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Why Hegelian Logic Uncovers the Transcendental Conditions of Cognition Better than Fichteian

Logic

Hegel's '*Encyclopaedia Logic*' is a system of metaphysics that aims to explain the possibility of science by giving an account of why the *Absolute* – the whole which constitutes being – allows for subjectivity and nature to be *thinkable* (i.e., discursively graspable, judgeable, etc.). Hegel argues that the Absolute is not conceptually graspable by means of propositions or judgements, but by the discursive capacity *Reason*, which acts by thinking the grounds of the Absolute, encountering contradictions, and then resolving them. These grounds are thought through Logic, specifically through unmediated, unrestricted and undetermined means. Hegel takes '*Being*' to be the starting point of grasping the Absolute, after abstracting all logical propositions from their conceptual and mediate content. However, a contradiction arises when Hegel claims that the pure indeterminate Being implies its negation '*Nothing*'. Hegel introduces the category *Dasein* (i.e., Determinate Being) to resolve this contradiction so that *Being* can remain immediate and indeterminate. This paper will elucidate the process by which Hegel introduces and resolves the contradictory relationship between Being and Nothing. Then, an explanation will be given for why the transition from Being to *Dasein* in Hegel's Logic undermines Fichte's attempt at uncovering the transcendental conditions of cognition in Part One of the *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*.

Since the Absolute lacks subject or predicate, a judgement cannot intelligibly be made about it. Additionally, the Absolute cannot be expressed through concepts, because concepts are determinately the concepts they are by virtue of their negative relation to some other concept

(e.g., what it is to be ~~the concept~~ blue is to *not* be other non-blue colours), and that the Absolute is immediate (i.e., undetermined by any concept distinct from itself). Therefore, logically expressing the Absolute requires beginning with an unmediated beginning, entirely free from presuppositions and being constitutive only of what it generates for itself. When Hegel writes “*pure Being constitutes the beginning, because It is pure thought as well as the undetermined, simple immediate, and the first beginning cannot be anything mediated and further determined*” (136), it is implied that a truly indeterminate starting-point requires full abstraction from the differences between its concepts, in order to be indeterminate and immediate. Thus, abstracting between subject and predicate (e.g., abstracting from the logical proposition ‘Lee Jun-fan is Bruce Lee’ both subject ‘Lee Jun-fan’ and predicate ‘Bruce Lee’) results in the just ‘*Being*’ as such (not Bruce lee, but Being in general). That is, after total abstraction, ‘Being’ can be exemplified by the ‘is’ in the logical proposition ‘Lee Jun-fan is Bruce Lee’. However, a contradiction arises by the *Omnis Determinatio est Negatio* principle when trying to conceive of pure Being *without* its compliment – ‘not Being’, or ‘*Nothing*’. The *Omnis Determinatio est Negatio* principle states that all determination is negation; thinking determinately pure Being determinately requires opposing it to what pure Being is *not* (i.e., nothing).

A contradiction lies in the apparent artificiality of pure Beings’ indeterminacy. If pure Being can be compared to an opposing concept ‘Nothing’, this entails that Being is a concept only mediately conceived through Nothing. That is, Being cannot be understood as immediate if it is understood by reference to another concept. However, Hegel maintains that even pure indeterminacy must be thought of one concept in contrast to others (otherwise, you cannot know whether you are thinking about pure Being or Bruce Lee’s films). This opposition is, therefore,

necessary. And because pure Being and pure Nothing share the same qualities of both applying to everything while excluding nothing, they are identical to one another. This analyticity between Being and Nothing is articulated by Hegel when he writes that “*the determination that is the same in both [Being and Nothing] ... the deduction of their unity is thus entirely analytical...*” (141). That is to say, Being and Nothing share a relation to each other that makes it so one cannot possibly be conceived without the other.

However, a serious contradiction occurs when contemplating the opposition between Being and Nothing: if they are identical, how can they be distinct? That is, how can the relation between Being and Nothing be consistently thought as standing in opposition whilst being just two ‘pairs’ that are necessary to one another? In light of this contradiction, Hegel introduces the concept ‘*Becoming*’, which designates the act by which thought transitions through contradictions, governed by the *Omnis Determinatio est Negatio* principle. The third concept that is required to resolve the contradiction and stabilise the logical space between Being and Nothing is the category Determinate Being (i.e., of beings in general). This resolves the contradiction between Being and Nothing because it allows Being to be thought with respect to its true determinate negation (beings in general), and thereby preserve its identity with pure Nothing. This allows for the Being and Nothing to be thought in a consistent relation, and for the Logic to proceed in determining the Absolute by using more categories that thought can use to consistently think about pure Being.

In Fichte's first principle, the I is posited against itself in the form of "I am I" to distinguish between the subject-I and the object-I. Hegel argued that for pure Being to be undetermined by anything distinct from itself, its expression by logic cannot include determination. However, predicating distinct concepts in the I/pure Being introduces limitation in pure Being (which entails finitude, mediacy). Fichte's mistake was to incorporate the object-I into pure Being, by opposing itself to something that attempts to limit its own thought. It is paradoxical to conceive of limits within thought, because those limits are conceived by thought itself. When Fichte opposes a not-I to the I (WL, 104), he asserts a contradiction occurs between the positing relation of the not-I and the I, because positing the not-I implies positing oneself, but the not-I is supposed to be distinct from the I and its positing. Hegel argues that Fichte mislocates the source of this contradiction since Fichte initially failed in correctly abstracting the absolute I from its subjects and predicates. This contradiction is not situated between the positing relations of the first and second principle, but rather located in Fichte's attempt to oppose the not-I to oneself, when rather the not-I should be opposed to pure Being in the form of pure Beings' negation. That is, the subjective limitation of the first principle limits pure Being so that it is not as indeterminate as it *should* be (as in the Hegelian pure Being), so the not-I is placed in a highly determined logical space.

In Fichte's third principle, he tries to resolve the contradiction by positing the finite I as limited by a finite not-I, alongside the infinite task of approximating to absolute self-determination. The third principle renders a regression because the infinite task of self-approximation would never allow for metaphysical knowledge about anything to station in the mind. Thought cannot have the structure of a Fichtean infinity (that is, one that continuous

asymptotically towards an unreachable ideal) because thinking cannot be limited by anything outside of thought. **If thought is limited by something, that something would not be thinkable** – but for Fichte it is, by his first principle wherein limitation is introduced into subjectivity. The transition from Being to Dasein avoids these problems in Fichte's principles because its contradiction was fixed by positing a determinate being (Dasein) opposed to the pure Being. This allows for the Logic to proceed, without being stuck in any regressive state whereby the nature of pure Being is constantly conflicted by the limitations introduced into it at its starting point. Hegel's Logic allows for metaphysical knowledge to happen by avoiding an infinite regression that requires the state of Being to constantly be altered in light of future principles.

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