

Kant and Hegel on logic and ontology: Philosophizing without judgments and syllogisms. A Hegelian response to the logocentric predicament

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Abstract

In *Hegel's Logic and Metaphysics*, McNulty interprets the *Science of Logic* as an inversion of Kant's relation between formal logic and ontology, highlighting a fundamental problem: Kant presupposes formal logic to derive transcendental logic. McNulty calls this the *logocentric predicament* and claims that Hegel proposes a theory of categories that does not presuppose formal logic. After discussing this approach, I offer an alternative thesis. I claim that Hegel's *Logic* includes a retroactive-retrospective dimension, meaning subsequent elements are somehow present and operative in earlier stages of this logical development. The *Logic* does not presuppose formal logic but progressively deduces its methodology through an intellectual experience revealing the movement of object and thought. However, these progressively deduced elements are somehow present and operative in earlier logical stages. McNulty overlooks this, leading to mistaken conclusions about the absence of concepts, judgments, and syllogisms throughout Hegel's *Logic*.

Keywords: transcendental logic; formal logic; speculative logic; method; logocentric predicament.

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I - Introduction

The Science of Logic is not – as is well known – a treatise on formal logic. Nevertheless, Hegel’s work does not overlook this matter. In fact, in the *WdL* Hegel attempts a deduction and justification of formal logic as a possible response to a methodological problem that the post-Kantians had identified in Kant’s work. Broadly speaking, the German idealists locate this problem in Kant’s critical project – namely, that it presupposes formal logic in at least two ways. On the one hand, Kant presupposes the validity of general logic; he does not subject logic to any critical assessment. In other words, logic is simply taken as given and employed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant relies on general logic in the *Critique* without ever questioning whether logic is valid at all. He assumes the validity of its principles and uncritically employs its inferential procedures and its formal elements (concepts, judgments). On the other hand, Kant presupposes logic to deduce the categories of pure understanding. He takes the table of judgments as given and assumes that these judgments correspond to the activities of pure understanding. Thus, Kant uses general logic to deduce or uncover the intrinsic activities of pure understanding, without offering any critical treatment of logic itself or even questioning whether general logic would provide a reliable guide for discovering the operations of the understanding (A 69/B 94–A 80/B 106). Moreover, Kant relies on the logical use of the faculties to investigate their so-called “real use” (e.g., A 299/B 355–A 309/B 366). According to McNulty, this presupposition of formal logic within the act of philosophizing led the German idealists to question the very foundations of philosophy (McNulty, 2023, p. 16-19–20): if philosophy rests on unfounded assumptions, philosophy itself may collapse. In other words, if formal logic is presupposed and lacks further grounding, the entire edifice of rationality is at risk. This is what McNulty calls the *logocentric predicament* (McNulty, 2023, p. 10).

Among the German idealists, the most radical response to this problem is arguably found in Hegel, who ultimately brings the investigation to what he calls the *absolute method*. This absolute method has the task of grounding the methodological procedure implemented in *The Science of Logic*, thereby ensuring that the method of metaphysics is itself justified (or self-justifying).

With the aim of addressing the way Hegel resolves the logocentric predicament, McNulty offers a reading of the *Science of Logic* focused on the deduction of formal logic. He asks why it is necessary to ground formal logic and how Hegel, without presupposing logic, succeeds in deducing and grounding it. For my part, I find that Hegel’s methodological proposal is much more radical than McNulty assumes, and that McNulty’s logocentric problem is only a small part of a broader issue (the problem of grounding the method) left unresolved in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Put simply, Kant not only presupposes formal logic in the *KrV*; he presupposes his entire methodology – the operations that make logical progression possible.

To resolve this problem, Hegel must reject central aspects of modern methodology. In short, I take it that Hegel cannot accept the inferential order presupposed in modernity by the analytic–synthetic method (namely, the requirement that premises precede the conclusion without presupposing it). Hegel breaks with this and resolves the problem of grounding method through a risky proposal: he defends the presence of subsequent elements within earlier logical stages. This requires abandoning the inferential unidirectionality maintained from antiquity to modernity. The particular way in which Hegel addresses the problem includes, as one element among others, the derivation of formal logic over the course of the inferential development. But this is only a part of a more general strategy – namely, that subsequent elements must in some sense already be present within earlier stages.

In the present work, I aim to defend certain aspects of this alternative methodological reading (which requires defending the claim that the *WdL* involves an “intellectual experience” carried out by following the development of the “semantic materiality” of categories), and I do

so by engaging critically with McNulty's work, which identifies a central problem from a partial or incomplete perspective.

II - Formal Logic and Philosophy: The Logocentric Predicament

Let us begin with the *logocentric predicament*. This dilemma consists in philosophy's dependence on logic and the consequent question concerning the philosophical grounding of logic. In short, in order to think, we need logical laws and formal logical elements (concepts, judgments, and syllogisms). We rely on these resources in all philosophical and scientific disciplines, but we cannot justify logic through any further discipline, nor can it justify itself. Thus, the logocentric predicament is framed.

McNulty traces this dilemma back to Aristotle himself, who assumes logic as the *organon* of all science, while being a discipline incapable of justifying itself.² According to McNulty, in the history of philosophy there are two types of responses to the logocentric predicament (McNulty, 2023, p. 17-22-23, 166). The first type of response can be found in Aristotle and represents the path most commonly taken in the history of philosophy. It consists in invoking the self-evidence of logical laws. McNulty presents this as an appeal to *brute facts*. This solution justifies logic by appealing to the facts of consciousness or to some form of self-reflection.

McNulty considers that nearly the entire philosophical tradition from Aristotle to Kant (and maybe Fichte) falls under this strategy. When we think of them, logical laws appear to us as necessary. We experience their necessity directly.

McNulty explains this by showing how Hegel interprets Aristotle (McNulty, 2023, p. 45-46, 48; Hegel, *Enz. §20 Zusatz*; Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Logik*, Bd. 10, p. 3-4). According to Hegel, Aristotle grounds the laws of logic and their elements not through deduction or argumentation, but through an empirical and inductive procedure. Beginning with the empirical observation of the activity of the mind, Aristotle resorts to induction and thereby formulates the laws of logic. At the other end of the history of philosophy, we find Kant simply assuming formal logic, and Fichte attempting to deduce it by claiming (McNulty, 2023, p. 63-85, 89-90) that the act of self-consciousness and the principle "A = A" could lead to the derivation of the logical principle of identity or of non-contradiction. This derivation would rest on a self-evident apperceptive act.

McNulty is somewhat ambiguous as to whether Fichte should be counted among those who attempt to ground logic in brute facts. On the one hand, Fichte appears to be the first to recognize the need for a deduction of logic; on the other hand, he once again resorts to acts of consciousness. However, this is not the main point. The point is that this is, in fact, Hegel's reading of Aristotle. Hegel's well-known accusation against Kant is that he proceeds empirically in justifying the table of categories (Hegel GW 33, 68-69; GW 21, 31; GW 12, 28). It is therefore not surprising that Hegel also detects an element of "empiricism" in Aristotelian logic. Indeed, McNulty draws a connection between Hegel's critiques of both Aristotle and Kant, suggesting that the philosophical tradition from Aristotle to Kant (and perhaps even Fichte) has generally followed this path: grounding logic in acts of consciousness, whether by means of induction or apperception.

In fact, it is doubtful that Aristotle actually does this. Unfortunately, we cannot elaborate on this point here, but it must be said that, although Aristotle understands logical principles as evident and indemonstrable, they can be defended through a dialectical procedure (as

² Being the first and most general principles of science, and the necessary conditions for any further demonstration, logical principles – according to Aristotle, Apo 75b35-76a, 76a15-35, Met 1005b5, 1005b30, 1006a1-10 – cannot themselves be demonstrated.

characterized in the *Topics* 101a36-101b4). A plausible example is to be found in the defense of the principle of non-contradiction in *Metaphysics* IV (1006a11-12).³

The second response to the logocentric predicament would be a rarely attempted path. Instead of presupposing the self-evidence of logic (or trying to justify it through an act of consciousness), it would consist of resorting to argumentation. McNulty attributes this path almost exclusively to Hegel, and perhaps to Plato (McNulty, 2023, p. 112).⁴ This path involves proceeding without presupposing the laws and elements of logic (cf. Hegel, GW 11, 15), and eventually deducing them, thus reaching them through *argumentation*. As one can imagine, the difficulty lies in how to do this without resorting to judgments, syllogisms, logical principles, etc.

In summary, we are faced with a dilemma: how to justify logic if all thinking requires and presupposes it, and logic can be justified neither by another discipline nor by itself. This dilemma presents two possible responses: to invoke the self-evidence of logic based on some brute facts of consciousness, or to proceed argumentatively without presupposing logic and provide reasons for its derivation. According to McNulty, Hegel embarks on this second path.

III - McNulty's Thesis: Hegel's *Logic* without Concepts or Judgments

Let us then see how Hegel proceeds according to McNulty. McNulty argues that Hegel inverts Kant's order of dependence between logic and ontology (McNulty, 2023, p. 167-246). While Kant derives his ontology from formal logic (he derives the table of categories from the table of judgments and uses logical functions to study the real use of the faculties), Hegel derives logic from his ontology. According to this, the *Science of Logic* would be an ontology that allows for the derivation of logical laws and logical elements. The theory of categories leads to a derivation of the principles of non-contradiction, identity, and the logical elements *concept*, *judgment* and *sylogism*.

In accordance with this inversion, Hegelian *Logic* should proceed without presupposing the laws or elements of formal logic. Indeed, McNulty understands Hegelian *Logic* as *non-formal-logical*, *pre-predicative*, and *non-inferential* (McNulty, 2023, p. 25-38, 110, 125, 203) – yet this does not preclude its rationality. It relies on dialectic, which is a *rational* method or mode of argumentation, but not a formal-logical or inferential one.

It is also worth noting that, for McNulty, the object of analysis in Hegel's *Logic* is the *concept* itself. What unfolds and becomes progressively enriched throughout the *Logic* is precisely the concept. The Doctrine of Being offers monadic categories, the Doctrine of Essence provides dyadic (or relational) categories, and finally, the Doctrine of the Concept offers triadic categories (McNulty, 2023, p. 204-206). Thus, the development of the *Logic* proceeds without judgments, predication, or syllogistic inference. McNulty even goes so far as to claim that the Doctrine of Being is, to some extent, *non-conceptual* or *pre-conceptual* (McNulty, 2023 p. 204).

Clearly, this raises questions about the viability of Hegel's *Logic* itself. How does Hegel manage to proceed rationally and argumentatively without relying on concepts, judgments, or syllogisms?

Put in a nutshell, McNulty's solution involves employing a series of distinctions that provide him with a differentiated framework of enunciation, allowing him to characterize Hegel's procedure without relying on terms such as *concept*, *judgment*, *sylogism*, *inference*, and so

³ Irwin (1988, p. 19-20, 175) defends a dialectical access to first principles in Aristotle.

⁴ McNulty draws a parallel between Hegel and Plato, suggesting that Plato, like Hegel, does not rely on predication or definitions – and therefore does not rely on judgments either. I will examine this topic in greater detail later.

on. Put more simply, McNulty uses alternative terms to refer to the linguistic elements appearing in the *Logic*, thereby avoiding labeling them as *concepts*, *judgments*, *sylogisms*, or *inferences*. This strategy enables him to argue that Hegel's *Logic* proceeds without presupposing these logical elements and ultimately derives them. Let us examine this further.

For instance, McNulty introduces the distinction between *judgment* and *claim* or *statement*. To support this distinction, he references Hegel's well-known distinction between *Urteil* and *Satz*. He asserts that not every *statement* corresponds to the logical form of a *judgment* and does not imply *predication* (McNulty, 2023, p. 110 footnote 6, p. 125). Consequently, the *Logic* would allow for *statements* that do not take the form of *judgments* and do not entail predication or syllogistic inference (by excluding the use of *judgments*, the use of *sylogisms* – composed of them – is also excluded).

However, to explain how the *Science of logic* advances through *claims* or *statements* that are not *judgments*, McNulty proposes an equivalence that seems questionable. He equates *judgment*, *predication*, and *definition*. By equating the use of judgments and predication with the act of defining, McNulty concludes that, insofar as Hegel does not provide definitions, he also does not employ predications and judgments. To elucidate this, McNulty refers to the Platonic dialogues, wherein – according to him – the Athenian philosopher also refrains from offering definitions (instead, he inquires into a topic) and, therefore, does not make judgments that predicate a property of a subject.

Regarding all this, several points should be made. Firstly, there is a well-known passage in the *Encyclopedia* (§85) where Hegel states that the progression in the *Logic* is a constant and insufficient attempt to provide definitions of the absolute. This not only indicates that Hegel indeed offers definitions of the absolute⁵, but also that this clearly involves the use of judgments: both from Hegel's and from McNulty's perspective – having equated judgment and definition – it must be acknowledged that if Hegel provides definitions, then he must be employing judgments.⁶

In my opinion, a more viable thesis than McNulty's would be to assert that Hegel rejects *beginning with unalterable definitions*, rather than claiming that he does not provide definitions at all. Holding this thesis does not imply that Hegel never offers potentially modifiable definitions or that he refrains from predicating concepts of a given subject (the use or non-use of definitions is – in my opinion and *contra* McNulty – to some extent independent of predication: isn't stating that 'being is nothing' an act of *predication* without being a *proper definition*?). However, not resorting to definitions pertains less to the use or non-use of judgments – as McNulty

5 Bowman (2013, p. 16, 173, 186) argues for the presence of definitions throughout the *Logic*. He maintains that the first and third moments of each stage of logical development correspond to nominal and real definitions, respectively. Karin de Boer (2004, p. 808–809, 811; 2010, p. 45–47) likewise acknowledges the presence of definitions throughout the *Logic*. Categories function as definitions of the Absolute, meant to be sublated.

6 McNulty acknowledges this (2023, p. 125–126), but seeks to avoid the objection by claiming that, in this passage, Hegel rejects the idea that these intended definitions constitute judgments in the logical sense. For example, "the Absolute is Being" would be – according to McNulty, 2023 p. 125–126 – a definition but not a judgment, only a pseudo-judgment. However, as I see it, this passage admits at least two alternative interpretations. First, Hegel does not state that these definitions are not *judgments* <Urteile>, but rather that they are not *statements* or *propositions* <Sätze> – which is, if anything, even more puzzling. Secondly, Hegel could be interpreted as follows: if we employ the forms of *traditional, static* definitions, then we are connecting in a sentence a term full of meaning (let's say, 'Being') with an undetermined term ('God', 'the Absolute'), thus failing to form an actual judgment, even a statement (Hegel takes these terms as mere *Namen* and *Vorstellungen* GW 21 54). However, this does not necessarily preclude that, if we gain some determination of those as yet undetermined terms ('God', 'Absolute'), these definitions would be statements or even judgments. If we pay attention to GW 12, 55–56, where Hegel explains the difference between *Sätze* and *Urteile*, it seems to me quite clear that these definitions may end up as *Urteile* (they express a relation of a universal to a particular or singular). In my opinion, Hegel is not stating that *Logic* provides definitions but not judgments; he is stating that these definitions are not finished, they need further, progressive development (as judgments do) and they can gain the actual status of a *Hegelian judgment*, i.e., their dialectical character, through this development. These definitions need reinterpretation and re-elaboration. Without this development, terms such as 'Absolute' or 'God' might be meaningless, leaving us without a judgment or even a statement. But if they are enriched, they will display the development of a concept, which will pass through the stage or form of (Hegelian) judgments and syllogisms.

believes — and more to Hegel’s rejection of the geometric method (which starts with *unalterable definitions*). In this regard, McNulty’s comparison of Hegel with Plato is pertinent. Yet, McNulty seems to misstate the issue: he claims that Plato does not provide definitions (and, therefore, does not employ predication and judgments).⁷ Plato, like Hegel, does offer definitions, uses judgments, engages in predication (without these terms being synonymous) and — unlike Hegel — arguably presupposes the laws of formal logic.⁸ However, like Hegel, Plato does not begin with *unalterable* definitions. This means that these philosophers do not preclude the use of definitions in any way but rather exclude their use as *static starting points* (i.e., as definitions appear in the geometric method).

Now, Hegel’s rejection of the geometric method is indeed related to the insufficiency of judgments. However, what Hegel denounces is not, in my view, the use of judgments *per se* and predication, but the use of judgments understood from a pre-Hegelian standpoint (what he calls the standpoint of the Understanding). Hegel rejects the pre-Hegelian conception of judgments and their use. That is, Hegel rejects expressions that establish static and rigid semantic relations between two concepts, thus rendered incapable of expressing speculative truths. However, elaborating on this issue would lead us off-topic. What must be clear is that Hegel does not reject judgments, definitions, or predication, but rather a certain use and a certain conception of them. Hegel employs definitions (but not as static, rigid, and definitive statements), judgments, and predication, without these terms being strictly synonymous.⁹

The second problem is that Hegel’s distinction between *Urteil* and *Satz* does not appear to align with McNulty’s proposed distinction between *judgment* and *statement*, or at least it does not seem to be made with the same intentions. Hegel’s intention, in any case, does not seem to be to claim that the *Logic* consists of *Sätze* that are not *Urteile*. If anything is excluded from the *Logic*, it is the mere *Sätze* that refer to accidental, non-essential matters, etc. (Hegel, GW 12, 55-56; GW 33, p. 156 §167). Moreover, in §167 of the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel states that all things are judgments (“*alle Dinge sind ein Urteil, – d.h. sie sind Einzelne, welche eine Allgemeinheit oder innere Natur in sich sind [...]*”). Therefore, Hegel’s distinction between *Urteil* and *Satz* does not lead to the conclusion that the *Logic* proceeds without *judgments*. On the contrary, this Hegelian distinction is introduced to indicate the metaphysical or philosophical irrelevance of certain *Sätze* <statements> that do not constitute *Urteile/judgments*.

Thus, in summary, the device McNulty employs to characterize the linguistic elements of

7 Gonzalez (1998) supports a reading of Plato according to which knowledge, for Plato, is nonpropositional. However, what Gonzalez understands by “nonpropositional” seems to differ significantly from McNulty’s use of the term — namely, that nonpropositional knowledge is “knowledge-how,” whose object resists description and is inseparably tied to self-knowledge. Gonzalez argues that dialectical knowledge (which he deems nonpropositional) stands in contrast to Plato’s hypothetical method, which remains confined to the propositional level. I do not think this corresponds to McNulty’s understanding of Hegel’s nonpropositional *Logic*. I believe Hegel would reject any form of mystical access to truth. That said, while I disagree with Gonzalez’s reading, this is not the place to discuss his interpretation in detail.

8 In Plato’s *Phaedo*, we find a passage (89d–91c) that suggests Socrates — and by extension, Plato — presupposes and accepts certain technical knowledge related to argumentation, rhetoric, and logic (“*τῆς περὶ τοὺς λόγους τέχνης*”, Harold North Fowler translates “proper knowledge concerning arguments”). Throughout the *Phaedo*, Socrates offers various methodological prescriptions for engaging in philosophical inquiry. In the aforementioned passage, he contrasts his position with those of the eristic and the misologist. The misologist, having been misled in the past by sophists and eristics due to a lack of this proper knowledge concerning arguments, comes to distrust all forms of reasoning. The eristic, by contrast, possesses such technical knowledge but uses it to persuade others by any means necessary. Socrates distinguishes himself from the eristic by seeking not only the conviction of others — who serve as judges of the argument’s soundness — but above all his own. In doing so, the deliberate use of fallacies is necessarily excluded. He also distances himself from the misologist, which implies that the philosopher must possess expertise in the techniques of argumentation (and, accordingly, admits its laws). This is reinforced by the well-known passage at 99d–101e (Socrates’s “second voyage in quest of the reason”), where Socrates asserts that his metaphysical inquiry must proceed through arguments (*λόγοι*). Taken together, these considerations suggest that Plato presupposes and relies on logical principles. For a discussion of how Plato positions himself in relation to figures such as the sophist, the eristic, antilogic, and dialectic, see Kerferd (1984, p. 59–67).

9 For further details on my reading on Hegel with regard to the geometric method, see Herszenbaun 2024.

Hegel's *Logic* as non-predicative or non-judgmental does not align with Hegel's characterization of these linguistic elements. It must be acknowledged, however, that Hegel recognizes that the *Logic* does not begin with judgments. Therefore, it should not be understood that every linguistic expression in the *Logic* is indeed a judgment. For example, the initial equivalence of being and nothing does not, in principle, constitute a judgment.¹⁰ I will return to this in the following section. As I will show there, the *Logic* involves a progressive gestation of logical elements (for instance, of the judgment). In this I believe I agree with McNulty, although I understand this gestation differently.

I believe there are two underlying issues in McNulty's argument. The first – of utmost relevance and one that permeates the entire *Logic* – is how, in Hegelian *Logic*, a certain theoretical element is both present and not present at a certain stage of the logical development prior to its explicit presentation and justification. This can be said of the judgment, the absolute, the spirit, or the method. How does the *Logic* proceed without presupposing the judgment, the method, the absolute idea, and how are these elements present, in some way, before their actual deduction? The second issue would be, I believe, the connection between language and categorial development. In this case, the question is whether the linguistic expression through which the *Logic* is conveyed corresponds one-to-one with the proper conceptual development occurring within the *Logic*. I will return briefly to this second issue later.

Now, returning to the central question – namely, how subsequent elements are present in earlier stages or moments of the logical development – this is a key problem in Hegel's *Logic*. In any case, even if we acknowledge that Hegel cannot begin the “Doctrine of Being” by presupposing the logical form of the *judgment*, it is equally true that the conclusion McNulty reaches does not seem plausible: to expel *judgments* from Hegel's *Logic*, leaving only mere *Sätze* – statements whose grammatical form must, after all, also be presupposed. Thus, following McNulty's strategy, the problem is not actually resolved; it is merely postponed: the *logocentric predicament* is replaced by a *grammatocentric predicament*.

Up to this point, these are the arguments McNulty uses to claim that the *Logic* is pre-predicative and non-inferential, and the problems I find with them. Let us now examine how McNulty argues that the “Doctrine of Being” is non-conceptual.

As stated, according to McNulty, in the “Doctrine of Being” Hegel resorts to monadic logical structures. Thus, for McNulty, here we do not even find the logical element “concept” since the concept for Hegel is a triadic structure.¹¹ In this case, McNulty distinguishes between the *Hegelian concept* (a triadic and dynamic structure that articulates universal, particular and

10 In the *Anmerkung 2* of the chapter “Sein” (GW 21, 77–78), Hegel describes the expressions concerning being and nothing as *Sätze*, as opposed to the form of the judgment. This could suggest – in favor of McNulty – that the *Logic* proceeds with *Sätze* and not with *Urteile*. In my view, however, opposing *Satz* to *die Form des Urteils* in this logical stage and when referring to the *Ausdruck spekulativer Resultate* and to the expression of the relation of identity and difference between being and nothing does not indicate such a primacy of *Sätze* over *Urteile*. Rather, it indicates an unconditioned beginning in which speculative truths cannot yet be expressed, due to the absence of an adequate logical form. Once properly developed, the judgment will culminate in the mature dialectical-speculative form of the syllogism, which will be able to express speculative truths. Due to the absence of such logical development, Hegel must characterize the linguistic expressions concerning being and nothing as mere *Sätze*; but once his theory of the concept, judgment, and syllogism is deduced, we will understand that they were in fact *Urteile*, albeit afflicted with the following ambivalence: taken naively, they are insufficient to express speculative truth; understood in a conceptually adequate way, they express the original partition (*ursprüngliche Teilung*) of the concept (GW 12, 55) and must be carried through to their full dialectical development in the form of the syllogism. This shows that judgments are imbued with speculative and spiritual vitality and movement, and – as the main thesis of this paper states – are somehow present and operative even before their actual deduction (to see the potentially dialectical character of judgments see GW 12 242: “Dieses sosehr synthetische als analytische Moment des Urteils, wodurch das anfängliche Allgemeine aus ihm selbst, als das Andere seiner sich bestimmt, ist das Dialektische zu nennen”; in GW 12, 27–28, Hegel compares two approaches to logical forms. Against the Kantian approach, Hegel implicitly suggests that, for example, the positive judgment may possess a dialectical character of its own).

11 “Hegel can argue for the concept in nonconceptual terms if he can invoke only nontriadic structures that do not yet have the triadic structure of the Concept”, McNulty, 2023, p. 204.

singular) and the *traditional logical concept* (a shared common note obtained through abstraction). Since the categories involved in it do not possess this Hegelian triadic conceptual structure, the “Doctrine of Being” would be considered non-conceptual.

Leaving aside the question of whether the categories in the “Doctrine of Being” are triadic or not (e.g., “being-nothing-becoming” forms a *triad*), the problem is that McNulty’s interpretation of Hegel’s procedure in the “Doctrine of Being” fails to resolve the *logocentric predicament*. Solving this dilemma requires the capacity to philosophize without relying on any presupposed logical elements – whether from traditional formal logic or from any revised form of logic. That is, to avoid falling into the trap posed by the *logocentric predicament*, Hegel must argue without employing *any* logical element whatsoever. He must be able to deduce the Hegelian *concept* without presupposing *any* kind of *concept* (whether *Hegelian* or *traditional*).

The problem is that the solution McNulty proposes does not meet the aforementioned requirement. According to McNulty, Hegel would argue without presupposing his own dialectical logic (that is, he would derive his theory of the *concept* without presupposing the Hegelian *concept*), but he would do so by relying on *traditional concepts* – monadic conceptual structures – (which means relying on traditional logic). Therefore, in the end, if we followed McNulty, Hegel would fall into the very error he attributes to Kant: deriving *transcendental logic* from *formal logic*. In this case, it would be a matter of deriving *dialectical logic* (the Hegelian *concept*) using *formal logic* (the traditional concept), which is still being used without any deduction or rational justification whatsoever.

In summary, even if we were to accept McNulty’s description of Hegelian *Logic*, it would still fail to resolve the *logocentric predicament*. Therefore, we must now consider whether this description accurately captures Hegel’s procedure. Let us examine this more closely.

IV - Hegel’s Method Revisited

As already mentioned, McNulty’s topic of interest appears to lead us to a crucial issue in Hegelian logic. The central problem is not merely the foundation of formal logic or whether it is presupposed in philosophical thinking. In Hegel’s case, the issue is, I believe, somewhat broader, given the nature of his response. The problem lies, in a certain sense, in the presence of later elements within earlier logical stages or moments – elements that have not yet been deduced. As we know, the concept, the judgment, the syllogism, the absolute, the method, the idea, and so forth are all properly deduced toward the end of the *Logic*; and yet, in some way, they already seem to be operative in earlier stages of the logical development that leads to them. Hegel’s way of addressing the logocentric predicament is closely tied to this argumentative strategy. He does not need to presuppose the inferential rational procedures through which the work unfolds, because these procedures will be deduced and justified in due course – however, in a somewhat mysterious fashion, they are already latent in the earlier moments.

This complex articulation between earlier and subsequent elements has been addressed in various ways in the specialized literature. For example, Angelica Nuzzo (2005, p. 190-192, 194-196) speaks of a gap that must exist between the preceding logical development and the absolute idea – a gap that is coupled with a necessary articulation between the absolute idea, now become method, and the logical progression that precedes it. In short, the absolute idea must be distinguishable from the preceding logical development from which it arises, while at the same time exerting a retrospective, conceptual, and methodological determination over it. Only through this retrospective determination does the logical course acquire necessity and scientific character. It is this retroactive application of the method to the preceding logical development that renders the beginning as such (GW 12 240, 249-250). Moreover, Nuzzo (2011,

p. 121-126-128) acknowledges the need to establish a clear distinction between the immanent, genetic deduction – that is, the inferential movement progressing from beginning to end – and a retrospective movement that allows us to reinterpret earlier logical moments in light of subsequent elements. Dieter Henrich himself (1971, p. 75-154) recognizes these different paths across the *Logic*, acknowledging the aforementioned retrospective determination. Similarly, Giacomo Rinaldi (2012, p. 57-59) argues that Hegel breaks with the dichotomy between foundationalism and antifoundationalism, as Hegelian *Logic* integrates both logical movements, such that the teleological retrospective determination reconfigures the natural inferential course.

In my view, this feature of Hegel’s *Logic* marks a rupture with the modern tradition. In a certain way, the introduction of this retroactive-retrospective dimension into the *Logic* can be seen as a response to a central concern of modernity. Already in the Renaissance (Galileo) and early modernity (Descartes), we find that the proper order of knowledge becomes a central issue. Both Galileo and Descartes are guided by a desire to philosophize in accordance with the mathematical model. However, when they appeal to the mathematical method, they are not referring specifically to arithmetic or algebraic operations or to any kind of quantitative analysis. Rather, both are primarily concerned with the correct ordering of cognitions – an exposition that makes explicit all the involved terms and accepted assumptions, and proceeds in such a way that nothing in the demonstration is presupposed before it is actually demonstrated.¹²

From my perspective, this feature of modern philosophy stems from the analytic-synthetic method of the Greek mathematical tradition and the Aristotelian axiomatic system. This method was revived during the Renaissance through the Latin translations of Pappus’s and Euclid’s works, and from there, it became a structuring principle of the scientific and philosophical method in modernity (Engfer, 1982). Hegel breaks with this – not by reverting to some kind of “pre-mathematical disarray,” if I may use the term, just as his break with Kant does not entail a return to pre-critical metaphysics.

The central idea, I believe, is that Hegel maintains that subsequent elements must be deduced solely from earlier ones, without being presupposed; and yet, at the same time, these subsequent elements must restructure and re-signify the earlier ones, exerting a retroactive-retrospective semantic effect on them – and ultimately, they must somehow already be present in those earlier moments. In my view, this is the secret of the Hegelian method. This methodological model goes beyond the logocentric predicament, while also encompassing it: Hegel’s solution to the logocentric predicament appears as a particular instance of this broader methodological dynamic.

Obviously, this is a topic of considerable importance, and I cannot offer a comprehensive treatment here. However, I can outline a few points that may help us reflect on the viability of such an approach.

In order to understand such a procedure, one must first consider both the beginning and the end of the *Science of Logic*. “Being-Nothing-Becoming” and “The absolute idea” offer fundamental guidelines for how Hegel proceeds throughout the *Logic*.

“The absolute idea” articulates the absolute method through which the *Logic* unfolds. This method is only deduced at the end, as a further categorial result. Yet it is not *merely a method*; it is the very dynamic of pure thought itself – the movement by which the categories of pure thought are derived (that is, the very movement through which the *Logic* develops), and the procedure through which the intellectual object of pure thought undergoes transformations.

¹² Regarding Galileo’s method, see Wisan, 1978, p. 35–36. For Descartes, see *Discours de la Méthode*, 1987 p. 19; *Regulae ad directionem ingenii*, “Regulae” 4, 5 and 6; *Méditations métaphysiques*, 2011, p. 121: “Dans la façon d’écrire des géomètres, je distingue deux choses, à savoir l’ordre, et la manière de démontrer. L’ordre consiste en cela seulement, que les choses qui sont proposées les premières doivent être connues sans l’aide des suivantes, et que les suivantes doivent après être disposées de telle façon, qu’elles soient démontrées par les seules choses qui les précèdent”.

In “The absolute idea,” Hegel describes this procedure in terms of analysis, synthesis, negation, and negation of the negation (Hegel, *GW* 12, 242, 244-7). These procedures present the dynamic through which the *concept* enriches itself through inner development. The initial *concept* generates an inner difference that further specifies it, and then this difference becomes autonomous, after which it must be reintegrated into a superior structure that contains the differentiated extremes.

Since Hegel is here offering a characterization of the very process through which the *Logic* begins – a procedure that remains operative throughout its entire development – it must be understood that, although Hegel invokes the term “negation”, it is not the kind of negation that functions within the structure of a judgment. At this stage, there is, and at the same time is not, a judgment or syllogism involved. What is at play, rather, is the inner dynamic of the concept itself, which Hegel equates with the self-differentiating activity of a self-conscious “I”. A useful point of comparison here may be Kant’s notion of apperceptive synthesis, which helps to illuminate Hegel’s account.

In Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (B 130-131, 137-8, 141, 143), the intellectual act of synthesis through which an object is constituted requires or coincides with a judgment. In order to posit something distinct from itself (i.e., the object), the “I” makes use of a judgment.¹³ In Hegelian terms, we could express this by saying that the I’s self-distinction depends on a judgment. Still, one may ask: does the mere act of apperception – the mere act of thinking “I” – not imply an act of splitting and reuniting the “I” with itself? And, in that case, would this thought qualify as a *judgment* according to Kant? Kant does not even assign it the status of a concept (A 346/B 404). Thus, Kant finds himself – from Hegel’s perspective – confronting the conceptual inadequacy of his formulation: the fundamental operation of distinction and reunion cannot be categorized in any way because it is neither a concept nor a judgment.

Hegel, by contrast, equates the dynamic of the concept with the synthetic act of differentiation and recognition performed by the transcendental “I” (*GW* 12 18-19, 22). What Kant understood as the operation of an “I”, Hegel conceives as the dynamic of the concept. The concept is, therefore, a triadic, dynamic structure that presupposes the gestation of an internal difference and its subsequent reunion. This conceptual structure can develop or unfold. Such development of the concept does not initially require a judgment, but it will eventually give rise to the form of judgment and reveal that this form is already implicitly contained within it. (Or, to put it another way, the form of judgment will develop and make explicit the dynamic of the concept, *GW* 12, 55). Let us now examine whether this birth of judgment can be further clarified.

Let us now take a look at the beginning of the *Logic*. Hegel states that the *Logic* begins without presuppositions (*GW* 21 55-56) – with the mere act of thinking and its immediate object: Being. *Being* is the name given to the immediate object of pure thought. Pure thought aims to think without presupposing any ontological category, logical operation, or law. What pure thought finds before itself is an absolutely indeterminate object, which Hegel calls *being*. But in attempting to think *being*, this object becomes an absolute vacuity, which Hegel calls *nothing*. This initial conceptual movement constitutes the core of the *Logic*’s beginning and offers a glimpse into how it proceeds. Hegelian dialectic does not follow a pre-established procedure governed by formal laws or rules of inference. Rather, it follows the movement of *die Dinge an*

¹³ The synthetic activity responsible for the constitution of the object is the synthetic activity of the understanding, not of the imagination. The imagination by itself could not carry out any synthesis without the categories supplied by the understanding. On the one hand, the categories provide the rules of synthesis, without which no object could ever be constituted as such. On the other hand, synthetic activity is a capacity of the transcendental I, which deploys this synthesis in various modes (i.e., through the categories). The schema is a product of the interaction between the synthesis of the understanding and the form of sensibility. Imagination is not the original source of synthetic activity. According to the reading I follow, imagination is not an independent faculty, but rather a certain combination or joint operation of understanding and sensibility. Since the synthetic activity of the understanding coincides with judging, the synthesis of a manifold in the constitution of an object always implies or involves a judicative activity.

und für sich selbst (GW 12 242) or *die Sache selbst* (GW 11, 15) – that is, the movement of the very categories involved. This is, as we can see, not only the development of the intellectual object but also the development and enrichment of thought itself. Since the object is the necessary intellectual object of pure thought, what we learn about the ontological determinations of the object is also a lesson in the conceptual determinations of pure thought. And the dynamic of its unfolding is the dynamic of the development of the *Logic*, as well as a further stage in the self-knowledge of pure thought: pure thought comes to know the dynamic of its own development, which is nothing other than method itself.

I would like to return to something I said earlier: in describing the moments of the method, “The Absolute Idea” reveals the inner dynamic of the concept. Indeed, if one attends closely to the description of the method’s movements in “The Absolute Idea”, it feels like reliving the movement of *Being* at the beginning of the *Logic*. This is the case not only because Hegel explicitly refers to *Being* there (GW 12, 239-240), but more importantly because the intellectual experience we undergo in “The Absolute Idea” appears analogous to that at the beginning of the *Logic*: here, a conceptual movement is enacted – now with methodological awareness – yet with the terminological simplicity characteristic of the *Logic*’s opening. In other words, at the beginning of the *Logic*, Hegel guides us through an experience that follows the movement of both object and thought. In “The Absolute Idea”, the development of the concept is once again experienced – this time, as noted, with methodological awareness. Hegel again guides us through this movement, now employing a terminology that renders this methodological awareness explicit (characterizing the beginning as universal, the logical progression as negation, and so forth).

I would like to clarify two points: (1) what I mean by *intellectual experience*, and (2) a point I mentioned earlier – namely, the correspondence between the linguistic expression of the *Logic* and the categorial development that constitutes it.

First, when I speak of “intellectual experience” here, I am not referring to an apperceptive or self-conscious act, nor to any kind of empirical observation of the inner states or operations of our mind, nor to a noetic grasp of a transcendent object or an intellectual access to a first principle, or anything of the sort. The hypothesis we are considering is the following: when Hegel begins his *Logic*, he does not yet have a properly deduced and justified conceptual terminology, nor a proper definition/characterization of the intellectual object of pure thought. He cannot assume logical laws or formal logical elements, nor can he rely on traditional metaphysical notions in order to refer to the object of *Logic*. Therefore, the only path forward he can find is to use certain terms and statements that, without properly defining or describing the object of investigation, *induce the reader to conceptually conceive of the object* (in this case, *Being* – that is, the immediate and indeterminate object of pure thought, which will be designated by this name, as if Hegel were attaching a label to something previously unknown, simply to have a way of referring to it).

I insist on this point: Hegel cannot provide us with a proper *definition* of this object or an actual *description*. Instead, he induces us by indirect means into an *intellectual experience* – so to speak – and leads us through certain linguistic expressions – likely imprecise – to think about a certain intellectual object of pure thought. In light of this, one might think that the linguistic expression of the *Logic* is an “all-too-human” attempt to express in words something that, in principle (though not exclusively), must be intellectually experienced firsthand. This would imply that we should not necessarily expect, at every moment of the logical development, a one-to-one correspondence between the linguistic expression of the *Logic* and its categorial unfolding.

This intellectual experience to which I refer is nothing more than the actual development of the intellectual object of pure thought. *Logic* is intended to just follow the necessary development of its object: the intellectual object of pure thought, which is, at the same time,

pure thought itself. Accordingly, *Logic* follows the inner development of pure thought. This intellectual experience is just letting pure thought's object develop according to its inner requirements.¹⁴

In the end, if the course of the *Science of Logic* is adequate, we should conclude with an appropriate characterization of pure thought, its object, and the dynamic of its movement. If this journey is sound, we should have followed a path in which no logical element or law has been presupposed. The derivations that Hegel makes in the “Doctrine of Essence” from the logical laws, as well as the derivation of the logical elements in the “Doctrine of the Concept”, would not be sustained by a pre-established procedure, logical rule, or unfounded presupposed method. They would arise from a rational procedure that progressively exhibits itself, generating itself step by step, together with the material it processes. This procedure presupposes nothing and, in the process, progressively grounds itself argumentatively, coinciding with the immanent development or unfolding of the concept, as we have explained above.

In other words, the method or procedure develops *movement by movement*, with each movement taking place upon a certain conceptual-semantic materiality, and being driven forward by that very semantic materiality. By this peculiar expression (“semantic materiality”), I refer to the specific content we think of in each corresponding concept. What I mean is this: the transition from *Being* to *Nothing* is imposed by the very meaning of these concepts or objects of thought, or it is imposed by the act of thinking itself, which, according to Hegel, is identical with its object. Thought's movement – or the passage from one category to another – is not dictated by a presupposed methodological, procedural, or inferential rule. With this movement – imposed by thought's object itself – certain intellectual operations¹⁵ are also deduced. This will eventually lead to the deduction of Hegelian logical laws, method, and logical elements. In short, the logical progression is driven forward by the specific content of each category.¹⁶ This impulse allows for the step-by-step deduction of not only certain specific categories but also certain intellectual operations, methodological procedures, and, eventually, logical elements and laws (arguably reformulated). These intellectual operations and procedures ultimately provide not only the method of the *Logic*, but also a self-understanding of pure thought. In following this logical movement, thought deduces its own operations and procedures and, thus, learns about itself. In the end, the *Logic* is pure thought's self-examination.

Conclusions

As I see it, the method of Hegel's *Logic* – as well as the logical laws and logical elements

¹⁴ Put in a nutshell, I aim to demonstrate that the logical and methodological procedures applied in the *Logic* are actually deduced within this work itself, rather than being presupposed. This is not a novelty in Hegelian scholarship; the novelty lies in my account of how this occurs. To elucidate how this is possible, I maintain that in each category and at every stage of the categorial development (a) the progression is driven by the particular meaning of the categories involved – what I call the “semantic materiality” of the category – and (b) at each of these stages pure thought acquaints itself with certain operations, procedures, and so forth, intrinsic to pure thought. This is the manner in which the logic and methodology of the *WdL* are to be deduced. However, in order to explain how this development may begin without any presuppositions – without presupposing inferential procedures, concepts, metaphysical categories, or without Hegel providing a *definition* or *description* of its object – I propose that Hegel offers some imprecise characterizations of the object of pure thought, such that the reader may think of it and begin their journey by following the inner development of this object. This is what I call “intellectual experience”. It does not concern the experience of inner or mental states, nor the noetic grasp of a transcendent object; rather, it concerns following the necessary operations and development of the immanent object of pure thought.

¹⁵ I use the term ‘intellectual operations’ *lato sensu*. I do not intend to refer to the intellect strictly speaking, but rather to operations of thought more broadly conceived.

¹⁶ This seems to be what Stephen Houlgate (2006, p. 65) has in mind when explaining the progression of the logical development.

– emerges from the categorial development driven forward by the specific meaning of each categorial element. Along with the development of the categories, certain intellectual operations or methodological procedures are also generated. Thought progressively becomes aware of the movements involved in each category or logical stage, as well as of the operations involved in these movements. In this way, the development of the *Logic* does not presuppose a method, logical laws, or elements; rather, these are progressively deduced through an intellectual experience that exhibits the movement of both object and thought. These ultimately deduced elements reveal themselves, in the end, as already present and operative throughout the entire preceding procedure. Accordingly, in following this intellectual experience, we must not let ourselves be misled by the linguistic expression to which Hegel resorts in his exposition of the categorial development. In following this path for the first time – that is, the immanent genetic development or deduction – we may find concepts, judgments, and syllogisms to be missing. However, from the perspective of the absolute method (or the absolute idea), these logical elements, methodological procedures, and intellectual operations are, somehow, already there.

McNulty's approach appears to have identified a legitimate problem in the *Logic* – one that is, in my opinion, a particular instance of a broader issue: namely, how subsequent elements can be both present and absent at earlier logical stages. McNulty does not address this broader issue and, therefore, overlooks the retroactive-retrospective dimension of the *Logic*. At the same time, he seems overly attached to what we have here called Hegel's linguistic expression of the categorial development. By failing to consider this retrospective dimension, he is led to mistaken conclusions regarding the absence of concepts, judgments, syllogisms, or other inferential procedures throughout the *Logic*.

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