

HEGEL'S CRITIQUE OF
METAPHYSICS

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PREFACE

The first part of the present book is the translation of my 1981 *Hegel et la Critique de la Métaphysique: étude sur la Doctrine de l'Essence* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin). The second part consists of two essays written in the early nineties, in which I offered a somewhat different perspective on Hegel's philosophical project.

Hegel et la Critique de la Métaphysique was originally written as my Thèse de Doctorat de Troisième Cycle (Ph.D.), which I defended in the fall of 1980 at the University of Paris-Sorbonne. Throughout the late sixties and seventies in France, the question of the relation between Marx's historical materialism and Hegel's dialectical method had been at the forefront of philosophical discussions. A view prominently defended by Louis Althusser was that the true ancestor of Marx's naturalistic treatment of society and history was not Hegel's dialectical method, plagued with metaphysical idealism and a teleological view of nature and society, but Spinoza's version of naturalistic monism. My interest in Hegel's *Science of Logic* was thus sparked initially by my interest in Marx, in contemporary political and social theory inspired by Marx, and in Althusser's provocative statements concerning Marx's and Lenin's relation to Hegel. One can find traces of this original interest in Part I of the present book, especially in Chapters 2 ("Twists and turns of Hegel's contradiction") and 3 ("*Grund* against *concept*?") where my discussion of Hegel's notions of "contradiction" and "ground" (*Grund*) is also a discussion of (then) prominent Marxist interpretations of Hegel such as those (in France) of Louis Althusser or (in Italy) of Galvano Della Volpe and Lucio Colletti.

Given this starting point, my study of the *Science of Logic* took an unexpected turn when I realized that no single step Hegel took in that work could be understood except against the background of Hegel's

debt to Kant's transcendental philosophy. My interest in Hegel's exposition of "Ground" in the Doctrine of Essence of the *Science of Logic* had initially been elicited by the fact that Hegel appeared to offer a concept of totality, and of the complex correlations between an empirical multiplicity of elements and the unifying structures organizing them, far more complex and interesting than the teleological model Althusser attributed to Hegel. But now in exploring Hegel's explanation of "ground" it became obvious to me that Hegel's version of the relation between empirical multiplicity and its unifying principle was inspired by Kant's analysis of the relation between the inexhaustible multiplicity of possible empirical entities and their law-like unity, and by Kant's account of the dependence of the law-like unity of nature on what he called the "transcendental unity of self-consciousness," namely the principle of mental activity that ensures that all our representations will belong to a single unified consciousness. Similarly, in studying Hegel's section on "contradiction" I became convinced that Hegel's treatment of "identity," "difference," "opposition," and "contradiction" could be understood only in light of Kant's treatment of the very same concepts in the chapter of the *Critique of Pure Reason* entitled "The Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection." Indeed, Kant's description of those concepts as "concepts of reflection" is echoed in Hegel's description of them as "essentialities or determinations of reflection." Thus a project that started as an exploration of Marx's debt (or lack thereof) to Hegel, became an exploration of Hegel's response to Kant.

There is a striking similarity between the interpretation I proposed of the relation between Hegel's "speculative" logic and Kant's "transcendental" logic, and the view defended by Robert Pippin in his groundbreaking *Hegel's Idealism: the Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge University Press, 1989). Pippin's book is broader in scope, offering an interpretation of Hegel's system as the culmination of Kant's transcendental enterprise freed from the various guises of Kant's dualism: dualism of reason and sensibility, of thing in itself and appearance, of natural necessity and freedom. My own book focused on only a few chapters of the Doctrine of Essence (Book 2 of the first part of the *Science of Logic*: "The Objective Logic"). The reason for this choice, after I realized my interest was shifting from Hegel as an ancestor of Marx to Hegel as a descendant of Kant, was that Hegel himself described more specifically the second book of the *Science of Logic* (to which "ground" and "contradiction" belong) as the true successor to Kant's Transcendental Logic.

The particular chapters of the Doctrine of Essence I focused on seemed especially appropriate to bring out this Kantian legacy as well as Hegel's transformation of it.

The completed thesis had four chapters, plus a short introduction and conclusion which now introduce and conclude Part I of the present book. Chapter 1 is an analysis of the relation between Hegel's dialectical logic and Kant's transcendental logic. Chapters 2 and 3 analyze Hegel's treatment of "contradiction" and "ground." Chapter 4 offers an interpretation of Hegel's complex treatment of modal categories (actuality, possibility, necessity) and of the transition from these categories to the single most important concept of Part II of the *Science of Logic* (The Subjective Logic, or Doctrine of the Concept): freedom. Except for a few attempts at making my formulations clearer, I have left the original book unchanged, becoming Part I of the present book. Any attempt at amending it would have led to complete rewriting, and it was not my intention to undertake such a rewriting at this time. Thus the first part of the book bears the mark of the considerably younger philosophical apprentice I was at the time.

The two additional essays that now form Part II introduce a somewhat different perspective, which in some respects corrects my original understanding of Hegel's intentions in the *Science of Logic*. Let me briefly explain how.

It remained unclear to me, in light of my analyses of the Doctrine of Essence, how much of my interpretation of Hegel's Logic in relation to Kant's transcendental philosophy still held up when one proceeds from the Objective Logic to the Subjective Logic or Doctrine of the Concept, where Hegel takes himself to move decisively beyond Kant toward his own "speculative logic." More specifically, I was unsure how much of my defense of Hegel as the successor of Kant's critique of dogmatic metaphysics still stands once one moves to Hegel's Subjective Logic. And I was unsure how well Hegel's view of the relation between "ground" and "conditions," unity of thought and plurality of empirical elements, holds up in the face of Hegel's exposition of objectivity as the self-development of the concept.

I therefore embarked on a systematic study of the Subjective Logic. The first hurdle along the way was the extensive praise and criticism of Kant's Transcendental Deduction of the Categories with which Hegel opens this second part of his *Science of Logic*. In order to form for myself a clearer view of Hegel's position and its relation to Kant's, I returned to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and fell head first into the ocean of Kant's

philosophy. Instead of a book on Hegel's Subjective Logic, I produced a book on Kant's first Critique (*Kant et le Pouvoir de Juger*, whose original French version appeared in 1993; its expanded English version, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, was published in 1998 by Princeton University Press). In the meantime, I did come up with at least some answers to the questions just mentioned, concerning the overall import of Hegel's Logic. These answers are presented in the two chapters that form Part II of the book.

Chapter 5 ("Point of view of man or knowledge of God. Kant and Hegel on concept, judgment, and reason") is a revised version of my contribution to the conference organized in August 1995 by Sally Sedgwick on "The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy: Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel." Its perspective is quite different from that of my earlier book. The focus now shifts from the Doctrine of Essence to Hegel's notions of "concept," "judgment," and "reason" in the Subjective Logic. I analyze the change in the meaning of these notions from Kant's transcendental to Hegel's speculative logic, finding help in an earlier text of Hegel, the 1801 *Faith and Knowledge*, where Hegel offers a systematic evaluation of Kant's standpoint in all three *Critiques* and defines his own philosophical project in contrast to Kant's. While Hegel's standpoint undergoes significant changes from *Faith and Knowledge* to the *Science of Logic* (I lay out some of these changes at the end of the chapter), nevertheless the earlier text is invaluable in helping us understand Hegel's radical revision of Kant's notion of "reason" and his related revisions, at least in the context of "speculative" logic, of Kant's notions of "concept" and "judgment."

The original version of Chapter 6 ("Hegel on Kant on judgment") was written and published in French in 1992. Its main focus is Hegel's notion of "Judgment" (as expounded in the Subjective Logic) in contrast to Kant's. Despite his harsh criticism of Kant's table of logical functions of judgment and what he deems its "empirical" character, Hegel seems faithfully to follow the pattern established by Kant in his table, consisting of four main titles of judgment (quantity, quality, relation, modality), and three divisions under each title (affirmative, negative, infinite; universal, particular, singular; categorical, hypothetical, disjunctive; problematic, assertoric, apodictic). I show how and why in Hegel's reading, the four titles and their three respective divisions distinguish judgments considered not just in their form but also in their content, and what this tells us about the shift from Kant's "general formal" to Hegel's "speculative" logic.

Chapters 5 and 6 both end on a fairly negative note. In Chapter 5, I express doubts about Hegel's charge against Kant, according to which Kant was wrong to give up on his own most important discovery when he treated as a merely negative notion the idea of an intuitive understanding, which Kant introduced both in the first and in the third *Critique* to illuminate *a contrario* the nature and limitations of our own finite, discursive understanding. In Chapter 6, I express doubts about Hegel's reinterpretation of Kant's four titles and twelve divisions of elementary logical functions of judgment in the context of his own "absolute judgment," and about Hegel's definition of "the rational" as a kind of realized syllogism: an individual entity (e.g. a house, or a human community) instantiating a universal concept (e.g. "family home," "State") by virtue of its particular constitution (e.g. the architectural structure of the house, the Constitution that organizes the community). How do my doubts about those points relate to the more positive assessment I gave of Hegel's enterprise in the Doctrine of Essence?

In the Introduction to the *Science of Logic*, Hegel proclaims his debt to Kant's idea that metaphysics should now be *logic*. What Hegel means by this, I proposed in my study of Hegel's Doctrine of Essence, is that rather than the empty endeavor to come up with a science of being *qua* being or a science of the universal determinations of things as they are in themselves, metaphysics after Kant is a science of being as *being thought*. In other words, metaphysics is an investigation of the universal determinations of thought at work in any attempt to think what is. Hegel goes even further than Kant, I maintained, in claiming that the kinds of entities under consideration depend on the kind of thought at work in individuating them, or on what Hegel calls the "attitude of thought toward objectivity." This being so, "truth" in metaphysical thinking does not consist in the agreement of thought to an object supposed to be independent of it, but rather in the grasp of the fundamental set of thought-determinations by which an object is individuated, as well as the grasp of the place of these thought-determinations in what Hegel calls the movement of thinking in general, i.e. the space of concepts under which any object at all is determined. Grasping the universal features of that movement of thinking is what is supposed to be achieved when we reach the "Absolute Idea," the final chapter in Hegel's *Science of Logic*. According to the interpretation of Hegel's view I offered in *Hegel et la Critique de la Métaphysique*, this was how Hegel claimed to refute both the empty claims of pre-Kantian dogmatic metaphysics and Kant's subjectivism and psychological idealism: grasping the movement

of thought (the set of conceptual determinations) by which a thing is individuated as the kind of thing it is was grasping *die Sache selbst*, the very matter at hand. It was grasping what it is that makes the thing as it appears the kind of appearance it is, by grasping its proper place in the thought process that provides the framework for any determination of thing.

However, this way of characterizing Hegel's project in the *Science of Logic* appeared radically insufficient once I started exploring Hegel's endorsement of Kant's "intuitive understanding" as "the true idea of reason" and Hegel's related metaphysical reconstructions of Kant's notions of "concept" and "judgment" in the Subjective Logic. In its early version (as I analyze it in Hegel's 1801 *Faith and Knowledge*) and even more in its mature version (in the Introduction to the Subjective Logic in the *Science of Logic*) Hegel's endorsement of Kant's "intuitive understanding" is the key to Hegel's claim that the *Science of Logic* expounds "the presentation of God, as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and of a finite spirit" or again his claim that the concept of God, rather than "I think," is the proper starting point of all philosophy. This radical shift of perspective is what I emphasize in taking up as the title of Part II of this book an expression present in the title of my 1995 essay (now Chapter 5): "Point of view of man or knowledge of God." The alternative under examination is that between Kant's avowed limitation of his critical philosophy to the human, "finite" standpoint (both theoretical and practical) and Hegel's claim to bring about, in expounding the "pure thought-determination" of the *Science of Logic*, precisely the kind of absolute standpoint Kant described as that of an "intuitive understanding" and presented, in §§76–77 of the *Critique of Judgment*, as a mere problematic concept meant to clarify by contrast the nature and limitations of human understanding.

Of course, it is by no means obvious that taking into account Hegel's emphasis on the standpoint of an intuitive understanding or "God's knowledge" as the backbone to the whole enterprise of the *Science of Logic*, is incompatible with the analysis of the Doctrine of Essence outlined above. On the contrary, one might read it along the very same lines of interpretation, and say that in emphasizing – against Kant – the importance of Kant's appeal to intuitive understanding in the third *Critique*, and in relating it to the Transcendental Ideal (the idea of an *ens realissimum* as a necessary idea of pure reason) in the first *Critique*, Hegel completes his appropriation of Kant's transcendental Logic by calling us to the ever-renewed task of assigning each and every one of the

thought determinations expounded in the Logic its proper place in the development of the whole. Correspondingly, the notions of “concept” and “judgment” expounded in the Subjective Logic would acquire a meaning peculiar to the context of the *Science of Logic*, in which “concept” refers to the unified process of conceptualizing Kant described as the transcendental unity of apperception and “judgment” refers to this process in its relation to what resists and ceaselessly reactivates it: the whole of reality *to be* conceptualized. Such a reading would have some kinship with the interpretation of Hegel’s project Robert Brandom derives from his reading of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹ It would also be in continuity with the interpretation of Hegel’s Logic as a radicalization of Kant’s transcendental philosophy that I offered in the first part of this book, in the course of my analysis of Hegel’s Doctrine of Essence.

This is an attractive reading, but one that does not fully do justice to Hegel’s claim to have restored metaphysics against the Kantian strictures. Understanding this claim in its own terms is what I try to do when I explain it in light of Hegel’s endorsement and transformation of Kant’s “intuitive understanding” and Hegel’s subsequent characterization of judgment as the self-division (*Urteilung*) of infinite being. For reasons I explain in Chapters 5 and 6, I do not think Hegel makes a convincing case for restoring metaphysics along these lines: this is the negative note on which both chapters end. Nevertheless, I offer the outline of a compromise that would preserve both Kant’s prudent restriction of any metaphysical endeavor to the strictures of the “human standpoint” and Hegel’s holistic and dynamic exposition of “pure thought-determinations.” Such a compromise takes nothing away from the reading of Hegel’s Doctrine of Essence I propose in Part I of this book, and it is somewhere along the lines of the deliberately one-sided reconstruction of the Subjective Logic I suggested above. This kind of reconstruction by no means excuses us from the task of understanding where and why it differs from Hegel’s original view or what we might be missing in adopting it. On the contrary, becoming aware of such contrasts is part of what makes reading philosophers of the past an exciting and surprising endeavor.²

I do not want to close this Preface without signaling what I take to be the major limitation of my interpretation of Hegel’s Doctrine of Essence in the 1981 book. There my reading of Hegel’s relation to Kant was almost exclusively focused on Hegel’s response to Kant’s transcendental logic. I now think I should have given more attention to the fact

that one of the most important ways in which Hegel transforms Kant's transcendental logic consists in this: for Hegel, the relation between the unity of thought and the multiplicity of empirical elements has inseparably theoretical and practical aspects. So for instance, when I analyze the relation between the unity of *ground* and the multiplicity of *conditions* (in Chapter 3) I analyze it in light of the relation, in Kant, between transcendental unity of apperception and the empirical manifold it unifies for cognition. But just as important, in Hegel's elaboration of the relation between "ground" and "conditions," is the relation between what Kant called practical reason, with its self-prescribed imperative to order natural determinations for action according to its own norm (freedom), and these natural determinations themselves, which have their own law-like unity, cognized under the unity of apperception. The complex relation between these two kinds of unifying activity in the face of the contingent multiplicity of the empirical, finds its way into Hegel's notion of "ground" and then, in the Subjective Logic, into those of "concept," and "Idea." In the second part of the present book I do emphasize the fact that Hegel's *Science of Logic* is to be read in light of Hegel's appropriation of all three *Critiques*, not just the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Needless to say, a lot more remains to be done to take the full measure of Hegel's achievement in this regard.

A work that spans so many years is bound to have incurred more debts than can be recounted. Among the tireless interlocutors, critics and friends who have helped me along this particular journey, I must at least mention Alexandre Adler for our discussions of Hegel and Marx, many years ago; Olivier Schwartz for more conversations than either of us, I am sure, can remember; Wayne Waxman for innumerable questions about Hegel and Kant, and for forcing me to doubt every single one of my unexamined assumptions. I was fortunate to benefit, over the years, from the advice and kind support of Bernard Bourgeois. Thanks to Aaron Garrett for suggesting the translation of *Hegel et la Critique de la Métaphysique*, and for insisting on its happening when I strongly doubted it was a good idea. My very special thanks to Terry Pinkard and to Robert Pippin for supporting the project of this translation and for their own work in making Hegel studies such an exciting field of investigation. Thanks to Robert Brandom, Michael Forster, and Paul Franks for illuminating conversations about Hegel's philosophy.

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INTRODUCTION

Numerous are the witnesses now coming forward in favor of a revision of the trial in dogmatism which Hegelian philosophy has had to endure. Hegel's *Logic* was the first accused in this trial. Benedetto Croce noted in his time that British Idealism had done Hegel a disservice by presenting Hegel's *Logic* as a systematic worldview and a universal method of knowledge.¹ The philosophies of history that flourished at the end of the nineteenth century, as well as one version of Marxism – that which finds expression in Friedrich Engels' *Dialectic of Nature* – played a similar role. A romantic description of universal laws common to nature, history, and thought was attributed to a thinker who adamantly opposed philosophical romanticism. As a result, the mere appeal to common sense all too often sufficed to dismiss Hegel's philosophy and, in particular, Hegel's *Logic*.

Today, however, the situation is different. In his Introduction to the issue of *Hegel-Studien* devoted to "The Science of Logic and the Logic of Reflection," Dieter Henrich writes:

After the revival of Hegelian philosophy at the beginning of this century, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* has for a long time been the center of attention in Hegel studies. [...] The *Science of Logic* was considered to be evidence of a genius that outlived itself, in which the real motivations and force of Hegel become visible only indirectly; and at the same time, as a work which had inspired an anachronistic Victorian Hegelianism.

This judgment has since undergone revision. [...] It is only after 1960 that one began to see attempts at a commentary [of the *Science of Logic*] that did not merely reproduce the style of Hegel's thought, but which described it from a somewhat distanced point of view, an indispensable condition for the success of any analysis.²

Thus commentators have begun to break away from the pathetic rewriting *ad infinitum* of Hegelian triads, and instead, to focus their attention on Hegel's challenge to the very nature of philosophical discourse. In France, Gérard Lebrun's recent book, *La Patience du concept*, is the most developed example of such an approach.³

In this context, reading Hegel's *Logic* as a critique of metaphysics has seemed to me particularly promising. I shall suggest in what follows that the meaning and systematic coherence of the concepts Hegel expounds in the *Logic* are thus brought into new light. The reader will be sole judge whether the analyses I propose, in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, of Hegel's concepts of "contradiction," "ground," and "actuality," confirm this view.

I first need to explain what I mean by the word "critique." Using this term is locating Hegel's *Logic* in the lineage of Kantian philosophy, and making of this lineage an important organizing principle of the *Logic* in its entirety. This point will be explained in Chapter 1 of this work. However, I should warn from the outset that here the meaning I am giving the term "critique" is different from the meaning we inherit from Kant. The critique I am attributing to Hegel is not the determination of the powers and limits of reason, supposed to be the indispensable preliminary to assessing any claim to metaphysical knowledge. Rather, it is the exposition of the very concepts of metaphysics, not in order to relegate them to the prop room of a dismissed dogmatism, but rather in order to call upon them to account for their own place and role in the activity of thinking.

It is a fairly well-known point that the "truth" of concepts, according to Hegel, is not their purported conformity to an object independent of them. Rather, it is their conformity to a project of thinking that is realized in them. In the *Science of Logic*, the initial project is to characterize *being*. But this project immediately collapses, and the *Science of Logic* is the painstaking exposition of the successive attempts to respond to this collapse and to reformulate the project in such a way that it can be realized. What are these new formulations, and in what way do they define a project that can be realized, indeed that is supposed to be realized by the whole process of thinking expounded in the *Science of Logic*? In other words, how can concepts be evaluated as to their "truth," if this means their adequacy to the project they are supposed to accomplish? However difficult it is to answer such a question, accepting that these are the terms of Hegel's problem in the *Science of Logic* is a necessary condition for even beginning to enter the text.

In all fairness, Hegel would have rejected the term “critique” to characterize what he is doing in the *Science of Logic*. For him, “critique” is this inconsistent attitude which consists in wanting to learn how to swim before jumping into the water, i.e. wanting to determine a priori the rights of reason instead of considering what reason *in fact* does, and produces. Now my defense here is that the use I am making of the term “critique” does not so much relate it, retrospectively, to Kant (although again, Hegel’s relation to Kant will be a guiding concern of this book) as prospectively, to Marx. What I am proposing is that Hegel offers a critique of metaphysics in the way Marx will later offer a “critique of political economy.” Or rather, Marx offers a critique of political economy like Hegel, *and not Kant*, offered a critique of metaphysics. Marx does not ask: under what conditions is a political economy possible? Rather, he asks: what is going on, that is, what is thought, *in fact*, in political economy? What are the referents and reciprocal relations of its concepts? This way of proceeding is precisely the same as the one Hegel adopts in his *Science of Logic*. It does not consist in asking under what conditions metaphysics is possible. Rather, it consists in investigating what metaphysics is about, and how the project of metaphysics needs to be redefined if one is to come to any satisfactory accomplishment of its self-set goal.

By thus forcing the term “critique” into Hegel’s thought, I would like above all to suggest the following idea: at every stage in the *Science of Logic*, the transition from one concept to the next is inseparable from a particular stand taken with respect to the status of these concepts (the way they relate to other concepts, and the way they present a content). Moreover, every transition from one concept to the next is driven by the effort to elucidate further, not only the content of the concept (what is thereby thought), but the nature of its relation to “being” (in Part 1, Book 1 of the *Science of Logic*, Being), to something “actual” (in Part 1, Book 2, the Doctrine of Essence), or to an “object” (in Part 2, the Subjective Logic or Doctrine of the Concept).⁴ Taking once again our inspiration from Kant, we could say that Hegel’s Logic is inseparably a *metaphysical* and a *transcendental* deduction of the categories of metaphysics: a justification of claims concerning their content as concepts (what is thereby being thought: “metaphysical deduction”), and a justification of claims concerning their relation to objects (or reality, or being: “transcendental deduction”).⁵ The main goal of this twofold “deduction” is to put an end definitively and radically to all representational illusions, according to which thought could be gauged by any measure

other than itself. Thought, and particularly metaphysical thought, is not the mirror of nature. And yet it is neither arbitrary nor subjective (it is not relative to the particular standpoint of individual thinkers or empirically specified group of thinkers). This, again, is a Kantian theme. But as we shall see, Hegel gives this theme a very different meaning than the meaning it had for Kant.

From this perspective, we can see how the Doctrine of Essence plays a key role in the *Science of Logic*. The question of the "essence" of things is the metaphysical question *par excellence*. Discerning the "true" essence behind illusory appearances, thus grounding the possibility of truth in knowledge, is a traditional ambition of metaphysics. Yet Hegel, as is well known, refuses any rigid dichotomy between essence and appearance. What is less well known, however, is the significance of this refusal and the ways in which it threatens the very notion of "essence."

Revealing the essence of things, that is, of appearances, is nothing else, according to Hegel, than revealing the movement of thought that constitutes them as appearances. Nothing is revealed *beyond* appearances. Rather, one might say, what is revealed is *hither* with respect to appearances, *this side* of appearances. What is revealed is that an appearance is not *given*; rather, it is *constituted*. To understand the "essence" of appearance is to understand in what movement of thought it is constituted, from what totality of thought-determinations it derives its meaning. As we shall see, Hegel's whole exposition in the section on "contradiction" amounts to dissolving the illusory independence of "things" without, however, refuting their existence. It is a fact that we live in a world of things. Still, we must understand that these things are *our* fact, *our* doing – not in the sense that a philosophy of praxis would give to this statement, which would be too narrow an interpretation, but in the sense of a metaphysical account of the world as constituted by a process of *thinking*.

Such is therefore the main aspect of Hegel's reinterpretation of the notion of "essence": there is not an "essence" for each sensible thing; there is not even a "world of essences" behind the "world of appearances." This second formulation is a common interpretation of Hegel's position: the transition from "Being" to "Essence" in the Logic is supposed to be the transition from things to their relations.⁶ Yet Hegel's position is more subtle: the transition from "Being" to "Essence" is the transition from determinations which seem to exist by themselves and to be immediately presented in "things," to the revelation that

the apparently most “immediate” determinations are always constituted and organized in the context of a unified process of thinking. It is true that this unity of the process of thinking is initially revealed not in the “things” themselves, but rather in the relations by way of which it becomes necessary to explain them. The whole Doctrine of Essence is the step-by-step exposition of *things* and their *relations*, of what *appears as given* and what is explicitly *constructed by thought* (the “essence” of things). But this exposition also reveals that if it is possible to think an essence for the appearance, to unify things by way of their relations, it is because the same unity of thought that determines relations and laws, namely essence, was already at work in the very presentation of the appearance. One and the same unity of thought organizes the immediate presentation of things and the understanding of their relations: both being and essence are products of the concept.

Thus Hegel treads on a tightrope between empiricism and dogmatic rationalism. Against empiricism, he refuses to assert that appearance is the ultimate content of thought or the irreducible given on which all thought is supposed to be grounded. But against dogmatic rationalism, he refuses to postulate the existence of anything other than appearance, any kind of rational pattern or ground one should retrieve from things as they initially appear. There is nothing other than appearance, nothing beyond appearance. And yet, appearance is not what is true. This is the demonstration that Hegel tries to make in the Doctrine of Essence. The “true” will be the developed exposition of the concept that organizes appearances even in their most “immediate” presentation, in other words, the exposition of the thought mediations that condition the very production of appearance.

Note that Kantian philosophy too defined itself by way of its twofold struggle, against empiricism and against dogmatic rationalism. Against empiricism, Kant affirms that understanding and reason have concepts of their own that are not derived from the senses. Against dogmatism, he affirms that these concepts yield knowledge only in relation to sensible representations. What, then, is the difference between Kant and Hegel? One way to characterize this difference might be to say that Kant preserves some aspect of each of the two positions he refutes. Like the empiricist who “woke him from his dogmatic slumber,”⁷ Kant affirms that the ultimate soil for any of our cognitions is the appearance, the “phenomenon.” Like the rationalists, he distinguishes from the cognition of phenomena a cognition of things in themselves which only an intellect freed of its dependence on sensible intuition might

yield. Kant's uncomfortable position is a major source of difficulties in his philosophy, which is in some respects more obscure even than that of Hegel. Kant leaves empiricism behind without leaving it behind, he leaves rationalism behind without leaving it behind. There is a reason for this: Kant preserves a pattern which is common to empiricism and to dogmatic rationalism, and which Hegel calls *representation*. It consists in relating cognition to something radically external to it, whether an empirical given that is not yet thought (appearance), or a rational content that is not yet revealed (essence).⁸

Hegel, for his part, escapes the dilemmas of representation and puts an end to the dualism of essence and appearance by leaving behind the theory of knowledge (e.g. Kant's question: how is knowledge possible at all?) and instead taking up residence in metaphysics, which he takes to be a knowledge that is the world itself, and a world that is, itself, knowledge of the world.⁹ For him, essence and appearance are equally constitutive of the world. It would be just as wrong to believe that essence is true by itself as to believe in the truth of appearance. What needs to be understood is how *both* essence *and* appearance are produced, in a systematic unity which is that of the world as thought.

Let me briefly state a few important consequences of this point:

- Hegel's Logic is not a method, if by method one means a general pattern of progression to be followed by all knowledge (or for that matter, a particular pattern of progression to be followed by some particular knowledge, e.g. the method of physics, the method of chemistry, and so on). In this respect it is telling that Paul Feyerabend should have inserted a reference to Hegel's *Science of Logic* at the beginning of his essay *Against Method*.¹⁰ In a way, Hegel's Logic is the anti-method. It makes no claim to providing the structure of any other knowledge than itself. It certainly does not provide any recipe for progress in those sciences which Hegel calls "finite."
- It remains nevertheless that, according to Hegel's repeated assertions (especially in the chapter on the absolute Idea, see *GW* 12, 236-237; *S.* 6, 550; *L.* 825), his Logic is a *method*. It is philosophy as method, or method as philosophy. It is a method in that its mode of exposition (or its "form") is inseparable from its content.
- This is because the Logic deploys, from being to existence, from existence to actuality, from actuality to objectivity, an ontological relativism that finds its resolution only in the unfolding of the totality of the Logic. None of its moments, even the "last," has any truth apart

from all the others. To attempt not only to give an overall account of this unity, but also to elucidate it step by step, always leaves one open to the danger of becoming trapped within the endless re-exposition of the Hegelian system. Taking this risk is nevertheless necessary to understand what motivates the transition from one category to the next.

I hope to convince the reader that the effort is worth pursuing. For, in terms that are deeply influenced by transcendental philosophy, and thus by what is perhaps the illusion of a fundamental unity of thought, Hegel arrives at a formulation of the problem of metaphysics whose force remains in part to be discovered.