

Method & The Dialectic

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1 The Kantian Background – “Determination”

- Kant speaks of “being” (or what is thought) as “determinate” or “indeterminate” (*bestimmt* or *unbestimmt*)

Every **concept**, in regard to what is not contained in it, is indeterminate, and stands under the principle of **determinability**: that of **every two** contradictorily opposed predicates only one can apply to it, which rests on the principle of contradiction and hence is a merely logical principle/ which abstracts from every content of cognition, and has in view nothing but the logical form of cognition. Every **thing**, however, as to its possibility, further stands under the principle of **thoroughgoing determination**; according to which, among **all possible** predicates of **things**, insofar as they are compared with their opposites, one must apply to it (A571-2/B599-600)

- An object is thus “determinate” insofar as there is an answer to the question of whether it is F or not-F, for any property F; similarly, a “determination” often simply means the same as “property” or “predicate”
- A “determining ground” is a ground that is sufficient for its consequent (the object’s) being either F or not-F
- The ground-consequent relation is always lawful
- The ground-consequent relation in the case of thought is always expressed in terms of either the law of non-contradiction, or of a law derivative of that law
- The ground consequent-relation, with respect to objects of experience, also has separate/independent laws depending on the forms of time and space

2 The Fichtean Background – The “Synthetic Method”

we have to discover some X, by means of which all these conclusions can be granted as correct, without nullifying the identity of consciousness. (GWL 1:107)

- Fichte’s “synthetic method” is that process through which he generates or deduces a concept that resolves some internal opposition or contradiction
- The concepts deduced through an application of the method are *new* — they are not simply analytically derived from some previous concept

there can be no further question as to the possibility of this [synthesis], nor can any ground for it be given; it is absolutely possible, and we are entitled to it without further grounds of any kind. (GWL 1:114)

- The concepts deduced through the method are also *justified*, in the sense that we are entitled to use them by virtue of the fact that they are necessary for the explanation of the possibility of experience
- However, it is unclear how Fichte’s method actually explains the source of the content of the relevant concepts, rather than merely our entitlement to use such concepts (i.e. how it provides a genuine metaphysical, rather than solely transcendental, deduction)

3 Hegel & Method

3.1 Does the Logic Have a Method?

- Hegel rejects any presupposition with respect to the *Logic* (SL48/21:56), but he also argues that it must have a method that is fit for its content

I know that it is the one and only true method. This is made obvious by the very fact that this method is not something distinct from its subject matter and content – for it is the content in itself, the dialectic which it possesses within itself, which moves the subject matter forward. (SL 33/21:38)

1. What does it mean to say that a method “is not distinct from its subject matter”?
2. Should we expect that the method (if any) Hegel employs in the *Logic* is the same throughout? Or might it change as the content changes?

3. Is the method (if any) of the *Logic* going to be present in other parts of the system as well (e.g. in the *Phenomenology*?)

3.2 Forster on the Dialectical Method

- Forster's characterization of the "dialectical method":

Beginning from a category A, Hegel seeks to show that upon conceptual analysis, category A proves to contain a *contrary* category, B, and conversely that category B proves to contain category A, thus showing both categories to be self-contradictory. He then seeks to show that this negative result has a positive outcome, a new category, C (sometimes referred to as the "negative of the negative" or the "determinate negation"). This new category unites - as Hegel puts it - the preceding categories A and B. That is to say, when analyzed the new category is found to contain them both. But it unites them in such a way that they are not only preserved but also abolished (to use Hegel's term of art for this paradoxical-sounding process, they are *aufgehoben*). That is to say, they are preserved or contained in the new category only with their original senses modified. This modification of their senses renders them no longer self-contradictory (and not a source of self-contradiction in the new category that contains them both). That is because it renders them no longer contraries, and therefore no longer self-contradictory in virtue of their reciprocal containment. At this point, one level of the dialectic has been completed, and we pass to a new level where category C plays the role that was formerly played by category A.^{1*} And so on. Hegel understands each step of this whole process to be necessary.

- Forster presents this method as if it is a feature of Hegel's entire discussion in the *Logic* (and in the *Phenomenology*; it has the advantage of being clear, but isn't obviously correct)
 - It isn't clear that the method as Forster describes it is being used in every categorical transition (e.g. from <becoming> to <determinate being>)
 - Hegel discusses the "dialectical" activity in a wide range of non-conceptual phenomena (objects, life, etc.), and it isn't clear how Forster's characterization could apply in those cases

3.3 Dialectical Moment vs Dialectical Method

- Is it clear that Hegel's argument in the *Logic* is one that uses a “dialectical method” as opposed to one that hinges on the nature of various “dialectical moments” of/in thought?

In terms of form, the logical domain has three sides: (α) the abstract side or that of the understanding, (β) the dialectical or negatively rational side, (γ) the speculative or positively rational side.

(*Anmerkung*): These three sides do not constitute three parts of logic, but are moments of every properly logical content [/Momente jedes Logisch-Reellen/], that is to say, of every concept or everything true in general. (EL §79/p. 125)

- Here we see Hegel make a distinction between understanding, “negative” or dialectical reason, and positive or “speculative” reason. These are not to be understood as independent logical forms or faculties. They are rather three aspects or characteristics of a *single* form of (rational) activity
- So perhaps it is best to reject the position that Hegel has a method of argument in the *Logic*, other than in the sense that he takes thought to have a “dialectical” aspect, which drives the various transitions to new categories

4 Thought's Movement

- Hegel's contention in the *Logic* is that thought/being exhibits a form of “self-movement” (*Selbstbewegung*)

method is the consciousness of the form of the inner self-movement of the content of logic (SL 33/21:38)

- Thought is self-moving in the manner that an organism is; it has an inner dynamism
- The source of the inner dynamism is the dialectical aspect or moment of thought

What propels the concept onward is the already mentioned negative which it possesses in itself; it is this that constitutes the truly dialectical factor. *Dialectic*, once considered a separate part of logic and, one may say, entirely misunderstood so far as its purpose and standpoint are concerned, thereby assumes a totally different position. (SL 34/21:39-40)

- Hegel's contention is that each category is such as to drive the activity of thought to produce a new category
- The reasoning characteristic of "speculative" reason is radically different from that considered by Kant (i.e. from syllogistic reasoning as comprehension from grounds)
- There are a variety of ways in which Hegel's conception of the self-activity of thought/being is parallel to that of an organism, at least in the following respects:
 1. Self-organization
 2. (Re)production
 3. Teleological determinacy
 4. Holism
 5. Developmental path dependence
 6. Necessitation in connection of stages
 7. Essential unity of stages