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Hegel's Critique of Metaphysics

Béatrice Longuenesse

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HEGEL'S CRITIQUE OF METAPHYSICS

Hegel's *Science of Logic* has received less attention than his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but Hegel himself took it to be his highest philosophical achievement and the backbone of his system. The present book focuses on this most difficult of Hegel's published works. Béatrice Longuenesse offers a close analysis of core issues, including discussions of what Hegel means by "dialectical logic," the role and meaning of "contradiction" in Hegel's philosophy, and Hegel's justification for the provocative statement that "what is rational is actual, what is actual is rational." She examines both Hegel's debt and his polemical reaction to Kant, and shows in great detail how his project of a "dialectical" logic can be understood only in light of its relation to Kant's "transcendental" logic. This book will appeal to anyone interested in Hegel's philosophy and its influence on contemporary philosophical discussion.

BÉATRICE LONGUENESSE is Professor of Philosophy at New York University. She is author of *Kant on the Human Standpoint* (2005).

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for Rolf-Peter Horstmann

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Christianity</i>	<i>The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate</i>
<i>Diff.</i>	<i>The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy</i>
<i>E. L.</i>	<i>Encyclopedia Logic</i>
<i>Faith</i>	<i>Faith and Knowledge</i>
<i>H. P.</i>	<i>Lectures on the History of Philosophy</i>
<i>L.</i>	<i>Science of Logic</i>
<i>L. A.</i>	<i>Lectures on Fine Arts [Aesthetics]</i>
<i>Letters</i>	<i>Hegel: the Letters</i>
<i>Phen.</i>	<i>Phenomenology of Spirit</i>
<i>R.</i>	<i>Principles of the Philosophy of Right</i>

NOTE ON CITATIONS

When I talk of “Hegel’s Logic” I primarily mean the logic expounded in Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, published in 1812 and 1816. Its first part, Objective Logic, is in two books: Book 1, Being (published in 1812, with a second, revised edition in 1831); and Book 2, the Doctrine of Essence (published in 1812). Its second part is the Subjective Logic (published in 1816). See G. W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Nordrhein-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1967), vol. 11 (Erster Band, Die objective Logik: erstes Buch, Die Lehre vom Sein; zweites Buch, Die Lehre vom Wesen) and vol. 12 (Zweiter Band, Die subjektive Logik oder Die Lehre vom Begriff), trans. A. V. Miller, as *Hegel’s Science of Logic* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1969). Hegel wrote a more condensed version of his Logic as the first part of his *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, published in 1817, with two new editions, one (heavily revised) in 1827 and the other (slightly revised) in 1830. See *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830), A: Die Wissenschaft der Logik, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 13, trans. William Wallace, with Foreword by I. N. Findlay, 3rd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975 [1st edn 1873]). Works of Hegel will be cited in the Akademie edition cited above, with volume and page (e.g. *GW*₄, 65); this reference to the German text will be followed by a reference to the Suhrkamp edition, *Werke in Zwanzig Bänden*, Theorie Werkausgabe (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971) with volume and page (e.g. *S.* 5, 82), and finally a reference to the translation in English indicated in the endnote upon its first occurrence, and in the bibliography (e.g. *L.* 81). A list of abbreviations for references to Hegel’s texts and to English translations is provided on the previous page. All other references will be in footnotes, except references to Kant.

As is common usage, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is cited by reference to the 1781 edition (A) and 1787 edition (B). All other works of Kant will be cited by reference to Kant's *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlichen Preußischen (later Deutschen) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 vols. (Berlin, 1902–83; 2nd edn De Gruyter, 1968, for vols. 1–9), abbreviated as AA. Standard English translations are indicated in the bibliography; references to the German edition are in the margins of all recent English translations.

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 ("*Ground* 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.

I am grateful to Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin for allowing the translation into English of *Hegel et la Critique de la Métaphysique* and to Nicole Simek for providing an excellent translation, which I revised only for purposes of clarification of my own views. I hope she will not find I have defaced her fine work too badly. The original version of Chapter 6 appeared in French under the title: “Hegel, Lecteur de Kant sur le Jugement” (in *Philosophie*, 36 [October 1992]). I am grateful to the editors of *Philosophie* for allowing its translation into English and to Nicole Simek for producing an excellent translation of this essay as well. The original English version of Chapter 5 appeared in the volume edited by Sally Sedgwick, *The Reception of Kant’s Critical Philosophy: Kant, Fichte, Hegel* (Cambridge University Press, 2000). My thanks to Sally for the fantastic conference she organized, for her hard work on that volume, and for allowing me to reproduce my contribution as Chapter 5 in this book.

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