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Hegel's Linguistic Turn and its Ontological Significance

Abstract: *The issue is whether Hegel's famous claim that logic coincides with metaphysics is to be read to mean that Hegelian logic does the same work as the classic metaphysics* de re *did of establishing the first principles of existence, or whether, on the contrary, the task of metaphysics after Kant can no longer be one of determining being* a se, *but of determining it inasmuch as it is made present to the mind conceptually—that is to say, present as intelligible object. Metaphysics then becomes a kind of transcendental logic. I defend the latter reading, taking Hegel's critique of Spinoza's language of the Absolute, and his treatment of the modal categories, as the basis for this interpretation. I also contrast Hegel's Logic with Fichte's late* Wissenschaftslehre, *which I take to be still bound to classical metaphysics, and criticize Dieter Henrich's reading of Hegel.*

1. *Metaphysics as logic*

The obvious allusion in the title of this presentation to the school of analytical philosophy that has dominated the anglophone academic scene for the past one hundred odd years should not be taken as indicating that I intend to make Hegel honourary member of that school.[1] That would be an absurd anachronism. The allusion, though intended, is for a very specific and narrow purpose, as will transpire in just a moment. At issue in the presentation is the nature of Hegel's Logic, and this is an issue that must be framed, as I intend to do right now, first and foremost in Hegel's own terms.[2] Hegel famously said that the Logic

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[1]There are, however, elements in his thought that bear affinity to it. For a convincing demonstration of this affinity, see Paul Redding, "Hegel's Anticipation of the Early History of Analytic Philosophy," *The Owl of Minerva*, 41:1-2(2010-2011) 19-40. The article concentrates on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

[2]I shall refer to Hegel's works according to the latest critical edition, *G. W. F. Hegel: Gesammelte Werke*, herausgegeben von der Rheinisch-Westphälischen Akademie der

coincides wwith metaphysics.[3] The question is how this statement should be read. One can take it to mean that the Logic does the same work as the classic metaphysics *de re* of establishing the first principles of existence. In the English-speaking tradition of Hegel-interpretation, this is how McTaggart understood the Logic.[4] This line of interpretation is still pursued today by Charles Taylor,[5] Frederick Beiser,[6] and Stephen Houlgate.[7] It renders Hegel's Logic a version of Schelling's Philosophy of Nature. The significant difference, of course, would be that, whereas Schelling ultimately grounds his cosmogony existentially on the basis of an intuition which transcends the concept—thus retaining for the relation of concept to reality, and as the source of meaning, the long-standing model of 'reference to referent'—Hegel, on the contrary, seeks existential traction for his logical metaphysics within the concept itself. It is this circumstance which is the source of the often repeated charge of 'panlogism' made against him,[8] or that lies behind the sobriquet of 'Absolute Idealism' commonly given to his system.

But there is another way of reading the statement, namely by taking the 'Logic'

according to its normal meaning of 'science of the concept', or, as Hegel also defines it, as the 'concept of the concept',[9] and asking what 'metaphysics' could possibly mean when predicated of a science thus understood. This is the way that I want to explore. On this reading, the issue can no longer be one of determining being *a se*, but of determining it inasmuch as it is *made present* to the mind conceptually—that is to say, present as intelligible object. Note that I have said 'made present', not 'represented', for 'representation' entails the 'reference-referent' logical model of the metaphysics *de re* which presupposes a difference of content separating the 'reference' and its 'referent'. Here, on the contrary, the only content that counts is the intelligible one of the conceptual object. The shift, in other words, is from metaphysics as establishing the outline of a physical universe to one that establishes the outline of a universe of meaning. This is not to imply that this new metaphysics does not carry with it an ontological commitment. The point, rather, is that such a commitment cannot be 'realist' in any pre-Kantian sense. It must be indirect: 'transcendental', one is tempted to say, except for the note of subjectivism that which the term brings with it, but which has no place in Hegel's Logic.

The temptation to use 'transcendental' is understandable, for it is easy enough to identify where the shift that I am trying to characterize first occurred—in a form at least, that would make it the most immediate precursor of Hegel's Logic. Much has been said since Kant about his problematic Transcendental Deduction. So far as the early critics were concerned, however, just as important was the deduction which, at least in one place, Kant called 'metaphysical'.[10] This was the deduction of the table of categories—an exercise which Kant also significantly characterized as the 'determination of the concept of an object in general'.[11] On Kant's premise that sensations without thought are blind, the categories provided the norms by which to recognize what would count as an object validly

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[9]GW 12.16.

[10]KrV, B158, § 26.

[11]KrV, B128: 'Sie [die Kategorien] sind Begriffe von einem Gegestande überhaupt' (the rest of the paragraph is also very important).

given in sense-experience. They provided, in other words, the *a priori* norms of objective presence. In the early reception of Kant's critical project, this 'metaphysical deduction' was never seen as problematic.[12]

My contention is that only if Hegel's Logic is read as an extension of Kant's 'metaphysical deduction'—as the detailed determination of the 'concept of an object in general' (an object, incidentally, which in Hegel's case turns out to be itself a subject)—only then can one understand in what critical sense it makes an ontological commitment, and what that commitment might be. This is the meaning of the 'linguistic turn' in the title of the presentation. Whether 'analytical philosophy' is of one piece, and how many, if any, of its past protagonists would have considered themselves to have made the turn, is itself a serious historical issue.[13] Nonetheless, whatever the historical complexities, the turn from the classical metaphysics *de re* to the analysis of the structure and linguistic articulations of our conceptual schemes, where language is the natural medium of expression of such schemes and the only place where they can be analyzed, has conspicuously been the signal mark of analytical philosophy.[14] This is a turn, I want to say, that Hegel also made, in the wake of Kant's Critique of Reason and in the philosophical idiom of the day. He was not alone in making the turn. Fichte did also, in his case in

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[12]Hegel saw in the principle of this deduction the beginning of authentic idealism. But he blamed Kant for having turned the categories into static, dead pigeonholes of the intellect which, in fact, nullified the speculative intent of philosophy. Cf. GW 4, 5. In effect, Hegel directed at Kant the same criticism that the latter directed at Aristotle, namely, that his table of categories was incomplete and developed rhapsodically, without a determining principle. KrV A79/B105-A81/B107.

[13]For a lucid overview of the many phases of the movement, and of the different strands in each, and for a trenchant criticism as well of recent attempts to return to a metaphysics *de re*, see P. M. S. Hacker, 'Analytic Philosophy beyond the Linguistic Turn and Back Again', St. John's College (Oxford)'s web-page:
http://info.sjc.ox.ac.uk/scr/hacker/docs/Beyond%20the%20linguistic%20turn%20.pdf (accessed 11 July 2013).

[14]I say 'conspicuous', not universal. It was not the case for the young Moore and Russell—notably the latter, who was a Platonic enthusiast.

explicit opposition to Schelling's Spinoza-inspired cosmogony. It will be instructive to consider his contrasting method of making it. Hegel and Fichte both succeeded in surpassing the Spinoza who in their time was the representative *par excellance* of the classic metaphysics *de re*, but they did it with a difference which, significantly, came to a head precisely in their contrasting attitudes towards language.

2. *The linguistic turn*

Hegel's turn occurs with 'absolute relation', poised as this category stands at the transition from the Logic's objective part to the subjective. But it is already virtually at hand in the preceding language of the 'absolute', and in the categories of modality that directly issue from it. 'Absolute', and 'modal categories', immediately call Spinoza to mind, and Hegel indeed refers to him in a long comment added to this section.[15] There is nothing, however, in the criticism that he levels against Spinoza's system at this juncture that we would not also expect from anyone at the time unwilling to accept its monism. The more telling criticism is to be found elsewhere, earlier in the text, and only in its revised part of 1832.[16] I shall return to this. But first I must set up the conceptual framework for understanding the criticism, and, even more important, why the criticism is relevant to Hegel's linguistic turn.

Let me explain. The categories, for Hegel no less than for Kant, are reflective terms. They are not universal genera which need specification by a content being added to them—as regretfully Kant also uses them at times—but define, rather, the function that various types of terms discharge in a sentence so that the latter be coherently constructed, without, however, themselves discharging any such function. As Kant says, the categories define which type of terms go into otherwise only syntactically defined sentence

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[15]GW 11, 376-379.

[16]GW 21, 324.

positions.[17] Should they be systematized and themselves made into the elements of a discourse, this discourse would have to be *sui generis*—a discourse about discourse itself; one, therefore, that defines the limits of meaningfulness. Such, I take it, is Hegel's Logic: a systematically developed version of Kant's original Metaphysical Deduction.

More is at issue, however, than just systematization. Indeed, systematization would have no relevance for actual discourse without two assumptions about language, and by this I mean 'ordinary language', where 'ordinary' does not exclude even a high degree of sophistication. These assumptions are implicit in the very notion of 'category'. Kant does not exploit them, but Hegel does. The first is that language, no less than the categories, is itself essentially reflective—as much a discourse about itself as about the subject-matter which is its object. And that it is a discourse about itself is the most important feature, for only inasmuch as in saying whatever it says it recognizably retains thematic unity, and for the sake of retaining this unity it generates norms of relevance and continuity internal to it, does its subject-matter attain articulated presence: it is objectified.[18] The discourse's reflective nature generates the rational space necessary for this presence to be realized. I say 'rational space'. This is a metaphor that I borrow directly from Wilfrid Sellars, who famously spoke of a 'space of reasons',[19] but its Kantian heritage is just below the surface. Just as physical space, as we normally picture it, makes possible the orderly juxtaposition before us of physical things, so the mind's representational activities, be they imaginative or conceptual, make possible the presence of these same things to the mind as objects. The metaphor, in other words, is just another way of speaking of a conceptual *a priori*.[20] Kant

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[17]i.e., with reference to an actual source of knowledge, namely sense-intuitions as already spatio/temporally determined. Cf. KrV § 10. But Kant also uses the categories as genera that need particular determination by a sense-content being added to them. This is his mistake.

[18]Cf. Kant's transcendental unity of apperception.

[19]"Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, ed. Herbert Feigl and Michael Scriven (Minneapolis, 1956), pp. 298-299.

[20]Moreover, the metaphor aptly alludes to a number of other metaphors that Kant himself constantly uses, as for instance 'the *realm* of empirical objects', or 'the *kingdom* of ends'

relied on a psychological model to locate the source of this *a priori*. For Hegel, it is rather generated by discourse itself. Its thematic unity makes possible the objectively recognizable unity of presence of a subject-matter.[21] To stay within the metaphor of a space of reason, the Logic delineates in its artful ways the conceptual geography of precisely this space.[22]

This first assumption assures the existential continuity between ordinary language and Hegel's Logic. The second assumption simply reinforces this continuity. Because of its reflective nature, language spontaneously formalizes itself internally: we are all born logicians. All terms, even those which, on the face of it, are direct determinations of a supposed subject-matter, are the more or less explicit products of a judgement regarding how they (the terms) stand within the context of discourse in general.[23] And these judgments have a history: I mean, a real history in time, but one which is nonetheless governed *a priori*. It is governed by the fundamental interest motivating all language to be at one with itself, that is, to create meaning (this is another way of defining rationality). It is equally governed by the need generated by this same interest to introduce new judgements about its subject-matter—in effect, to coin new terms or invest already existing ones with new meaning—in order to resolve problems of coherence that threaten to break out into outright contradictions in the course of its praxis. Language constantly reforms itself. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel gives an account of this process of

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[21]One result is that Hegel liberates his Logic from the dependence on any psychological model. To be sure, such terms as 'senses', 'understanding', and 'reason', all of them denoting faculties of the mind—all of them, therefore, legitimate furniture of a philosophical psychology—appear in it. In the Logic, however, their use is entirely subordinated to logical interests. They are to be understood to mean degrees of intelligibility, or as denoting types of objectivity made possible by discourse. Any psychological or even phenomenological connotations that they carry are strictly accidental.

[22]I am borrowing Gilbert Ryle's analogy of philosophy as a cartography of mental space. Cf. 'Abstractions', *Dialogue* (Journal of the Canadian Philosophical Association), 1962.

[23]Leaving aside at the moment the value that they might have within specialized forms of discourse.

self-reform staying close to the actual historical circumstances under which it occurred, both in the development of science and of social existence.[24] The Logic, for its part, brings the process to completion—not chronologically,[25] for this is not just a matter of summing up the material content of an age-old conversation, but in the sense that, in the medium of an untensed language which is the work of conceptual art, the Logic defines the internal norms which made that process, though *historically* open-ended, already *formally* complete at every moment. The language of the Logic expresses this completeness. It defines what Hegel calls *das Logische*.

The key-word here is 'completeness'. There is no need to proceed after the exposition of the categories to a further 'transcendental deduction' that would establish their existential validity. This is a need that arises only on the classic reference-referent model of truth which still conditions Kant's critical project, and which is bound, in his case, to a false psychology of sense-representations. On this model, any conceptual representation of the 'referent' would depend on a prior immediate intuition of it. In case this intuition is lacking, as it is on Kant's critical assumptions, any area of meaning which the categories constitute is consequently necessarily relegated to the sphere of the merely subjective. For Hegel, on the contrary, it is only by virtue of the intelligible space which the concept creates that the presence of anything in any way existing *a se* is manifested. Whereas on Kant's type of idealism the validity of the rational is to be tested against being *a se* or, when this is inaccessible, against such a contingent proxy as 'sensations', on Hegel's, it is the *aseitas* of being which is to be tested against the ideal. The actual is the

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[24]Section Six is especially significant in this regard, for Hegel shows there how the establishment of new types of societal language, each motivated by the failure of the previous to hold a community together, gives rise to new, ever more reflective forms, of social arrangements. The upshot is the birth of a community that knows, first by virtue of its religious mythology, and then reflectively, that the Absolute, *as Spirit*, is with it. It knows that it is the creator of meaning and, therefore, of its identity as community. It is at this historical point, which Hegel identifies with his own time, that Science can finally assert its presence in full self-awareness.

[25]Except in the sense that the time has to be ripe for logic, in Hegel's specific form, for it to come onto the historical stage.

rational.

I am not implying that any conceptual system will do, provided that it generates a type of meaning, as if there were no existential difference between monopoly money and real money. In the case of Hegel's Logic, there is indeed a test by which to measure its existential traction, but one which is internal to it and does not require adding an extra-logical content. Take the protagonist of the opening section of the *Phenomenology*—Frau Bauer, as Hegel refers to her in a *Wastebook* aphorism.[26] She has no problem referring to her son, her *Held*, or to Celestine, the cow in the barn yonder, as if their presence, and the sense of immediacy accompanying it, were the starting point of all her experiences. Little does she know—but should soon learn under pressure from the 'we' (the philosopher doing the *Phenomenology*)—that 'immediate presence' is a complex event, and that both this 'presence' and the 'referring' to it which she takes as obvious are in fact results dependent on her tacit reliance on deeply ingrained ideal constructs such as 'farm' and 'family'—ultimately, on historically long since reflectively made decisions now enshrined in her daily language. Nonetheless, whatever the process of conceptual mediation, the presence of her boy, of Celestine the cow, or of the barn yonder, are for Frau Bauer ineluctable facts. This ineluctabilty cannot be reduced. The challenge for Hegel's Logic (the test of its existential validity) consists precisely in demonstrating that the sense of facticity (*Fakticität*, as Fichte calls it) in which Frau Bauer's lived experiences are immersed is itself a product of conceptualization. Conceptualization makes presence possible; it opens up the intelligible space for discovery in the first place. Or again, to make the same point in scholastic language, judgements of existence proceed from essence—provided, of course, that the sufficient conceptual determinations are available.

3. *The facticity of experience*

But how is this demonstrated in logical terms? Anyone familiar with the text of the Logic

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[26]*Wastebook,* Aphorism 10. Karl Rosenkranz, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegels Leben* (Berlin, 1844; Darmstadt, 1963, reprint), p. 539.

knows that facticity—or 'immediacy', which is Hegel's typical term,[27] breaks out at every stage of the logical process, in each case under a different form and with different meaning. At play in the Logic's discourse is a difference between its subject-matter in general (*Gegenstand*), which remains unspoken as such, and its subject-matter as objectified under specific conceptual determinations (as *Objekt*).[28] The discourse progresses as new and ever more reflective categories are introduced and the *Gegenstand* is determined—that is, objectified—accordingly. The just mentioned immediacy breaks out in this process inasmuch as the categories introduced at each stage retain a content of their own which is not absorbed in the discourse itself. They relate to each other, therefore, by connections that remain external to them: as *supposed*[29] at each stage, they turn out on reflection as having been merely *presupposed*. The discourse unfolding through them is thus disrupted, and the nature of the underlying subject-matter which it should make manifest (*das Logische*, as we know from the end) remains obscure. This is the logical counterpart of the experience that our Frau Bauer undergoes historically, as she becomes scientist, metaphysician, and social practitioner, and, repeatedly confronted by conceptual and social problems resulting from the limitations of her at the moment accepted common wisdom, instinctively accepts new norms of objective truth, unaware that these norms are themselves the product of still unspoken judgments which will be in turn the source of new problems. Immediacy, like an irreducible surd, comes to disrupt her experiences. In the *Phenomenology*, Frau Bauer eventually finds rational satisfaction with the creation of the right linguistic community, where the language is first religious, and finally philosophical. Within the abstract framework of the Logic, however, such a satisfaction is to be found only when the relations that connect its categories externally are interiorized by them. The

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[27] As contrasted with Fichte's *Fakticität*.

[28] As I have argued at length elsewhere, the distinctions, *Gegenstand/Objekt*, and *Beziehung/Verhältnis*, run through the Logic, and are crucial for an understanding of it. Cf. *Logic*, p. xxxvi (*passim* in the rest of the Introduction), lxx-lxxi

[29] The usual English translation for *gesetzt* is 'posited'.

relations are transformed from *Beziehungen* to *Verhältnisse*, so that in *saying* one of them, one has in principle already said all the rest, and the difference separating *Gegenstand* and *Objekt*, though not annulled—for Hegel does not countenance abstract identity—is nonetheless exhaustively contained. In this sense, the logical discourse is completed. What happens then to immediacy? Is it abolished? Does it assume a new meaning? Expressed from within the Logic, this is the issue of whether, and how, Frau Bauer's sense of ineluctable facticity is saved.

4. *The language of the absolute*

We are ready to turn to the language of the 'absolute' in the third section of Book Two. The categories defining it are *absolute*, *attribute*, and *mode*. Spinoza and his use of this language apart, these categories simply express in extreme form Frau Bauer's realism. Being is *a se* and *per se*, that is, it is 'absolute'. As so expressed, however, its facticity turns out to be problematic, not because it is unclear whether its presence is self-justifying or in need, rather, of justification, but because this presence transcends the issue of justification altogether. This is an issue that arises only on the side of discourse, because, *as discourse*, it is by nature explicatory, hence explanatory, whereas the 'absolute' is by definition refractory to precisely any explanatory process. It is *a se*, and, therefore, resists objectification. Discourse is consequently settled with the problem of both subjectively *needing* explanation, and yet recognizing the objective *superfluity* of it. Whatever is said of the 'absolute' must only be *attributed* to it: it is *said* of it, not because of it, but because of the language about it. From the 'absolute's' own standpoint, whatever is thus being attributed to it is only a *mode*, a merely relative, accidental determination. And, in saying this, one must keep in mind that, from the 'absolute's' standpoint, the notion of a 'standpoint' is, paradoxically, itself problematic.

Moreover, this language of attribution is incipiently critical, for, as a statement about its subject-matter, it explicitly contains a comment about itself—namely, that its determination of the 'absolute' is only a way and manner of speaking about it. The gap between subject-matter and whatever objectification it might want to bring to it is explicitly

recognized. Conceptually, therefore, we are here at a crossroad. Because of this gap—now clearly and distinctly delineated—either one travels the way of Kant for whom the 'absolute' is the *Abgrund* of reason, that is, the abyss where reason is given to illusions whenever it tries to cross it, and, consequently, any determination of being *a se* must remain subjective.[30] Or, following Spinoza and much of classic metaphysics, one undertakes to traverse the gap, but on the strength of such some non-discursive means as intellectual vision or feeling—at the price, in other words, of leaving reason behind. In this case, too, though in a different sense, the 'absolute' proves to be the *Abgrund* of reason.[31]

The question is whether Hegel can forge a third alternative. The key term now introduced is *Auslegung*—'exposition', as normally translated into English, though I prefer the less literal but, I believe, more descriptive 'narrative'. Now that the categories have become explicitly self-reflective, the Logic is in a position to reflect critically on what it has been from the beginning: *de facto* it has been an *Auslegung* of the 'absolute', a narrative about it. So was Frau Bauer's discourse, and that of the metaphysical systems

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[30]The language of the Absolute was introduced by Fichte and Schelling. Kant spoke rather of the 'unconditional'. The image of the 'abyss' (*der Abgrund*) is however in Kant, possibly inspired by Haller, and it reappears in Hegel. The equivalent image in Fichte is that of the *hiatus irrationalis* (the irrational gap, indeed an abyss) that separates the Absolute and the world of experience. This can be an abyss of reason *as such* only for Fichte. For Kant it is of 'human reason', even though what other kind of reason there could be on his critical premises is not at all clear, since the alternative to the typically dialectical human reason is intellectual intuition. Fichte is more consistent than Kant in this. For Hegel, the abyss is of 'finite reason', that is, reason still conceived after the model of the understanding (as by Kant and Fichte), rather than as a dimension of creative Spirit. For Kant, cf. KrV A613/B641: "Die unbedingte Notwendigkeit, die wir, als den letzten Träger aller Dinge, so unentbehrlich bedürfen, ist der wahre Abgrund für die menschliche Vernunft"; for Hegel, GW 21, 380; 11, 372.28-37; for Fichte, an exceptionally clear text is to be found in Lecture XIV of the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* (second series), where Ficthe says that there is gap, a hiatus, between the Oneness of the Absolute and the disjunction of being/thought; inasmuch as the oneness projects itself into the latter, this happens *per hiatum irrationalem. J. G. Fichte – Gesamtausgabe* (GA), II/8, 225.6-11. For another text, Lecture XIX, GA, II/8, 293.34-295.2.

[31]This contrast of Spinoza and Kant is clearly stated by Fichte in W-L 1812; Kant has to remain at the level of the mere *faktisch*, ignoring issues of genesis. Cf. GA II/13, 56, lines 8-16.

based on it, all of which have been reflected in the Logic's previous stages. The uncritical realism of this discourse makes it *ex hypothesi* impossible for it to comprehend its assumed subject-matter. As a narrative about the 'absolute', it has to remain *external* to it: hypothetical, in Fichte's terminology. The move, therefore, that Hegel must make to surpass the alternative to which Spinoza's and Kant's positions inevitably lead is clear. It is a matter of translating the *external* narrative of these positions into one that is *internal* to the 'absolute'—a self-narrative *by* the 'absolute' itself, now, however, become 'spirit'. In effect, this amounts to showing that the immediacy which has hitherto irrupted at every stage of the Logic *de facto*, far from signaling the presence in it of an irreducible surd—an element of irrationality at which all discursiveness comes to grief and which must give place, therefore, to either direct vision or subjective faith—this immediacy is instead the product of discursiveness itself: it marks an achievement on the part of reason, not a failure. If, historically speaking, reason has taken it to be an intractable surd, that was only because it did not yet know itself as reason. Spinoza's and Kant's *Abgrund* was one of *finite* reason, not of reason as such.

5. *The modal categories*

This point is explicitly made as the Logic turns to the modal categories. Hegel's 1832 criticism of Spinoza to which I have earlier alluded would find its more natural place here.[32] Significantly, the criticism is equally directed at Kant. In that revised text, unexpectedly referring to both Spinoza and Kant in connection with 'measure', Hegel blames both for having assigned to the modal categories only subjective validity. But what would it mean to assign to them objective validity? Certainly not to revert to a pre-Kantian form of dogmatism that would inevitably lead to some type of 'external narrative'. If the move, however, cannot be from Kant back, then it must be from Kant forward, and, at the

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[32]As I have argued elsewhere: *Logic*, Introduction, pp. xliii ff. But it makes sense that Hegel should have made the point in connection with 'measure', for 'measure' begins to introduce in the structure of the logical object an internal thickness, so to speak, which already belies the mere phenomenality (the mere surface presence) of both Spinoza's and Kant's object of experience.

present stage of the Logic, the 'forward' can only consist in dropping once and for all the dogmatic assumption of being *a se* as the unspoken subject-matter of discourse. It means, in other words, *recognizing as this underlying-subject matter the very objectifying process so far only unreflectively directed at it*.[33] The distance between *Gegenstand* and *Objekt* is thus bridged. This is a result that only makes explicit the assumption that *de facto* governs the whole Logic from the beginning, namely, that the main business of language is not to refer to anything outside it, but, on the contrary, to create a universe of meaning, a space of reasons, within which alone nature is first made *effectively* present: is made *actual* (*wirklich*) precisely by being rationalized, that is, transformed into the works of Spirit. Language is the most fundamental of such works.

The first move in this direction is made by virtue of the fluidity of the modal categories. Since the meaning of each spontaneously slides into the meaning of the others,[34] together they constitute a complete discourse that renders the assumption of anything transcending it superfluous.[35] Essentially, this is a matter of demonstrating that the meaning of *die Sache selbst*, the 'facticity of fact', emerges from within this discourse: it consists in a synthesis of two judgements, namely, that a fact '*is* because it *is*', where the stress is on the 'is'; and that 'it is *because* it is', where the stress is instead on the 'because'.[36] Frau Bauer, in her ordinary language about things in general, already acts out this synthesis. She has no difficulty assuming a thing, simply because it *is there*, as the

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[33]Fichte makes this move also, but in a different spirit and with different consequences.

[34]Cf.: "Diese *absolute Unruhe des Werdens* dieser beyden Bestimmungen ist die *Zufälligkeit*. Aber darum weil jede unmittelbar in die entgegengesetzte umschlägt, so geht sie in dieser eben so schlechthin *mit sich selbst zusammen*, und diese *Identitä* derselben einer in der andern ist die *Notwendigkeit*." GW 11.384.31-34.

[35]Cf.: "Wenn alle die Bedingungen einer Sache vollständig vohanden sind, so tritt sie in *Wirklichkeit*; – die Vollständigkeit der Bedingungen ist die Totalität als am Inhalte, und *die Sache selbst* ist dieser Inhlat bestimmt eben so ein Wirkliches als Mögliches zy sein." GW 11.387.14-17.

[36]This synthesis is what defines absolute necessity in the Logic: it marks the completion of the whole dialectic of modal categories. Cf. GW 11.391.

starting point for the explanation of the presence of something else; yet, when her lived context requires it, reversing the process and taking the presence of the original thing as requiring other things as conditions for its presence—i.e., as providing the *because* of its being *there* in the first place. Frau Bauer is operating with a language defined by 'actuality' and 'possibility', where the meaning of the two inherently shift into one another, for the measure of the truly 'possible' is its already being in principle 'actual'; and, of the truly 'actual', that its actuality is the inevitable result of its possibility. This interplay of 'actual' and 'possible' is what makes for the ineluctable character of the 'fact': on the one hand, its presence is *necessary*, for, once *there*, it cannot be revoked; on the other hand, though *there*, it might not have been, and hence remains *contingent*. It is this 'might have been' that only the space of reason creates which renders the otherwise merely physical presence of things both intelligible *and* problematic.

Within the artificially self-contained discourse of the Logic, Hegel subjects to analysis this mutual entailment of the modal categories, first at a purely formal level of abstraction, as categories in general; then as relativized, i.e., in the form in which they would govern Frau Bauer's language in the particular contexts of her immediate world of experience, where only relative necessity is in each case at issue. The crucial transition, however, is made in a third step, where a totality of these particular contexts is envisaged. This is a universe in which the modal categories would indeed define meaning *in concreto*, i.e., not just formally; nor, however, just in particular contexts, but *in toto*, absolutely. It is a universe (reminiscent of Leibniz's, or, better still, of Adam Weishaupt's) made up of particularized worlds, each self-contained and independent of the rest from its point of view—in fact, however, each reflecting and made possible by all the rest. There is no space available in it for any 'might have been', since any 'might have been' at one place in the universe is already actual somewhere else. Reality is dense, so to speak.[37] The connection between 'possibility' and 'actuality' is, therefore, one of 'absolute necessity'. Hegel calls it

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[37]All distinctions in it are surpassed in being posited. Cf. GW 11 390. 29-391.17.

'blind necessity'[38]—one which is averse to light, as he also says,[39] using an image to which I shall return in connection with Fichte. The narrative about the 'absolute' is now indeed internal to it, for it is through the mediation of the universe holding all its worlds together that these can each reflect all the rest and be actual. But the problem is that there is nowhere from which the narrative can be narrated—not from the side of the actual worlds, because of their particularity; not from the side of the universe in general, because, if narrated apart from these worlds, it relapses into formal abstraction. The connection between the two remains opaque, and any disclosure of it unresolved.

Yet, Hegel says, the light will shine.[40] It is the very fluidity of the modal categories that forces its revelation. For if one wants to avoid the opaqueness of the language of 'absolute necessity', yet hold on to the completeness of discourse that it tried to achieve, there is no choice left but to look for this completeness on the side of the discourse itself: in the universe of meaning that the latter generates, where absolute necessity is transformed into spirit's freedom. Discourse progresses by stating itself. It thereby particularizes its original theme and hence establishes the need to re-state itself over and over again: in this sense, it generates immediacy. The sense of the ineluctable which Frau Bauer experiences before 'facts' is due precisely to the freedom she enjoys of being able to speak the language of the 'might have been' before any of them: of ever continuing a conversation about them in which the 'is' and the 'because' alternate in setting its leading motif. But it is the language itself, by virtue of its original theme, that governs this process of particularization, thereby retaining its unity and the capacity to declare normatively when it

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[38]"Die absolute Notwendigkeit ist daher blind." GW 11.391.25.

[39]"Aber diese *Zufälligkeit* ist vielmehr die absolute Nothwendigkeit; sie ist das Wesen jener freyen, an sich nothwendigen Wirklichkeiten. Dieses Wesen / ist das *Lichtscheue*, weil an diesen Wirklichkeiten kein *Scheinen*, kein Reflkex ist, weil sie nur rein in sich gegründet, für sich gestalten sind, sich nur *sich selbst* manifestiren, – weil sie nur *Seyn* sind." GW 11.391.38-392.3.

[40]"Aber das Wesenwird an ihnen hervorbrechen und offenbaren, was es ist und was sie sind." GW 11 392.3-4. I am interpreting the rest: an internal exposition which is at the same time a self-revelation already defines the life of Spirit, and Spirit is realized in the medium of language.

has become an achieved discourse—a thematic totality. *This is Hegel's linguistic turn.* As expressed in the medium of the Logic, its full implications come to the fore only at the very end, where Hegel reveals that its content is not any particular determination, or any totality of determinations, but the methodical and self-contained movement from one determination to the other. Method itself, which Hegel calls the rhythm of *die Sache selbst*,[41] is the content.

6. *Hegel's versus Fichte's linguistic turn*

I said that Hegel was not alone in making his linguistic turn. Fichte did also, and it is instructive to consider the difference—not, however, without first making a brief critical excursus.[42] We have all learned from Dieter Henrich's studies, on Hegel's Logic in particular. One has reason to wonder, however, why he could have repeatedly faulted this Logic on the ground that reflection is at work in it from the beginning, notably in Book One where 'being' and its determinations are adduced as 'immediate'. The result, according to Henrich, is that the return to its beginning that the Logic claims to perform at the end, thereby mediating the immediacy of the beginning, is in fact none other than just one more reflective loop that evades immediacy.[43] This is a strange objection indeed. Of course there is reflectivity in the Logic from beginning to end: the Logic is a product of reflection. It has Frau Bauer's language as its historical antecedent, but this language too, though not as deliberate as that of the Logic, is, *as language*, already reflective. And Frau Bauer has, in turn, her own natural functions as historical antecedent. These might indeed be 'unreflective'—at least according to a strict sense of 'reflective'. But the point of her

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[41]Cf. GW 21 38.22-25.

[42]The literature on Fichte is enormous. For the late Fichte, however, I have found the works of Gaetano Rametta especially illuminating. *Le strutture speculative della Dottrina della Scienza* (Pantograf,1995). "Einleitende Bemerkungen über die Wissenschaftslehre von 1807," in *Fichte-Studien* XXVI (2006) 33-61.

[43]See, for instance, Dieter Henrich, "Anfang und Methode der Logik," *Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft I (1964), 19-35, cf. pp. 27, 29, 31-32.

language is to transform these otherwise mere physical occurrences into the content of a discourse within which, as measured against the 'might have been' that reflection brings into play, they acquire their character of immediacy: their facticity. Whereas Frau Bauer generates this immediacy spontaneously, and deals with it *ad hoc*, the Logic reenacts its genesis artfully, for the sake of comprehending. Comprehension, and comprehension alone, is the Logic's admittedly reflective aim. To expect anything else would be not unlike being surprised because at the end (say) of a dietary science no food is yet at hand.

Henrich's objection runs, on the face of it, into such an astounding category mistake that, in all fairness, one must ask on what assumption the mistake would not occur. The quest need not be long. It is Henrich's repeated claim that Hegel's science is governed by the conception of the absolute All-One.[44] This is a significant formulation, for it happens to coincide with exactly the assumption with which Fichte began his 1804 version of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, when he dropped the idiom of the 'I' and replaced it with that of the Absolute.[45] Schelling can be forgiven for believing that he was being plagiarized, for Fichte, if not assuming a Spinozistic standpoint for the first time, was at least for the first time making its assumption explicit. But what set Fichte apart is how, with his usual brilliance, he clearly recognized the problem of a science whose intended subject-matter (the Absolute) transcends the science's means of expressing it. Even the statement of its fundamental assumption, namely, that 'the Absolute appears', already entails a falsification. For if the Absolute actually were to appear, or, for that matter, if in the just cited statement one were successfully referring to it, the Absolute would have created a space outside itself, thereby ceasing to be 'absolute'. That the Absolute *is*, and that *it*

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[44]See, for instance, "Erkundung im Zugzwang: Ursprung, Leistung und Grenzen von Hegels Denken des Absoluten," *Das Interesse des Denkens: Hegel aus heutiger Sicht*, eds. W. Welsche and K. Vieweg (Munich, 2003), p. 21. Henrich understands Hegel metaphysically not unlike McTaggart.

[45]W-L 1804, Lecture I, GA II/8, 9. But see also, as another among many instances, "Vom Verhältniß der Logik zur wirklichen Philosophie – Nachschrift Itzt" (1812): ". . . also auch: *kein mannnigfaltiges Seyn*; wohl aber **Ein Seyn: Gott!** der nur aber in seinem Bilde im Wissen vorkömmt'. IV/5, 57.8-9.

appears, must remain, therefore, a hypothetical thought motivated by interests internal to thought itself, and assented to only by virtue of purely subjective belief. It is a thought which, in expressing what it expresses, at the same time distances itself from it.

But this is the definition of 'schema'—a trope which, from 1804 to the end, plays a crucial role in the *Wissenschaftslehre*.[46] A 'schema' represents whatever it schematizes only *formally* or intentionally; *materially*, the representing is done in the medium of the content which is characteristic of the particular schema chosen in a given context, and which steps in the place of what is being schematized; it represents the latter 'vicariously' (another favourite expession of Fichte).[47] Experiences, for Fichte, are all schemas of the Absolute, after-images (*Nachbilden*) of it; the *Wissenschaftslehre*, for its part, is the deliberatively reflective after-image of these after-images. Its first task, therefore, is to construe a schema that meets three conditions. (1) It images the contradiction of an Absolute that must appear, yet in appearing stays within itself. (2) It does this in the only way it possibly can, that is, by exhibiting the contradiction from the side of the appearing (granted that there is one *de facto*): in effect, therefore, as a problem internal to the schema *as schema*. By definition, the schema is what it is only by being an 'other', something which, however, it cannot be, since it is *itself*; it can be true to this itself, therefore, only by de-constructing it while construing it. (3) Finally, in thus displaying this logic internal to it, the schema at the same time also instantiates a problem common (according to Fichte) to all experience. Namely, experience is based on a lived intuition which, since it precedes any subject/object differentiation, is however blind to itself; it therefore requires conceptualization; in being conceptualized, however, it turns into a pale thing in which its original lived immediacy is lost. Experience is unable to recover its source: this last, in

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[46]See, for instance, the schema A / xyz · B–T, which summarizes Lecture II (W-L 1804) and governs the rest of the exposition of the W-L. GA II/8, 19.

[47]*Stellvertreter*. See, for instance, W-L 1804, Lecture VIII, GA II/8, 123.2-3: "Was wir vorher für Urlicht hielten, hat sich nun verwandelt in bloße Einsicht und Stellvertreter des Lichts." For a very illuminating discussion of this term in Fichte, see Rametta (1995), pp. 99ff.

Fichte's expression, is hidden.[48]

To construe a schema that meets these three conditions is the task which in 1804, and more extensively in the 1809-1812 versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte accomplishes by translating the original problematic thought, 'the Absolute appears', into the schema of 'appearing *as appearing*'. This is an 'appearing' that *de facto* constantly resolves itself into a particular *appearance*. As this appearance, however, it leaves its *appearing* behind; it falls short, therefore of appearing *as appearing*. Its product, the particular appearance, must therefore be surpassed and replaced by another, thus initiating again the process of disappearing while appearing. What follows in the *Wissenschaftslehre* is a series of schemas, each the *Nachbild* of a particularized form of experience and, by implication, of an equally particularized assumption of what it is for the Absolute to appear; each struck down even as it is construed. These schemas follow one another in a process not unlike a neo-Platonic emanation from the One, where, at the bottom, at the realm of *Empirie*, which is nothing, the whole process is re-absorbed into the One. Idealism and realism are struck down, and so, too, the new forms of idealism and realism that emerge over the demise of the previous ones.[49] Consciousness itself is struck down, as well as the subject/object division which is essential to it.[50] The very process of thus

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[48]The whole Lecture VIII of W-L 1804 is relevant.

[49]Lecture XII, XIII and XIV deal with this reduction. Both idealism and realism must be struck down because, in their different ways, they both presuppose an »in itself « as absolute which, in point of fact, cannot be such, for it implies an opposition and must be, therefore, a relative, the product of consciousness. This is not to deny that, factically, we presuppose the 'in itself'.

[50]Lecture XIV is relevant. Cf. "Hauptresultat: Das Bewußtseyn ist in seiner ansich Gültigkeit abgewiesen, ohnerachtet zugestanden worden, daß wir aus demselben nicht herauskommen. [. . .] Haben wir dies nur einmal eingesehen, so wollen wir ja doch, ohnerachtet wir faktisch es nicht vernichten können, realiter, und über Wahrheit urtheilend, nicht daran glauben, sondern im Urtheile davon abstrahiren; ja wir müssen dies unter der Bedingung, daß wir zur Wahrheit gelangen wollen, nicht unbedingt, denn das ist nitch nothwending daß wir die Wahrheit einsehen." GA II/8: 217(lines 25-33); English, p. 110.

constructing *a priori* otherwise mere facts of consciousness, thus presuming to genetically enact within *oneself* a passage to the ineffable Absolute; indeed, even this "oneself" itself, the "us" who believes is doing the constructing, whereas, in truth, the construction does itself spontaneously—all this too is struck down.[51] What is left is just ineffability.

Hegel made his linguistic turn with the language of the 'absolute'. So did Fichte, but (here is the difference between the two) he did it, not by surpassing it, but by developing it internally as a language necessarily of mere attribution. In this, he was brilliant. Faced, like Hegel, with the alternative of going either back to Spinoza or past Kant, Fichte's move was to go back to Spinoza, but critically. His *Wissenschaftslehre* is a narrative, not of the Absolute (as it would be in Schelling), but of what it is like to exist in a universe whose ultimate truth is *das all-eine Absolute*. It is the phenomenology of a subject for whom existence (especially its own) is a mere epiphenomenon, and for whom, therefore, the only logically adequate language is that of attribution. Hegel said that 'absolute necessity' is blind, the *Abgrund* of reason. But he let light shine forth. Fichte, on the contrary, using the same metaphor, says of light that it hides itself from view while illuminating—hence, while manifesting, at the same time obscuring.[52] While Hegel avoided the *Abgrund* of reason by turning to Spirit, thus asserting the supremacy of discursiveness, Fichte opted to live at its margin, ever poised to let reason founder in it. "Thus, away with all words and signs!" Fichte tells his auditors. And he continues,

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[51]Fichte praises Spinoza for having seen, regarding the opposition between God and us, that, if we seriously want to avoid dualism, since God ought not to be done away with, then the negation has to be borne by us. "Daß alles einzelne Seyn, als an sich gültig und für sich bestehend, in seinem System verloren geht, und bloß Existenz übrig behält, ist klar und unläugbar." (115, lines 24-26) This of course applies first and foremost to the 'I'. But then Spinoza, according to Fichte, went on to kill God as well, by turning him into a thing without life. Lecture VIII, GA II/8: 113(line 28)-117(line 27).

[52]Cf. Lecture IV, GA II/8, 119 (lines 23-33): "Wir behautpen daher [. . .] zwei verschiedene Weisen des Lichtes, da zu seyn und zu leben: die Eine mittelbar und äußerlich im Begriffe, die andere schlechthin unmittelbar *durch sich selber*, ob es auch *keiner einsieht*, und der Strenge nach, daß es wirklich durchaus keiner einsieht, sondern dieses inwendige Leben des Lichts, durchaus *unbegreiflich* wird.

"Nothing remains except our living thinking and insight, which can't be shown on a blackboard nor be represented in any way but can only be surrendered to nature."[53] Fichte's language ends in silence.

There is no category mistake in Henrich. The mistake, rather, is to have interpreted Hegel as falling—as Fichte no doubt did—still within the classic tradition of the metaphysics of the *hen kai pan*, whereas Hegel was breaking free of it. The ontological commitment implied in his turn is that the language of 'becoming', not 'being', is the one that most broadly, yet accurately, defines the objectivity of experience: the 'one' sought by it is not that of Parmenides or Spinoza, but of the self-containedness of a being which, in becoming the other, stays with itself. Language is the perfect achievement of this kind of self-containment.

7. *Language as the space of discovery*

I am ready to conclude. The lesson to be learned from all this is that there is no 'given', no supposed fact, which is not already theoretically construed, no immediacy which is not mediated. 'Reference' is possible only in particular contexts, within already linguistically defined contexts of meaning. So far as judgements of existence are concerned, the implication is that all argumentation has to be ontological: there is no escaping from language.[54] And if anyone thinks that one is therefore condemned to a hopeless subjectivism or, alternatively, to panlogism, this is only because he or she holds on to the myth of language as essentially referential, and not, rather, as creating a space of discovery where nature is completed by being rendered intelligible, and things can consequently be recognized for what they are.[55]

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[53]Lecture VI, GA II/8: 95(lines 30-33).

[54]This is not to say that all discourse is successful, or that the traditional argument for the existence of God 'from the concept' works.

[55]The completion is only logical. But Hegel also seems to believe that he can give a narrative about nature and history which is also materially complete. Or does he? This would be wrong; but Hegel can be criticized on the strength of his own Logic.