

## HEGEL'S LOGIC OF ACTUALITY

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IT HAS BECOME COMMON in discussions of post-Kantian idealism to put forth the thesis that Hegel completes Kant, that Hegel completes the Kantian critical project by transforming transcendental idealism into absolute idealism.<sup>1</sup> Such readings generally tend to focus on the great similarities between Kant and Hegel in their attempts to work out how the conditions of possibility of knowledge depended upon coming to an understanding of our forms of thinking and our capacities of judgment, rather than tracing the origins of knowledge to impressions, sensations, or other empiricist notions of unadulterated sense experience. Knowledge and truth are not to be found by asking questions about the object, but by seeking knowledge and self-knowledge of the capacities and activities of thinking itself. Unlike precritical metaphysics, which sought knowledge of being as such, critical philosophy equates knowledge with the activities of reason and thinking. What Kant and Hegel share in common then, is the task which results from the Copernican turn: what are the necessary forms of thinking that are required for determining any object, given that objects must conform to our very forms of thinking, or more precisely, that objects are only given in experience as objects that are thought?

Famously for Kant, the supreme principle of the necessary conditions of possibility for knowledge of a possible object is the synthetic unity of apperception. For Hegel, objectivity and truth are expressed by the development and activity of the Concept (*Begriff*). In his book, *Hegel's Idealism*, Robert Pippin argues that what Hegel means by the Concept, and what absolute idealism is, should be

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<sup>1</sup> This is due in large part to the work of Robert Pippin, who puts forth this argument in *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). The recent translation of Béatrice Longuenesse's book, *Hegel's Critique of Metaphysics*, trans. Nicole J. Simek (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), has added further richness to this debate. Jean Hyppolite also argues that Hegel completes Kant by transforming transcendental logic into speculative logic in his book, *Logic and Existence*, trans. Leonard Lawlor and Amit Sen (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997).

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understood with respect to the ways in which he develops the Kantian “apperception or self-consciousness theme,” for it is Hegel’s development and extension of this theme that completes the Kantian project.<sup>2</sup> The logic of the Concept completes transcendental logic and Pippin cites the following in order to show the continuity between Kant and Hegel in their attempt to ground knowledge in forms of thinking rather than in empirical experience:

It is one of the profoundest and truest insights to be found in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the *unity* which constitutes the nature of the *Concept* is recognized as the *original synthetic* unity of *apperception*, as unity of the *I think*, or self-consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

What makes Kant and Hegel both “idealists” is their insistence that knowledge and truth are grounded upon the unity of the activity of thinking and not in mere sense experience. By allying his Concept with the unity of apperception, Hegel reveals how much he has in common with Kant and how the categories of the *Science of Logic* can be seen as a rethinking of transcendental logic.

This version of the Kant/Hegel relationship demonstrates the importance of understanding Hegel’s idealism as an extension of Kant’s, and indeed, Kant’s presence, even if not by name, can be found on almost every page in the *Science of Logic*. And yet, this certainly cannot be the whole story, since Hegel, in “completing” Kant, also transforms every facet of his predecessor’s philosophy so radically that words, concepts, and the very nature of reality itself, take on fundamentally new meanings. The “Concept,” the “absolute,” the “idea,” “judgment,” “actuality,” finitude and infinity, consciousness, the “I”—all of these terms are unrecognizable in the Kantian system according to Hegel’s definitions and cannot fit seamlessly into the broader project of a transcendental idealism that only seeks the formal

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<sup>2</sup> Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 7.

<sup>3</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 1969), 584, henceforth *SL*, followed by page number; *Wissenschaft der Logik*, 2 vols, that comprise vols. 5–6 of *Werke* (Frankfurt am main: Suhrkamp, 1969), vol. 2, 254, henceforth *WL*, followed by volume number and page number. Unless otherwise noted, emphases in the quotes are author’s own. For an earlier formulation of Hegel’s position with respect to the synthetic unity of apperception, see *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977).

conditions of possibility for experience in general.<sup>4</sup> To take just one example, Hegel's Concept cannot be easily identified with Kant's unity of apperception or the unity of the "I think" because the Concept for Hegel cannot be unequivocally attributed to an "I" or to consciousness, especially at the level of logic.<sup>5</sup> Unlike the external reflection of the "I think" that must synthesize and be applied to a manifold of intuition, the movement and urge (*Trieb*) of the Concept is an immanently developing process, one that has actuality and objectivity, without thereby being "permanently conditioned by a manifold of intuition."<sup>6</sup> The passage quoted by Pippin where the unity of apperception is praised is also a set up for Hegel's criticism of it a few pages further on:

Kant has introduced . . . the extremely important thought that there are synthetic judgements *a priori*. This original synthesis of apperception is one of the most profound principles for speculative development; it contains the beginning of a true apprehension of the nature of the Concept and is completely opposed to that empty identity or abstract universality which is not within itself a synthesis. The further development however, does not fulfill the promise of the beginning. The very expression *synthesis* easily recalls the conception of an *external* unity and a *mere combination* of entities that are *intrinsically separate*. . . . and has reverted once

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<sup>4</sup> My aim is of course not to deny the importance of Kant's influence on Hegel or post-Kantian German philosophy more generally. However, the language of "completion" and the over-emphasis of continuity between Kantian and Hegelian idealisms obscure the innovations of post-Kantian philosophy, as well as the radical departure from Kant that they represent. For a recent discussion of the various problems involved with interpretations that put forth a deflationary, "nonmetaphysical," or "Kantianized" Hegel, see Espen Hammer's introduction to *German Idealism: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Espen Hammer (London: Routledge, 2007), 1–6. See also in the same volume, Sebastian Gardner's essay, "The Limits of Naturalism and the Metaphysics of German Idealism," 19–49.

<sup>5</sup> "But this act [of thought as such] should no longer be called consciousness; consciousness embraces within itself the opposition of the ego and its object which is not present in that original act. The name consciousness gives it a semblance of subjectivity even more than does the term *thought*, which here, however, is to be taken simply in the absolute sense as *infinite* thought untainted by the finitude of consciousness, in short, *thought as such*" (SL 62–3 / WL 2.60).

<sup>6</sup> SL 589 / WL 2.261.

more to the assertion that the Concept is permanently conditioned by a manifold of intuition.<sup>7</sup>

The rejection of judgment as synthesis and the rejection of the unity of the Concept as a synthetic unity of heterogeneous parts fundamentally change how self and world are constituted and related. Hegel's point here is that by remaining absolutely tied to external intuitions, Kant betrays his own insight that the unity of apperception is the ground of the objective unity of all experience, the fact that "the *a priori* conditions of a possible experience in general are *at the same time* conditions for the possibility of objects of experience."<sup>8</sup> The Concept is not dependent on external intuitions because it is its own source of objectivity, and does not receive its objectivity from given, sensible criteria. Kant traces objectivity to the unity of apperception, only then to bar it from ever fulfilling its function by leaving it dependent on intuitions, restricting its validity to phenomena.

What this means then, most importantly, is that although Hegel is on board with Kant's Copernican turn, absolute idealism, unlike transcendental idealism, is about thinking as much as it is about being. Unlike Kant, for whom concepts and intuitions were inherently empty and blind respectively prior to synthesis, Hegelian logic, as Hyppolite writes, "starts with an identification of thought and the thing thought. The thing, being, is not beyond thought, and thought is not a subjective reflection that would be alien to being."<sup>9</sup> The Concept does not need to be applied to intuitions because it is its own content and determinacy; it is the drive of being as being thought as much as it is the drive of thinking that thinks itself. The absoluteness of absolute idealism is due to its being both an idealism and a materialism, both a logic and an ontology,<sup>10</sup> where these distinctions are themselves

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<sup>7</sup> *SL* 589 / *WL* 2.260–1.

<sup>8</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), A111; henceforth cited by page numbers from the A and B editions. My emphasis.

<sup>9</sup> Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Here the terms materialism and ontology should be taken in their most minimal sense. Materialism simply denotes the fact that absolute idealism concerns the matter and content of thinking as much the form. See for example *SL* 43–5 / *WL* 1.36–7 where Hegel refers repeatedly to *Materie*, arguing that logic cannot abstract from its material content. Ontology refers to the fact that the logical categories of thinking are equally the categories of being. In the introduction to the Doctrine of Essence, Hegel reminds us that

provisional, unstable, and contradictory, without returning to so-called precritical metaphysics. Thus, against Pippin's "non-metaphysical" reading that interprets Hegel's idealism as a form of transcendental idealism or "logical idealism" that does not "[confuse] logical with ontological issues," I want to claim that Hegel's logic precisely "slips frequently from a 'logical' to a material mode, going far beyond a claim about thought or thinkability, and mak[es] a *direct* claim about the necessary nature of things,"<sup>11</sup> of things themselves, or *die Sache selbst*. Seen in this light, understanding Hegelian speculative logic would require more interpretive dimensions than simply viewing it as the successor to Kantian transcendental logic, particularly in the Doctrine

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the path of knowing that inwardizes [*erinnert*] itself, sublating being into essence, "is the movement of being itself" (*SL* 389 / *WL* 2.13). One can also put the problem in terms of idealism and realism, where absolute idealism properly understood makes uncertain the very possibility of this distinction. Hegel writes in the *Philosophy of Nature*: "This idealism [absolute idealism], which recognizes the Idea throughout the whole of Nature is at the same time realism, for the Notion of the organism is the Idea as reality, even though in other respects the individuals correspond only to one moment of the Notion. What philosophy recognizes in the real, the sensuous world, is simply the Notion" *Philosophy of Nature: Part II of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press), §353 Zusatz.

<sup>11</sup> Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, 188, 187. These lines I have quoted from Pippin are precisely what he argues that Hegel *is not* doing and *cannot* be doing if he is indeed continuing and completing Kant's version of idealism. The whole sentence reads: "On the face of it, there are several places where Hegel, in discussing the limitations of a Notion or its development, slips frequently from a 'logical' to a material mode, going far beyond a claim about thought or thinkability, and making a *direct* claim about the necessary nature of things, direct in the sense that no reference is made to a 'deduced' relation between thought and thing. A claim is simply made, on the supposed basis of logical necessity, about things" (187). Pippin's Hegel clearly separates thought and being in a way that Hegel explicitly rejects. Speculative logic does not need to "deduce" the relation between thought and thing because their identity and unity is presupposed by the *Logic*, and immanently developed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. On this issue and on the similarities and differences between Hegel's and Kant's respective idealisms, see Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 2006), 123–31 and his criticism of Pippin, 137–43. See also Markus Gabriel, "The Dialectic of the Absolute: Hegel's Critique of Transcendent Metaphysics," forthcoming in *The Dimensions of Hegel's Dialectic*, ed. Nectarius G. Limnatis (New York: Continuum, 2009). I will be citing from a preprint unpublished manuscript.

of the Concept where Hegel's departure from Kant is most radically expressed.<sup>12</sup>

One way to understand the difference between transcendental and speculative logic is that whereas the former determines the necessary conditions and categories for the knowledge of any *possible* object, the latter is the process and activity of determining the truth of *actual* objects and of *actuality* (*Wirklichkeit*) itself.<sup>13</sup> Hegel's *Logic*, and perhaps his entire philosophy, attempts to work through and express what actuality is, and he writes in the *Encyclopaedia Logic* that "the content of philosophy is *actuality*."<sup>14</sup> The importance of the category of actuality for understanding how Hegel truly departs from Kant cannot be overstated. In the *Logic*, "Actuality" is the last section of the Doctrine of Essence and precedes the transition into the Doctrine of the Concept, presenting us with a form of determinacy that has overcome the traditional metaphysical opposition between essence and appearance, a form of determinacy that manifests the genesis of the Concept. If actuality is the content of philosophy as science (*Wissenschaft*), it is thus also first and foremost the content and subject matter of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, and more specifically, the content and subject matter of the Doctrine of the Concept in which

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<sup>12</sup> In *Hegel's Critique of Metaphysics*, Longuenesse suggests that although she interprets the Doctrine of Essence as the successor to Kantian transcendental logic, she acknowledges that such a reading may need to be revised when one takes into account Hegel's innovations in the subjective logic, or the Doctrine of the Concept. In part 2 of her book, she expresses doubts regarding the continuity between Kant and Hegel's own speculative logic, arguing that in the subjective logic Hegel reverts to some version of precritical metaphysics. Although I agree that it is in the Doctrine of the Concept where Hegel's own position becomes crystallized and his departure from Kant made apparent, I disagree that he reverts to precritical metaphysics. I will say more about this in what follows.

<sup>13</sup> See Houlgate, *The Opening*, 127–9. Again, in order to determine actual objects, Kant insists on our reliance on intuitions.

<sup>14</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991), §6; henceforth *EL*, followed by section number. The full sentence reads: "philosophy should be quite clear about the fact that its content is nothing other than the basic import that is originally produced and produces itself in the domain of the living spirit, the content that is made into the *world*, the outer and inner world of consciousness; in other words, the content of philosophy is *actuality*."

Hegel's speculative position is fully realized. Coming to an understanding of what Hegel means by *Wirklichkeit* is then crucial for assessing how speculative logic fundamentally changes the ways in which we conceive of reality and the ways in which it is a departure from Kantian idealism.<sup>15</sup> In what follows, I want to interpret speculative logic as a logic of actuality by (i) demonstrating how the relationship between the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Logic* and the transition from absolute knowing to the beginning of the *Logic* is an exposition of how thinking becomes actual and of the actual, and (ii) giving an exposition and analysis of the category of actuality in the *Logic* in order to show how Hegel's treatment of the modal categories overturns transcendental idealism and determines speculative logic as a logic of actuality. By breaking down the traditional distinctions between actuality, possibility, necessity, and contingency and redefining their significance, Hegel provides us with the categories necessary for a new understanding of the relation between thought and reality beyond the Kantian frame.

## I

Establishing the relationship between the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* is perhaps one of the most difficult interpretive tasks of Hegelian scholarship. Hegel often wrote that the *Phenomenology* served as the propaedeutic to his philosophical system, forming the first part of his system of science. The *Logic* follows as "the first sequel," beginning from the standpoint of absolute knowing where the *Phenomenology* ends.<sup>16</sup> Although this much is clear, many of the details of this relationship remain mired in controversy. What precisely does the *Phenomenology* establish? What is absolute knowing? How does the *Logic* begin?

The primary task of the *Phenomenology* is to overcome the opposition of consciousness, or to overcome the opposition between

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<sup>15</sup> In "The Dialectic of the Absolute," Gabriel suggests that Hegel's *Logic* can be read as a series of attempts at defining the absolute, where it turns out that there is no absolute as such, but that "the absolute can only be attained as a process of manifestation which Hegel calls (among other things) 'actuality' (*Wirklichkeit*)" (4).

<sup>16</sup> *SL* 29 / *WL* 1.18.

consciousness and its objects. In the well-known language of this earlier text, Hegel seeks to show how Substance is at the same time Subject by presenting the experience of consciousness as it overcomes various shapes of finite thinking in order that the standpoint from which the *Logic* begins can be achieved. Thus, the *Phenomenology* describes the “coming-to-be of *Science as such*,” showing how consciousness *must* undergo the infamous “pathway of *doubt . . . and despair*” before the opposition of consciousness can be overcome, before thought can become truly actual and *of the actual*.<sup>17</sup> To put Hegel’s dramatics aside for a moment, the stakes of this undertaking are in fact quite high. In order for it to be possible for the *Logic* to begin, Hegel must overcome a series of metaphysical and epistemological problems that arise due to the philosophical separation of subject and object. In the introduction, this separation is presented through a polemic against the idea of thought as an instrument or medium which we use and apply externally in order to come to “know” objects. The very separation and heterogeneity between such an instrument and its intended objects immediately lead us into two interrelated problems. On the one hand, if thought is an instrument actively applied to objects, thought will inevitably distort and alter the object, meaning that rather than gaining knowledge of the object itself, we only have knowledge of an object that has been distorted by the instrument of thinking. On the other hand, if our instrument is instead a passive and receptive capacity, our knowledge of the object will still only be seen through the lens of thought, and in either case true knowledge of the object will not have been achieved.

What Hegel demonstrates here is that whether cognition is presented as spontaneity (a synthetic unity of apperception unifying a manifold of intuition), receptivity (a priori forms of intuition passively receiving sense data), or perhaps both (synthetic a priori judgment), a philosophy that radically separates thought and its objects inevitably leads to some form of skepticism or the positing of some unknowable realm of objects beyond our knowledge, what Hyppolite calls the

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<sup>17</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), ¶27, ¶78, henceforth *PS*, followed by paragraph number; *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, vol. 3 of *Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 31, 72, henceforth *PG*, followed by page number.



ineffable.<sup>18</sup> If thought is construed as a mere instrument, either the skeptic will tell us that we do not have “true” knowledge, but only knowledge of phenomena, of mere appearances, or the mystic will resort to the positing of a mysterious, noumenal beyond, leading to faith but not knowledge. Thus, overcoming the opposition of consciousness entails overcoming skepticism<sup>19</sup> as well as the thing-in-itself, and this is what drives the *Phenomenology* towards its conclusion in absolute knowing. As each shape of consciousness is forced to realize its deep attachment to and entanglement with the very object which it continually repudiates as separate and external, consciousness gradually becomes aware of its identity with the object it seeks to know, and absolute knowing expresses the self-conscious unity of thought and being, of substance and subject. Only then do we reach the standpoint of the *Logic*, or the standpoint of science, “the point of view which no longer takes the determinations of thought to be only an instrument and a means . . . as an external form.”<sup>20</sup> What we have instead is a point of view where the determinations of thought *are* the determinations of the actual things that are thought, and absolute knowing, the standpoint of the *Logic*, leaves no remainder for the skeptic or the mystic to run with. Simply stated, absolute knowing is the awareness of the unity or identity of thought and being, of consciousness with the object of consciousness, of concept and intuition; in short, it is the self-awareness of the self-determining nature of the Concept (*Begriff*).<sup>21</sup> The *Phenomenology* overcomes the opposition of consciousness by bringing us to the standpoint of absolute knowing, to the standpoint of science where “the Concept, has become the element of existence, or has become the *form of*

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<sup>18</sup> Hyppolite writes that “The *Phenomenology*’s philosophical consciousness moves against such an ineffable” (*Logic and Existence*, 7).

<sup>19</sup> Pippin sees this as *the* task of the *Phenomenology*. See *Hegel’s Idealism*, chap. 5. See also Paul Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), chap. 3.

<sup>20</sup> *SL* 36 / *WL* 1.26.

<sup>21</sup> There is of course a lot more that can be said about absolute knowing, and I will take this up further down from the position of the opening of the *Logic*. For a helpful discussion of absolute knowing in the *Phenomenology*, see Angelica Nuzzo, “The Truth of *Absolutes Wissen* in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*,” in *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. A. Denker (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanities Press, 2003), 265–94.

*objectivity*.”<sup>22</sup> When objectivity is no longer sought for by relying on sense-experience “out there,” but sought for within the determinacy and existence of the Concept itself, metaphysics, transcendental logic, and even philosophy become Hegelian speculative logic. This is where the *Logic* begins.

## II

It is important to emphasize that the standpoint of absolute knowing from which the *Logic* begins is at once the most concrete and the most abstract. Absolute knowing is the most concrete and the most objective because it is thinking that has become actual, thinking that is at the same time the self-certainty of the object. Having overcome the abstract and formalistic thinking of consciousness, absolute knowing is

“the Concept in its truth, viz. in unity with its externalization . . . [it is] knowledge as an essential being which is *this* knowledge, *this* pure self-consciousness which is, therefore, at the same time a genuine *object*.”<sup>23</sup>

That is, absolute knowing is the determination that is at once thinking and being, reflective and objective, having overcome the abstract one-sidedness of empty thinking and blind immediacy. Hegel states clearly in the introduction of the *Logic* how its content consists of the actual object of thought as much as thought itself, insofar as their opposition has been overcome:

The Concept of pure science and its deduction is therefore presupposed in the present work in so far as the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is nothing other than the deduction of it. Absolute knowing is the *truth* of every mode of consciousness because, as the course of the *Phenomenology* showed, it is only in absolute knowing that the separation of the *object* from the *certainty of itself* is completely eliminated: truth is now equated with certainty and this certainty with truth.

Thus pure science presupposes liberation from the opposition of consciousness. It contains thought in so far as this is just as much the object in its own self, or the object in its own self in so far as it is equally pure thought. As science, truth is pure self-consciousness

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<sup>22</sup> PS 798 / PG 583.

<sup>23</sup> PS 795 / PG 580.

in its self-development and has the shape of the self, so that the absolute truth of being is the known Concept and the Concept as such is the absolute truth of being.<sup>24</sup>

This is how the unity of thinking and being, of subject and substance should be understood: the content of logic cannot simply be the transcendental or formal conditions necessary for the determination of a possible object—an appearance, phenomenon—rather, the content of logic must be an actual object of thought, the thing itself (*die Sache selbst*) as thought. Hegel continues by describing his science of speculative logic as an objective thinking in which the form and matter of the object are inseparable and unthinkable in isolation:

This objective thinking, then, is the content of pure science . . . far from being formal, far from standing in need of a matter to constitute an actual and true cognition, it is its content alone which has absolute truth, or if one still wanted to employ the word matter, it is the veritable matter—but a matter which is not external to the form, since this matter is rather pure thought and hence the absolute form itself.<sup>25</sup>

Actuality and objective thinking (or actuality *as* objective thinking) together constitute the content of speculative logic, a logic in which the form of thinking is inseparable from the matter that is thought. This is the concreteness of absolute knowing from which speculative logic begins.

On the other hand, the beginning of the *Logic* is also the most immediate and the most abstract. Although the opposition of consciousness has been overcome, all that is determined by this is that thought is immediately the thought of being, pure being, a determination that turns out, in all its immediacy, to be extremely abstract.<sup>26</sup> Hegel writes that the beginning of logic must be “an

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<sup>24</sup> *SL* 40 / *WL* 1.43. See also *EL* §25.

<sup>25</sup> *SL* 49–50 / *WL* 1.43–4.

<sup>26</sup> Thus, the *Logic* begins with the phrase, “*Being, pure being*, without any further determination” (*SL* 82 / *WL* 1.82). Houlgate argues that the beginning of the *Logic* is akin to the Cartesian method of “universal doubt.” Logic begins with the abstract determination of pure being because it is the only possible determination that cannot be doubted when we ask the question, “What is thought *minimally*?” Whereas Descartes’s subjective version resulted in “I think, therefore I exist,” Hegel’s absolute knowing version results in “thinking, therefore being.” See Houlgate, *The Opening*, 31–2. The reverse determination of “being, therefore thinking,” or the

*abstract* beginning; and so it *may not presuppose anything*, must not be mediated by anything nor have a ground; rather it is to be itself the ground of the entire science.”<sup>27</sup> Logic begins with what is most immediate and abstract because it cannot presuppose any form of determinacy or mediation that it has not itself immanently developed as necessary. Since absolute knowing has brought us to the standpoint of the unity of thought and being, thinking is, immediately and at the same time, being; thinking *is*, it exists, and thinking that thinks itself is also immediately thinking that thinks being. Beginning from pure being, the *Logic* thus moves from the most abstract to the most concrete, acquiring increasing determinacy as thinking is driven from being to essence to Concept. Ironically, it is in the subjective logic, the Doctrine of the Concept, where the forms of thinking and being that are the most concrete and the most objective are expressed. Conversely, Hegel claims that “The objective logic, then, takes the place rather of former *metaphysics* which was intended to be the scientific construction of the world in terms of *thoughts* alone,”<sup>28</sup> and it is the objective logic that “correspond[s] in part to what [Kant calls] transcendental logic.”<sup>29</sup> The objective logic immanently develops the necessary categories for the overcoming of transcendental logic culminating in actuality (*Wirklichkeit*), a determination of thinking that can be seen as absolute knowing in its determined form. The *Logic* then, progresses from the most abstract to the most concrete and objective, and when the absolute idea is reached as the highest form of determination of the Concept, what we reach is “the discovery that the thought of being is actually the thought of nature.”<sup>30</sup>

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determination that being is necessarily being thought, that being is always already a determination of reflection, is not made explicit until the Doctrine of Essence.

<sup>27</sup> *SL* 70 / *WL* 1.68–9. On Hegel’s logic as presuppositionless, see Houlgate, *The Opening*, chap. 2 and 3.

<sup>28</sup> *SL* 63 / *WL* 1.61.

<sup>29</sup> *SL* 62 / *WL* 1.59.

<sup>30</sup> Houlgate, *The Opening*, 53. Hegel writes in the closing of *SL*: “The Idea, namely, in positing itself as absolute *unity* of the pure Concept and its reality and thus contracting itself into the immediacy of *being*, is the *totality* in this form—*nature*” (*SL* 843 / *WL* 2.573). And the last lines of *EL*: “What we began with was being, abstract being, while now we have the *Idea* as *being*; and this *Idea* that *is*, is *Nature*” (*EL* §244, addition). As the *Logic* progresses towards increasing determinacy and towards nature, it is interesting to note

## III

Of course, that the beginning of the *Logic* is at once the most concrete and the most abstract is a contradiction that Hegel has no trouble thinking through. This paradoxical beginning is necessitated by the fact

“that there is nothing, nothing in heaven or in nature or mind or anywhere else which does not equally contain both immediacy and mediation, so that these two determinations reveal themselves to be *unseparated* and inseparable and the opposition between them to be a nullity.”<sup>31</sup>

Although logic is supposed to begin with what is most abstract and immediate, we know that the standpoint of absolute knowing is in fact already mediated by the entire movement and process of the *Phenomenology*. The move from immediacy to mediation (negation, difference, reflection) and back, through which thinking becomes increasingly concrete, demonstrates the urge or drive (*Trieb*) of the Concept towards determinacy, towards actuality, the true content of philosophy. Beginning from pure being without any determination, thinking is immediately driven to the thought of pure nothing, unable to hold on to either thought precisely because they lack any determination and therefore cannot be grasped. The immediacy of pure being is thus immediately mediated as a process of becoming, a movement of vanishing as being and nothing pass over into one another. Still unable to grasp the unstable unrest of becoming, thought settles on its first stable determinacy in determinate being (*Dasein*). The movement of vanishing between being and nothing characteristic of becoming itself vanishes as becoming destroys the indeterminate categories of pure being and pure nothing on which its existence depends. As pure being and nothing are destroyed, thought is finally able to grasp something stable; since being in its purity is too abstract

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that Hegel almost entirely drops his use of “Remarks” in the Doctrine of the Concept. The “Remarks” made from external reflection, so useful in clarifying the abstract categories in the objective logic, become unnecessary as external reflection is eliminated. Having become actual, the categories immanently developed in the subjective logic have their own content and concreteness, and no longer need to be given content externally by the “Remarks.”

<sup>31</sup> *SL* 68 / *WL* 1.66.

and cannot be grasped, being must at the very least be determinate, though it is still unclear precisely what this determinacy entails.

How does logic proceed from the very minimal requirement that any thought of being must be determinate to the thought determination of actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) where essence and existence are united? Thought that thinks not just being, but determinate being, comes to determine that being must actually have a certain quality (reality, negation, something, constitution, limit) and quantity (magnitude, number, ratio). Again, although Hegel's categories often seem to mirror Kant's, what separates them radically is the fact that for Hegel, categories such as quality and quantity are equally categories of thought and of the thing itself (*die Sache selbst*), and not only of appearances. As quality is driven to the thought of quantity and back, thinking must determine being as the unity of both quality and quantity in measure, a level of concreteness that considers the very "determinations characteristic of *material* existence."<sup>32</sup> However, being, still in its immediacy, cannot hold the determinations of quality and quantity together without further determination by reflection, and with reflection becoming explicit, the truth of being is determined as essence. With essence, the immediacy of being is sublated (both superseded and preserved) into the mediation of reflection, resulting in a metaphysical dualism and dialectic between essence and existence, or essence and appearance. The dialectic of being (*Sein*), having sublated itself, has become in the Doctrine of Essence, the dialectic of illusory being (*der Schein*), being that is reflected into itself. As essence takes up illusory being as its own reflective determination, becoming existence and appearance, Hegel also engages in a ruthless critique of all traditional philosophical oppositions between identity and difference, form and matter, conditioned and unconditioned, sensible and supersensible, whole and parts, inner and outer, and of course, essence and existence. The objective logic, the part of logic corresponding to transcendental logic, culminates in the category of actuality where we see the first appearance of the absolute, representing the overcoming of

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<sup>32</sup> SL 348 / WL 1.412. Although Pippin insists that Hegel does not "confuse" the logical and the material modes, "the conceptual with the real order" (*Hegel's Idealism*, 193), here is one (of many) instances where Hegel does so explicitly.

transcendental idealism, and the proper beginning of absolute idealism.<sup>33</sup>

#### IV

The category of actuality emerges out of the sublation of the opposition between the inner and outer of appearance. Section 3 of the Doctrine of Essence takes us through three moments of *Wirklichkeit*: the absolute, actuality proper, and the absolute relation of substance. Actuality is reflected being where reflection is no longer opposed to being as essence was to existence. Actuality *exists*, but its existence is no longer that of illusory being or mere appearance; rather, it exists as a determination of reflection and is *rational*.<sup>34</sup> This is what Hegel means by the unity of the inner and the outer: the inner essence of being (determined by reflection) is no longer opposed to its outer existence and appearance, and actuality is “the unity, without remainder of form (reflection) and matter (what is given).”<sup>35</sup> Appearance is not mere appearance, opposed to reflection or opposed to a thing-in-itself, but rather, the outer existence of being is the very

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<sup>33</sup> Longuenesse writes: “the whole section on ‘actuality’, in the Doctrine of Essence, can be read as Hegel’s (metaphysical) deduction of the notion of actuality precisely insofar as it is also the beginning of a metaphysical deduction of Hegel’s ‘concept’. It is a deduction of the notion of actuality in the fully determined sense that will be given to it once the transition to the concept is accomplished” (*Hegel’s Critique*, 111). Here, one can also ask why the problems of transcendental idealism that were overcome with the achievement of absolute knowing are once again at issue in the *Logic*. As stated earlier, the position of absolute knowing with which the *Logic* begins is at once concrete and abstract, meaning that although the opposition of consciousness has been overcome, thought has yet to determine the necessary categories and the relations between categories that are necessary for the actual determination of reality in accordance with speculative logic. See section II above.

<sup>34</sup> This is the meaning of the famous passage from the preface of the *Philosophy of Right*, “What is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational.” See *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, ed. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Hegel refers to this passage in §6 of the *Encyclopaedia* after declaring that the content of philosophy is actuality. See also chap. 4 of Longuenesse’s *Hegel’s Critique*.

<sup>35</sup> Longuenesse, *Hegel’s Critique*, 120–1.

manifestation and expression of essence as a determination of reflection itself, determined now as *Wirklichkeit*:

What something is, therefore, it is wholly in its externality [*Äußerlichkeit*]; its externality is its totality and equally is its unity reflected into itself . . . since its content and form are thus utterly identical, it is, in and for itself, nothing but this, *to express or manifest itself*. It is the manifesting of its essence in such a manner that this essence consists simply and solely in being that which manifests itself.

The essential relation, in this identity of Appearance with the inner or with essence, has determined itself into *actuality* [*Wirklichkeit*].<sup>36</sup>

Actuality is the concrete absolute because it itself *is* the totality that is entirely self-determining, it is “the totality of relations of determinacy.”<sup>37</sup> Actuality is the immanent ground of “all actual and possible worlds, *as* worlds,” whose existence is not determined by anything external to it or beyond it, such as God, the understanding, intuitions, or a thing-in-itself; actuality is itself absolute because it is the self-exposition of its own reflected content.<sup>38</sup> Hegel tells us that the very content manifested by the absolute as actuality is the overcoming of the distinction between form and content, and that the content of actuality is simply self-manifestation. Essence and existence can no longer be opposed in actuality because actuality is the determination that *essence has no determination other than actual existence*, and that *existence cannot be determined except for as a determination of actual reflection*.

The determination of *Wirklichkeit* marks a significant departure from Kantian idealism because actuality was precisely what Kant

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<sup>36</sup> *SL* 528 / *WL* 2.185. Hegel defines actuality in the *Encyclopaedia* in the following way: “Actuality is the unity, become immediate, of essence and existence, or of what is inner and what is outer. The utterance [*Äußerung*] of the actual is the actual itself, so that the actual remains still something-essential in this [utterance] and is only something-essential so far as it is in immediate external existence” (*EL* §142). *Äußerung*, translated as “utterance,” also means manifestation, expression, saying, or demonstration.

<sup>37</sup> Gabriel, “Dialectic of the Absolute,” 7.

<sup>38</sup> Gabriel argues that the absolute as the first shape of actuality marks Hegel’s departure from transcendent metaphysics into immanent metaphysics where the movement of reflection is discovered as immanent to the absolute itself. See *ibid.*, 5–13.



argued could *not* be determined by thinking or reflection alone. The categories of the understanding could only determine possible objects, and thinking remained bound to intuitions for the determining of actual ones. Kant makes this clear in the first *Critique*:

But while possibility is merely a positing of the thing in relation to the understanding (in its empirical employment), actuality is at the same time a connection of it with perception.<sup>39</sup>

And a bit further down:

in order to exhibit the objective reality of the pure concept of understanding we must always have an intuition.<sup>40</sup>

And most emphatically in the third *Critique*:

It is indispensable [and] necessary for human understanding to distinguish between the possibility and the actuality of things, and this fact has its basis in the subject and in the nature of his cognitive powers. For if the exercise of these powers did not require two quite heterogeneous components, understanding to provide concepts, and sensible intuition to provide objects corresponding to these, then there would be no such distinction (between the possible and the actual). If our understanding were intuitive [rather than discursive, that is, conceptual] it would have no objects except actual [ones]. . . . But our entire distinction between the merely possible and the actual rests on this: in saying that a thing is possible we are positing only the presentation of it with respect to our concept and to our thinking ability in general; but in saying that a thing is actual we are positing the thing itself [*an sich selbst*]<sup>41</sup> (apart from that concept). . . . if the understanding *thinks* . . . then we are merely presenting the thing as possible. If the understanding is conscious of it as given in intuition, then it is actual.<sup>42</sup>

This severing of possibility and actuality founded on the opposition between understanding and intuition is precisely what Hegel attempts to overcome in Section 3, chap. 2, also simply entitled, "Actuality." If

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<sup>39</sup> A235 / B288.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> The translator notes here that although this reads "thing *in itself*" literally, Kant is not referring to *the* thing-in-itself or to noumenon. What Kant is referring to might be what Hegel calls *die Sache selbst*, the thing itself which is actual, but for Hegel *die Sache* is always the thing itself as thought. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 285, note 20.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 284–5.

we take Kant's remarks in the above passages seriously, then transcendental idealism only takes us as far as determining what objects would possibly be like for creatures such as ourselves, if such objects that fit the categories actually existed (thought suspends judgment on whether or not such objects could actually exist).<sup>43</sup> For Kant, the modal categories—possibility, actuality, necessity—determined not things, but only “express the relation of the concept to the faculty of knowledge.”<sup>44</sup> This is clearly unsatisfactory from the standpoint of absolute idealism which considers the thought determinations of actual objects *as thought*. As Longuenesse succinctly writes, “*Wirklichkeit* is *reality* as constituted, in all its determinations, by thought,” “the real as thought,” and not how the merely possible would be constituted or determined by thought.<sup>45</sup> Part of what Hegel is seeking to do by breaking down the distinctions between actuality, possibility, and necessity is to demonstrate that if the Concept is to be its own source of objectivity and the totality of all relations of determinacy as thought, then actuality is, properly speaking, the only “mode” in which things exist as determined by thought. Like Aristotle, Hegel invokes the priority of actuality over possibility because thought always begins with an actual object of thought, with reality and the thing itself, and not with “possible objects”;<sup>46</sup> in other words, thinking begins with the unity of thinking and the thing thought, rather than from their separation. Through an

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<sup>43</sup> “So long as intuition is lacking, we do not know whether through the categories we are thinking an object, and whether indeed there can anywhere be an object suited to them” (A235 / B288). See also Franks’ discussion of what he calls “The Actuality Problem” in *All or Nothing*, 244–8.

<sup>44</sup> A219 / B266. Kant defines the modal categories in the first Critique as such:

“1. That which agrees with the formal conditions of experience, that is, with the conditions of intuition and of concepts, is possible.

2. That which is bound up with the material conditions of experience, that is, with sensation, is *actual*.

3. That which in its connection with the actual is determined in accordance with universal conditions of experience, is (that is, exists as) *necessary*” (A218 / B265–6).

<sup>45</sup> Longuenesse, *Hegel’s Critique*, 113, 122. My emphasis. See also 117–20 on the similarities and differences between Kant and Hegel on the modal categories.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 122. See also *EL* §142 addition, where Hegel discusses Aristotle and Plato on *energeia* and *dunamis*.

immanent exposition of the modal categories beginning from actuality itself, Hegel seeks to demonstrate the necessity and objectivity of the Concept as expressing the determinations of *die Sache Selbst* without remainder, freeing thought from its dependence on something outside of thought.

## V

Hegel begins to break down the distinction between actuality and possibility by describing what he calls formal actuality, and immediately claims that actuality already contains possibility within it because actuality as the unity of inwardness and outwardness is existence that is reflected-into-self.<sup>47</sup> This possibility that is the immediate negative or the in-itself of actuality is still formal, and according to it, “*everything is possible that is not self-contradictory*.”<sup>48</sup> The emptiness of this statement becomes evident when we try to determine what it means: the possible is in fact a “boundless multiplicity,” but since each thing in this multiplicity is itself a determinate thing, a thing that contains negation, a thing in relation and opposition to other things, it is inherently contradictory, and nothing is possible according to the definition of formal possibility.<sup>49</sup> Thus, the emptiness of formal possibility leads it to be determined equally as impossibility, and according to formal possibility, “*everything is possible*. . . . But *everything* is just as much *impossible* too.”<sup>50</sup> Possibility is equally empty when it is regarded merely as “thinkability,” since this refers only to abstract thinking, and everything proves to be thinkable and thereby “even the most absurd and nonsensical suppositions can be considered possible.”<sup>51</sup> Formal

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<sup>47</sup> *SL* 542 / *WL* 2.202.

<sup>48</sup> *SL* 543 / *WL* 2.203.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* Recall Hegel's remark on the law of contradiction in section 1, chapter 2 of the Doctrine of Essence: “*everything is inherently contradictory*, and in the sense that this law in contrast to the others expresses rather the truth and the essential nature of things. . . . Contradiction is the root of all movement and vitality; it is only in so far as something has a contradiction within it that it moves, has an urge and activity” (*SL* 439 / *WL* 2.74–5).

<sup>50</sup> *EL* §143.

<sup>51</sup> *EL* §142, addition.

possibility sublates its own contradiction by determining itself as the ground of the very relation between opposing determinacies, as the reflected ground of its own contradiction. As the “real ground”<sup>52</sup> (and not merely the formal ground) of its own contradictory determinations—everything is possible, everything is impossible; it is equally possible and impossible that the moon will fall on the earth or that the Sultan will become Pope<sup>53</sup>—formal possibility is sublated and becomes actuality because it is only what actually exists which can determine what is actually possible. The contradiction of formal possibility is sublated by “the authority of the real”<sup>54</sup> simply because what determines possibility is the totality of relations of determinacy, and therefore actuality itself. It is not actually possible for the moon to fall on the earth because it goes against everything that has been determined by thought to be a fact. So in the end, what determines possibility are the actual facts as determined by thought and not formal reflection on what is abstractly thinkable according to the empty law of identity (mere noncontradiction). An abstract and empty definition of possibility does not tell us anything about what is actually possible, and Hegel writes: “Whether this or that is possible or impossible depends on the content, i.e., *on the totality of the moments of actuality*.”<sup>55</sup>

The reunification of formal possibility with actuality also returns us from abstract reflection to “*being or Existence in general*.”<sup>56</sup> Once again, Hegel demonstrates how reflection cannot be separated from existence, that reflection is simply existence that is reflected into self, that the reflection on what is possible is ultimately reflection on the actual, the immanent unfolding of the content of actuality itself. Possibility that is reunited with actuality, or actual existence that is “at the same time . . . determined as merely possible,” is the contingent.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> See *SL* 461–6 / *WL* 2.102–9 for Hegel’s explanation of “real ground,” the second moment of determinate ground. As Longuenesse notes, the three moments of actuality (formal, real, absolute or complete) mirror the three moments of determinate ground because “what is under scrutiny is the relation between thought of existence and existence that is thought.” See *Hegel’s Critique*, 121.

<sup>53</sup> *EL* §143, addition.

<sup>54</sup> Longuenesse, *Hegel’s Critique*, 126.

<sup>55</sup> *EL* §143, addition, my emphasis.

<sup>56</sup> *SL* 544 / *WL* 2.205.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

As one of the final moments of formal actuality, contingency immediately determines itself as a contradiction: the contingent is groundless because it is that whose opposite could equally exist, that is, the contingent is that which *is* only accidentally and could equally not be (it is existence that is determined as a possible existence). Therefore, it has no ground; however, and at the same time, the contingent has a ground because it is something actual; it exists as posited by reflection and therefore must have a ground, for the contingent is the very *Sache* that emerges from the ground, from formal possibility that has become the real ground of contingent existence.<sup>58</sup> Hegel's short discussion of contingency as that which is determined simultaneously as grounded and groundless demonstrates not only the emptiness of critiques that accuse speculative logic of eradicating the contingent, but more importantly, the contradictory character of the category of contingency makes explicit the limits of the Kantian system in failing to actually determine anything beyond the realm of the contingent. On the former issue, speculative logic, rather than eradicating the contingent, places contingency in its proper light by explicating its true content: the contingent is a determination of formal thinking that in fact leaves the object undetermined as to its true nature as an object grounded in relations of determinacy, as a *Sache* that exists and that has emerged out of a series of conditions determined by thought.<sup>59</sup> Hegel is not attempting to eradicate the contingent, but to think through its contradiction as both groundless and grounded, exposing contingency as a one-sided determination of actuality that fails to truly grasp its reflected character. Translating his objection to the over-valuing of contingency into the realms of nature and spirit (as he so often does), Hegel argues that randomness in nature is abstractly and indeterminately admired while we fail to understand its lawfulness, and in the realm of spirit the choices made by the free will are seen as entirely contingent while we fail to

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<sup>58</sup> See *SL* 474–8 / *WL* 2.119–23 on the emergence of the *Sache* from the ground into existence.

<sup>59</sup> Compare this to Spinoza's critique of possibility and of the contingent as "a defect of our knowledge." See Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. and ed. Edwin Curley (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), part I, proposition 33, scholium 1.

understand the medley of external circumstances that constitute every decision.<sup>60</sup>

On the latter issue, Hegel's polemic against the category of contingency also shows how Kant's system remains wedded to the realm of the contingent, while at the same time attempting to eradicate its threat to the unity of knowledge and experience. On the one hand, Kant is emphatic that the concepts of the understanding only determine the possibility of an object, and that "in the *mere concept* of a thing no mark of its existence is to be found. . . . that the concept precedes the perception signifies the concept's mere possibility; the perception which supplies the content to the concept is the sole mark of actuality."<sup>61</sup> In other words, Kant is precisely insisting that what is in fact an actual determination of thinking—the Concept that is at the same time its externalization, that is a genuine object and the form of objectivity—is determined as the merely possible, meaning that from the perspective of the understanding (*Verstand*), existence is only a possible existence until it is actualized by intuitions or perceptions. However, and this is also precisely Kant's worry, this means that all actuality and empirical experience is determined to be contingent because

nature, as regards its merely empirical laws . . . [contains] an endless diversity . . . that [is] nonetheless contingent as far as we can see (i.e., we cannot cognize them *a priori*) [that is, they require sensible intuitions]; and it is in view of this possibility that we judge the unity of nature in terms of empirical laws, as well as the possibility of the unity of experience . . . to be contingent.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, on the other hand, Kant is aware that the determination of experience by concepts, beyond the minimal necessity of say for

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<sup>60</sup> *EL* §145 addition. Although he engages in a thoroughgoing critique of the category of contingency, Hegel is also careful to emphasize that contingency is a necessary element in all determinations, meaning that freedom, unpredictability, spontaneity, indeed, even madness, are always present whether one is considering the realms of logic, nature, or spirit. Important to this discussion of contingency is the distinction between internal and external contingency, an issue I will take up in section VI of this paper.

<sup>61</sup> A225 / B272–3.

<sup>62</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 23. I have added the material in the brackets.

example, temporal ordering,<sup>63</sup> is entirely contingent in precisely the sense that Hegel means: something actual that is at the same time determined as something merely possible, something whose opposite could equally be, that is, the unity of nature as determined by the understanding could equally be an entirely heterogeneous and diverse aggregate. This worry about the contingency of determinations that are dependent on intuitions—leading to nothing short of a view of nature and everything actual as “a crude chaotic aggregate”<sup>64</sup>—is the motivating problem of the third *Critique*. Indeed, Kant acknowledges that his critical system has yet to overcome such contingency, but his proposed answer, the introduction of a new a priori principle of purposiveness for judgment that holds only for the judging subject, will hardly be satisfactory from the point of view of speculative logic.

The last moment of formal actuality emerges when the contradiction of contingency as that which is equally grounded and groundless is sublated into formal necessity. If we recall the dialectic between actuality and possibility that led us to the determination of the contingent, what we saw was the contradiction that arose when actuality and possibility were posited as distinct. Hegel describes the contingent as the “*absolute unrest*” or the becoming and vanishing of the actual into the possible (formal possibility) and the possible into the actual (contingency), and in the end it turns out that “because each immediately turns into its opposite, equally in this other it simply *unites with itself* and this identity of both, of one in the other, is *necessity*.”<sup>65</sup> The opposition between formal actuality and possibility shows itself to be unsustainable in the determination of the contingent because in contingency, actuality and possibility turn out to be the same: the actual delimits the range of the possible, meaning that what is actual is possible and what is possible is the actual. The sublation of

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<sup>63</sup> “It is true that we do initially find something necessary in the bases of the possibility of experience, namely, the universal laws without which nature as such (as object of sense) cannot be thought. These laws rest on the categories, applied to the formal conditions of all intuition that is possible for us, as far as it too is given a priori. . . . But apart from that formal temporal condition, objects of empirical cognition are still determined [*bestimmt*], or—if we confine ourselves to what we can judge a priori—determinable, in all sorts of additional ways” (ibid., 22).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., “First Introduction to the Critique of Judgment,” 398.

<sup>65</sup> *SL* 545 / *WL* 2.206.

this formal opposition leads to the determination that whatever *is* is necessary because the totality of what there *is* determines the full range of possible determinations. However, because it arises out of moments of formal reflection, this necessity is itself a merely formal necessity and requires further determination in order to become real.

## VI

With the transition from the moments of formal modality into real modality (real actuality, possibility, necessity), it becomes clear why Hegel's dismissal of the Concept's dependence on intuitions in order to be considered actual, and his declaration against Kant that concepts can only determine possible objects is not simply an extravagant form of rationalism that dismisses the empirical element all together. Real actuality is actuality that "has a *content*," leading Hegel to claim that it is first and foremost "the thing of many properties" and "the existent world."<sup>66</sup> In real actuality, the material, empirical element is not the intuitional given external to thought; rather, real actuality exists as the manifestation of its own content, and its "material" or "empirical" existence is "at the same time the in-itself and reflection-into-self."<sup>67</sup> If formal actuality was only "immediate, unreflected actuality,"<sup>68</sup> then real actuality expresses the *Sache selbst* as existence that is reflected, as existence that is the unity of the inner and the outer, and as existence that "*can act*."<sup>69</sup> Real actuality "*can act*" because as existence that is equally a reflection-into-self its relationships and interactions with other things have the status of concrete thought determinations, that is, these relationships are determined as actual by thought (and not by perceptions or intuitions). Formal actuality could not act because its determinations continually determined things as merely possible, meaning that the relationships of existent things never moved beyond the realm of contingency. Real actuality contains the empirical as a moment within itself, or is empirical existence as reflected existence in which the empirical and the reflected are no longer held apart.

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<sup>66</sup> SL 546 / WL 2.207–8.

<sup>67</sup> SL 546 / WL 2.208.

<sup>68</sup> SL 542 / WL 2.202.

<sup>69</sup> SL 546 / WL 2.208.



However, although Hegel is claiming that we are in fact determining the thing itself, he is not returning to a precritical metaphysics where thought has pretensions towards being *qua* being, since the being or the *Sache* under consideration at this point in the Doctrine of Essence is one that is not only reflected, but whose reflected determinations constitute the totality of its existence. Real actuality is the determination of the real as thought, of the real as being *qua* thought being, of the real as reflected existence. Hegel's "materialism" is one that expresses the richness of the empirical as determined by reflection without remainder, one that takes up the empirical as always already determined by thought.

Hegel's commitment to concrete empirical existence is further confirmed when he defines real possibility:<sup>70</sup>

if one brings into account the determinations, circumstances and conditions of something in order to ascertain its possibility, one is no longer at the stage of formal possibility, but is considering its real possibility. . . . The real possibility of something is therefore the existing multiplicity of circumstances which are connected with it. . . . Real possibility constitutes the *totality of conditions*, a dispersed actuality.<sup>71</sup>

Real possibility is thus the totality of actual circumstances and conditions that bring about a thing or an event, and in assessing the real possibility of something, one in fact only looks toward actuality. Hegel's definition of real possibility here also recalls the account of condition given in the chapter on "Ground," where he describes the emergence of the *Sache* by writing: "*When all the conditions of a fact [Sache] are present, it enters into Existence.*"<sup>72</sup> What these accounts of

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<sup>70</sup> As in the formal moment, Hegel immediately makes the transition from real actuality to real possibility simply by claiming that actuality already has possibility within it as its negative, reflected moment, that is, possibility is the in-itself of actuality.

<sup>71</sup> *SL* 547 / *WL* 2.208–9.

<sup>72</sup> *SL* 477 / *WL* 2.122. Almost the same sentence appears in the Actuality chapter: "When all the conditions of something are completely present, it enters into actuality" (*SL* 548 / *WL* 2.210). Hegel then continues by referring back to the section on conditioned ground: "the completeness of the conditions is the totality as in the content, and *the something itself [die Sache Selbst]* is this content determined as being equally actual as possible. In the sphere of conditioned ground, the conditions have *outside them* the form—that is, the ground or the reflection which is for itself—which connects them into moments of the something [*Sache*] in question and which produces

condition and real possibility<sup>73</sup> demonstrate is that ultimately, reflection on the conditions of what makes something (an object of experience, an event) possible cannot simply be reflection upon the a priori empty categories of the understanding, but must in fact be reflection on the empirical and the actual as determined by thought, on the existing relations of determinacy that constitute our actual and possible world, where these are no longer held as distinct. To be explicit, this entails that:

(1) Reflection on the possible or on “conditions of possibility” cannot be reflection on formal concepts and empty categories since what makes something possible are the actual conditions and the concrete circumstances surrounding its emergence. What makes something really possible is neither the empty categories, nor intuitional input, but an entire series of empirical conditions that are determined by thought to constitute the unity of the object. This also means that for Hegel, there can in fact be no real distinction between the empirical and the a priori, the empirical and the conceptual. Both are always already bound up in mutually constituting relations of determinacy that make their separation impossible in advance, or perhaps more accurately, that make any such separation a distortion of the thing itself. This means that *pace* Pippin, who in *Hegel’s Idealism* consistently employs the Kantian language of the determination of a “possible object,” Hegel’s exposition of the category of actuality demonstrates the dialectical unity of the logical and the material, of the conceptual and the empirical, and requires no “deduction” of the relation between thought and thing first because such a deduction is performed by the *Phenomenology*, but more importantly because any reflection on the real (and not merely formal) conditions of possibility of an object is *at the same time* the reflection

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existence *in them*. Here, on the other hand, immediate actuality is not determined by a presupposing reflection to be condition, but it is posited that this actuality itself is possibility” (ibid.).

<sup>73</sup> In the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel moves directly from contingency to a discussion of condition, before moving on to real possibility. See *EL* §§146–7. It is important here also to recall Hegel’s account of condition as “the immediate to which the ground is related . . . the *content* of the ground . . . and hence constitutes *material* for the ground” (*SL* 470 / *WL* 2.113–14). Longuenesse also succinctly sums up the relation of ground and condition: “Thus ‘ground’ is the side of unity (in thought). ‘Condition’ is the side of real determinations, of empirical multiplicity” (*Hegel’s Critique*, 105).

of the actual thing as always already determined by a series of conditions that thought determines as constituting the very thing itself. To speak of the logical and the material orders as if they were separated and unrelated is to retrospectively<sup>74</sup> distort and divide what was originally one single act of self-determining actuality, or, what will turn out to be the self-determining Concept (*Begriff*).<sup>75</sup> By reading Hegel as a logical idealist, Pippin does not allow speculative logic to move beyond determining the formal conditions of a possible object (the a priori forms of thinking and empty categories that leave the object largely undetermined, or determined merely as contingent), and maintains a strict distinction between the a priori and the empirical that is untenable by any standards of the Hegelian system.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> On the determination of real modality as retrospective, see Longuenesse, *Hegel's Critique*, 135–40.

<sup>75</sup> In his essay, "Concept and Intuition: On Distinguishability and Separability," *Hegel-Studien* 40 (2005): 25–39, Pippin argues that Hegel in fact does not object to Kant's *distinction* between concept and intuition, but argues instead for their inseparability, thought their indistinguishability. To clarify his own position, he claims that Hegel simply "wishes to stress *more*, make more out of, the organic unity or organic inseparability of such elements than Kant," and thus prefers and organic relation between concept and intuition rather than a mechanical one ("Concept and Intuition," 28). As Pippin rightly notes, the inseparability of concept and intuition is something that Kant himself suggests, particularly in the B deduction. Although inseparability is a subtle way of addressing the issue, the difference between Kant and Hegel here cannot simply be one of stress or emphasis, and the language of both inseparability and indistinguishability obscure Hegel's *dialectical* treatment of the problem of the relation between concept and intuition, one that I hope has become evident in our discussion of actuality. In arguing that Hegel does not object to the *distinction* between concept and intuition itself, Pippin's Hegel not only remains wedded to a strict separation between the logical and the material orders, but more importantly, Hegel's idealism threatens to become one where reason determines itself autonomously, where the "normative authority" of the conceptual is not at all "tied to an empirical derivation" (ibid., 35). Indeed, Pippin ends *Hegel's Idealism* with this exact problem, and I will say more about this below. For Pippin's earlier account of Hegel's take on the Kantian distinction between concepts and intuitions, see *Hegel's Idealism*, 8–9; see also his most recent account of these and related issues in chaps. 2 and 4 of *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>76</sup> On the issue of the status of the a priori for Hegel, Pippin claims that "Hegel tends to use the notion of 'absolute' as a replacement for the Kantian 'a priori'" (*Hegel's Idealism*, 250). This is certainly a misunderstanding of what

(2) By making reflection on the possible a reflection on the actual and thereby throwing into question a clear distinction between what is *a priori* and conditions experience and that very experience itself, speculative logic fundamentally changes the way in which we conceive of reality and the activity of its continual unfolding. Returning to the “Actuality” chapter, after Hegel defines real possibility as the totality of conditions, what we see once again is that possibility is actuality, and that in thinking the actual conditions of a thing what is in fact being thought is its real necessity:

what is really possible can no longer be otherwise; under the particular conditions and circumstances something else cannot follow. Real possibility and necessity are therefore only *seemingly* different; this is an identity which does not have to *become* but is already *presupposed* and lies at their base.<sup>77</sup>

The reason real possibility is always already real necessity is because in thinking the particular conditions connected with something, one is in fact always already thinking the thing in its necessity. Since modal reflection always begins from an existing actuality out of which possibility is then determined, real possibility is always already real necessity since the conditions under consideration are of “a thing *accomplished as (thought) unity*,” of some existing thing as always already determined, and continually redetermined, by thought.<sup>78</sup> In real necessity, what is made explicit is the unity of the thing with its conditions,<sup>79</sup> that “[t]he thing (Sache) is always already there for its conditions to be thought, and conversely the conditions are always already there for the thing to be thought.”<sup>80</sup> As with the determinations of formal modality, the oppositions between real actuality and possibility find their identity in real necessity: what is really actual is the really possible, and what is really possible is the real totality of

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Hegel means by “absolute,” since anything that is merely *a priori*, especially in a Kantian sense, would be abstract, one-sided, and precisely fall short of being absolute. Furthermore, the absolute is always a result, and always only discovered *a posteriori*, after the fact, thereby displacing the very meaning of the *a priori* altogether.

<sup>77</sup> *SL* 549 / *WL* 2.211.

<sup>78</sup> Longuenesse, *Hegel's Critique*, 137–8.

<sup>79</sup> Compare this with the unity of condition and ground, *SL* 471–5 / *WL* 2.115–19.

<sup>80</sup> Longuenesse, *Hegel's Critique*, 139–40.

conditions which *is* actuality. Therefore, real actuality and real possibility turn out to be the same, and what is determined in the thought of real modality is real necessity.

Although the moment of real necessity is not yet the end of the story, from here it is only a short step to the final moment of actuality, the determination of absolute necessity. It turns out that real necessity is still only relative because modal reflection continues to separate actuality and possibility, meaning that conditions and thing are still not thought in their true unity. Insofar as the totality of conditions is posited as real possibility, the conditions themselves are contingent (merely possible) and therefore still external to the *Sache* of which they condition. This is why Hegel writes of real necessity that "it has its *starting point* in the *contingent*,"<sup>81</sup> since we can ask of any conditions that are posited of a thing, why *these* conditions rather than some others? Why *these* determinate circumstances rather than others?<sup>82</sup> Here it seems that Hegel has fared no better than Kant in eliminating the specter of contingency that results from a series of empirical conditions determining the unity of a thing, and even though real possibility is determinate in a way that formal possibility was not, the contingency of the conditions themselves means that necessity is still relative. Two things occur in the transition to absolute necessity. First, the unity of the thing itself and its conditions, or the unity of actuality and possibility is thought *in its unity*, thought explicitly as a unity rather than thought as separate moments that only turn out to be the same after the fact. In the absolute moment, actuality and possibility are thought in their unity and therefore in their necessity, a determinate necessity that contains negation and contingency within itself as its own presupposition ("it has a *presupposition* from which it begins, it has its *starting point* in the *contingent*").<sup>83</sup> Therefore, secondly, rather than being haunted by an external contingency, the contingency of absolute necessity is one that is contained within itself, one that constitutes a moment of its own activity of becoming and, in fact, is "necessity's own becoming."<sup>84</sup> The reunification of contingency

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<sup>81</sup> *SL* 549 / *WL* 2.211.

<sup>82</sup> Hegel writes in the *Encyclopaedia*, "The *condition* . . . is a contingent, external circumstance that exists without reference to the matter [*Sache*]" (*EL* §148).

<sup>83</sup> *SL* 549 / *WL* 2.211.

<sup>84</sup> *SL* 551 / *WL* 2.213.

with necessity and the recognition that such contingency is necessity's own, insofar as it exists as its presupposition, is absolute necessity, is *Wirklichkeit* in its truly determined sense. This contingency that is constitutive of thought's self-determining activity, or the contingency that *is* the necessary unfolding and self-exposition of absolute actuality and the self-exposition of the Concept (*Begriff*), expresses the necessity of thinking the thing in its unity with its conditions, if thought is to think determinate being at all. What makes the determination of actuality so radical is that Hegel manages to overcome the Kantian dependence on intuitions without either losing grip on the empirical element all together, since the actual is not only reality as thought but is the very thing (*Sache*) as the unity of empirical conditions (where there can no longer be a clear distinction between the empirical and the a priori),<sup>85</sup> or returning to a precritical metaphysics where thought simply has access to things untouched by thought, to being *qua* being that is not always already caught up in a multiplicity of relations of determinacy. The self-determining activity of the Concept that expresses what is actual is thus neither an autonomous rational force that determines reality without resistance and opposition from what is really possible and the things themselves,<sup>86</sup> nor however is it a merely formal capacity, empty by

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<sup>85</sup> One can also say, where all conditions are empirical conditions (including the activity of thinking itself) insofar as the empirical is always already determined by thought.

<sup>86</sup> Though this is far beyond the scope of the present paper, what I am alluding to here is the closeness of Hegel's logic to Adornian negative dialectics where "objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder"; Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 5. At first glance, the idea "that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived" (ibid.) may seem precisely contrary to speculative logic; however, as long as one does not interpret the "remainder" as that which is inaccessible to thought, but as that which thought must continually redetermine in light of the continual reconfiguration of real (and thus always already thought) conditions and circumstances, then I see Adorno's statements to be precisely in the spirit of speculative logic and dialectics. Perhaps in addition to demonstrating Hegel's "Adornian" moment, one would also have to demonstrate why Adorno is not simply a Kantian on this issue. Longuenesse also makes a reference to Adorno when discussing the relation between ground and conditions in Hegel's determination of "complete ground" (see *Hegel's Critique*, 99–105). However, she seems to hold that this reading cannot be maintained in light of the developments in the

itself without a given manifold of content, that is unable to determine things beyond a very minimal necessity and is incessantly haunted by the threat of empirical chaos and external contingency.<sup>87</sup>

(3) To be clear, in the rapid and often rather opaque transitions from real possibility (the totality of conditions and circumstances) to its identification with real and then absolute necessity, what is being thought is not the indefensible claim that everything that exists is therefore necessary, but that actuality expresses the unity of the thing with its conditions as the necessary way in which things exist as always already determined by a totality of conditions, and more generally, by thought. Therefore, what is absolutely necessary is still contingent in the now qualified sense that (i) this contingency is the very becoming of necessity and is necessity's own presupposition, and (ii) this contingency is one that is not external to the activity of thinking that thinks being, but in fact constitutes the necessity of this very activity itself. Contingency is necessary insofar as everything is contingent; that is, there is nothing that exists that is not determined by a totality of conditions, and absolute necessity expresses the very activity of determining the necessity of contingency. Thus, Hegel writes: "Absolute necessity is not so much the necessary, still less *a* necessary, but necessity—being, simply and solely as reflection."<sup>88</sup> Unlike the formal determination of contingency that would be like a spuriously infinite alternation between something being determined equally as grounded and groundless, the determination that "contingency is absolute necessity"<sup>89</sup> is the true infinity of the becoming of necessity and the very activity of the Concept as the actual determining and redetermining of the unity of the thing with its

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Doctrine of the Concept, and I hope that in pointing out this structure in actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) itself, a category that Hegel claims is the very content of philosophy as science, a small beginning can be made towards refuting such an interpretive stance.

<sup>87</sup> For an exposition of the "Actuality" chapter that also demonstrates the centrality of contingency in Hegel's thinking, see John W. Burbidge, "The Necessity of Contingency," chap. 2 of *Hegel's Systematic Contingency* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 16–47.

<sup>88</sup> *SL* 554 / *WL* 2.217.

<sup>89</sup> Hegel also writes: "*contingency* is rather absolute necessity; it is the *essence* of those free, inherently necessary actualities" (*SL* 553 / *WL* 2.216).

conditions.<sup>90</sup> Contingency is then no longer regarded as a threat to the unity of thinking, nor repressed by a merely subjective and regulative principle, but is taken up as *necessary* and *constitutive* for the Concept's activity of determining itself as truly *wirklich*, as absolute, and as the unity of being and essence or being as reflection.

What all of this serves to demonstrate is the impossibility of any simple identification or association of Hegel's Concept (*Begriff*) with Kant's transcendental unity of apperception and of simply characterizing speculative logic as the completion of transcendental logic. The determination of actuality as absolute necessity and the subsequent development of substance that make up the genesis of Hegel's Concept precisely seek to demonstrate why transcendental idealism is a fundamentally flawed project that cannot be completed without transformations that will render it unrecognizable, and how speculative logic will therefore change the way in which reality itself is conceived. In an attempt to express his radical departure from Kant, Hegel writes in the introduction to the subjective logic:

If we remember [the definition of truth as the agreement of cognition with its objects] in connection with the fundamental assertion of transcendental idealism, that reason as cognitive is incapable of apprehending *things-in-themselves*, that *reality* lies *absolutely* outside the *Concept*, then it is at once evident that a *reason* such as this which is unable to put itself in agreement with its object, the things-in-themselves, and *things-in-themselves* that are not in agreement with the Concept of reason, the Concept that is not in agreement with reality, and a reality that does not agree with the Concept, are *untrue conceptions*.<sup>91</sup>

Rather than beginning from the separation of Concept and reality, speculative logic begins from the absolute necessity of reality as always already determined by thought and of the activity of thinking that is always already the thought of the real, of the actual thing itself. Concept and reality cannot but be in agreement, and the contingency, negativity, and contradiction that arise in the continual activity of conceptual determination are not phenomena that are external to thought, not threats that thought must neurotically repress, violently

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<sup>90</sup> SL 553 / WL 2.217. For a recent account of the stakes involved in Hegel's account of spurious versus true infinity, see Wayne Martin, "In Defense of Bad Infinity," *The Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 55/56 (2007): 168–87.

<sup>91</sup> SL 593 / WL 2.266.



master, blindly respect, or anxiously fear, but are absolutely necessary, internal to, and constitutive of the self-determining activity of the Concept as absolute. This is why Hegel claims that “the *expositor* [*Auslegerin*] of the absolute is *absolute necessity* which is identical with itself as self-determining,” and self-determining necessity is how finally “contingency becomes freedom.”<sup>92</sup> What is “absolute”<sup>93</sup> is the necessity and freedom of the activity of thinking that thinks the thing itself in its unity with the totality of its conditions, in its unity with thought and the continual process of conceptual determination, and this is why, to come full circle, absolute idealism is equally an idealism and a materialism, a logic and an ontology.

## VII

My goal in this paper, by reading speculative logic as an overcoming and departure from Kantian idealism rather than as its straightforward completion or successor, has been to try and bring out the ways in which Hegel radically changes the terms and stakes of philosophy such that the Kantian edifice no longer suffices in sufficiently accounting for the activity of thinking and the determination of actual, concrete experience beyond mere possibility. One of the problems that I am trying to extinguish by reading Hegel's *Logic* as a logic of actuality and a problem that continually arises when Hegel is read through a Kantian lens is one that Pippin describes in the closing sections of *Hegel's Idealism*, where he claims that although Hegel has shown us how “Notions [are] ‘identical’ with the *Notional* structure of actuality,” and “not the vast range of determinate particularity,” there must still in fact remain “a clear difference between Notion [*Begriff*] and Reality.”<sup>94</sup> Insisting then, that Hegel, like Kant, holds that logical categories must be empirically unrevisable, Pippin poses what he sees to be a “general philosophical problem in the post-Kantian tradition. . . . the problem of ‘returning’ to the empirical world, once one rejects empiricism or a naturalist realism in

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<sup>92</sup> *SL* 554 / *WL* 2.218, *SL* 571 / *WL* 2.239.

<sup>93</sup> On Hegel's uses of the word “absolute,” see Nuzzo, “The Truth of *Absolutes Wissen*.”

<sup>94</sup> Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, 259.

favor of original, constitutive conditions.”<sup>95</sup> In interpreting speculative logic as the activity of thinking that determines actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) itself, in the full meaning of the word, I have aimed to show why this cannot possibly be Hegel’s problem, and on the contrary, how absolute idealism is not only sensitive to the empirical world, but whose entire concern *is* the actual, empirical world, what we discover at the end of the *Logic* to be nature. Hegel then, is at once both more and less of an empiricist than Kant: more because for him the empirical is not external to thought, because the conceptual is not inherently empty, but is the activity of determination that takes up empirical content as always already thought; less of an empiricist because Hegel rejects any empirical “given,” any sensible experience that is not always already caught up in relations of (thought) determinacy. “Actuality” is the term that Hegel chooses for this determination of the unity of essence (reflection, thinking, the inner) and existence (being, appearance, the outer). Thus, not only are the categories empirically revisable, but such revisability and the continual activity of their determination and redetermination *is* the absolute necessity of the Concept rather than its downfall into contingency. This reunification with contingency, which is equally a reunification with nature, marks the departure of speculative logic from transcendental idealism and the beginning of a philosophy of nature and spirit that will continue to determine actuality in all its richness and complexity.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> I would like to thank Jay Bernstein, Richard Bernstein, Matt Congdon, Markus Gabriel, Christoph Menke, and Rocío Zambrana for their helpful comments and discussions on earlier drafts of this paper.