceptual character. Whether the specifically teleological explanation of Conceptual Transparency can be extended to all cases in which conceptual explication is a worthwhile endeavor is here unresolved. Nevertheless, it is clear that many cases of interest to us can be seen in this light. When we analyze the concepts of *<knowledge>*, *<mind>*, *<person>*, and *<morally right>*, it is always worth asking what *role* we expect these concepts to play, not only as they are 'means' for other purposes of ours, but as they are themselves purposively marked.[2] They are concepts used to mark out things we are trying to, and sometimes do, achieve. Hegel shows that such systematic analysis may be necessary not because we are unclear about what these words mean or how to use them, but perhaps because their

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[2] See Thomasson (2017) for a contemporary account of conceptual analysis along these lines.

correlative purposes may be insufficiently determined, or insufficiently connected to other related purposes. Hegel's systematic conception of philosophy is thus deeply related to his purposive account of conceptual content. On this account, it is fruitless to attempt to analyze individual terms or concepts, apart from their consideration to a wider network. Instead, Hegel wants to convince us that the objective world is, or can be, the product of "the concept," and thus our disparate purposes can only be coherently articulated and realized in a unity. If so, an explication of the concept will also be a reconciliation with our world.

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