

**RELATING HEGEL'S
SCIENCE OF LOGIC
TO CONTEMPORARY
PHILOSOPHY**

LUIS GUZMÁN

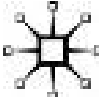


Relating Hegel's *Science of Logic* to Contemporary
Philosophy

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Luis Guzmán
The New School, New York, USA

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First published 2015 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN: 978–1–137–45449–2

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

*To Luis and Irza, who once created me, and Caetano and
Lautaro, who do not cease doing so*

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Acknowledgments

In my second year of undergraduate studies at Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Bogotá I was introduced to Hegel by Ramón Perez Mantilla, nicknamed “*el maestro absoluto*.” In a seminar dedicated to *Phenomenology* we barely made it to the inverted world. Twenty-five years later, I have barely made it through the Introduction. After a detour through Heidegger, I re-encountered Hegel at The New School for Social Research, at the hands of Agnes Heller and Richard Bernstein. It was Hegel’s *Science of Logic* which now drew me in, with the argument that if one was to offer a non-metaphysical interpretation of Hegel, this was the work to test it against. A Dissertation Fellowship offered by The New School allowed me to spend 2000–2001 in Berlin, where I worked on what amounts to Chapter 4 of this book. I must thank Dmitri Nikulin, a member of my Dissertation Committee, who encouraged me to undertake this project. An abridged version of Chapter 3 was published in Spanish under the title “El Carácter Contingente de la Necesidad Absoluta en la *Ciencia de la Lógica* de Hegel” in *Ideas y Valores*, Universidad Nacional, Bogotá, Colombia, No. 131, August, 2006, under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 license.

Many fruitful discussions among a group of doctoral candidates at The New School helped shape various of the ideas offered here. I am grateful to Morgan Meis, Stephen Levine, Howard Ponzner, and John Blanchard, among others, for their dedicated probing. The connection between Hegel and certain neo-pragmatists was honed at various papers delivered and seminars held between 2011 and 2013 at Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Bogotá, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, and Universidad Autónoma de Mexico. I am grateful to William Duica and Efraín Lazos for extending invitations to offer month-long seminars on Hegelian philosophy and neo-pragmatist thought during Spring 2011 (Bogotá) and Spring 2012 (Mexico City).

On a more personal level, I cannot fail to mention Lucía Pulido, who insisted on sharing a life with someone who was busy sharing a life with Hegel. Lastly, this book is dedicated to my parents, whose perseverance, hard work, and selflessness were a simple matter of course.

Introduction

The year 1994 saw the publication of three major works highlighting various Hegelian themes. Robert Brandom's *Making It Explicit*, John McDowell's *Mind and World*, and Terry Pinkard's *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* helped bring Hegel back to a respectable seat at the table of contemporary philosophical debate in the Anglo-Saxon world. The themes that have found their way into these discussions are, among others, mediation, immediacy, the in-itself/for-consciousness distinction, and necessity; or in more contemporary terms: inferentialism, givenness, the conceptual scheme/content dualism, and analyticity.¹

A frequent criticism of this Hegelian rehabilitation experienced in the last 20 years lies in the fact that it selects particular elements from the Hegelian system that, when plucked from their location and function within it, lose their Hegelian meaning.² These parts possess their meaning as elements of the whole. Separated from that whole they are no longer Hegelian. What we would have before us is not a rehabilitation of Hegel but rather a distortion of his philosophy and the masking of the metaphysical engine powering it. The task at hand is to offer a reading of Hegel from within his system, which would open spaces to be occupied by recent developments in analytic philosophy, instead of attempting to approach Hegel *from* these developments, setting aside what seems difficult to accommodate. This would require a defense of the whole structure of Hegel's philosophy, not merely of certain pillars and slabs belonging to the edifice. The question is whether this task is possible without ascribing to him a metaphysical position, which at the dawn of the twenty-first century would be difficult and probably unappealing to defend. If it is not possible, then Horstmann would be right: the Hegelian renaissance would not really be a renaissance but rather a plundering and decontextualizing of certain themes that are then recontextualized to make them

sound appealing to our contemporary ears. To use Croce's vocabulary: what is living or dead in the philosophy of the thinker of totality and the absolute could only be that totality or absolute itself. One either takes the absolute or takes nothing at all.

However, what if the absolute itself ought to be understood non-metaphysically? What if its structure destabilizes all dogmatic claims made about what is really real insofar as its historical character constantly alters the content of these claims through time? We are then left with an absolute that resembles Heraclitus' rivers, where "different and different waters flow" every time we wade in. The existence of the absolute would consist in the existence of the question "What is?" and in the attempts to answer it (this is the starting point of the *Phenomenology*). The absolute exists so long as humans inquire about reality. However, it exists as a posit that always exceeds the inquiry. Now, what makes Hegel's philosophy unique and not merely an additional attempt at answering this question is that it itself constitutes the breaking point at which the structure of the absolute is revealed. Hegel's absolute is the self-consciousness of its structure, which consists in including all prior moments within it. It is the first conceptualization of the absolute as subject to time. Hegel's response to the question is to say that "what is" is the whole, and the whole is constantly changing, always constituted by the process that has led to it at each particular historical moment. If metaphysics is to be understood simply as the belief in a *necessary* and *definite* constitution of reality that is or can, under ideal conditions, be revealed to human beings,³ then we might be willing to accept the Hegelian whole as non-metaphysical insofar as there are no ideal conditions under which it becomes a complete and necessary description of reality. The breaking point reached with Hegel lies, then, not in reaching the absolute and its necessary description of "what is," but rather in realizing that such a task is impossible and explaining why this is so.

The present work offers a non-metaphysical interpretation of Hegel's philosophy by focusing on five different topics that might serve as the ground on which to construct said interpretation. These topics have been selected because of their value in having bolstered an understanding of Hegel's philosophy as systematic, totalizing, and closed, thus paving the way for a rejection of Hegel's philosophical project as a whole as irrelevant to the various philosophical impulses informing the twentieth century. This positioning vis-à-vis Hegel unites thinkers as diverse as Russell, Popper, Gadamer, Adorno, Heidegger, Levinas, and Derrida, from schools of thought as varied as analytic philosophy, phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical theory, post-structuralism, and so on.

The five interpretive axes offered are Hegel's concepts of object, the infinite, necessity, rationality, and the absolute. The chapter on the object will be approached from the perspective of the "in-itself-for-consciousness" that appears in the second half of the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*. The chapter on the infinite will be culled from the section on Quality in Book One of the *Science of Logic*, where he deals with finitude, the ought, and the true infinite; the chapter on necessity will be based on the section on Actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) toward the end of Book Two; the chapter on rationality will be fleshed out by means of the syllogism, offered in the section on Subjectivity in Book Three; and the chapter on the absolute will focus on the last section of Book Three, that of the Idea. The goal is to be able to offer an interpretation of Hegel's philosophy that finds it very much alive and thus does more justice to any talk of a Hegelian renaissance than the isolated selection of certain Hegelian issues.

The present study does not offer a comparative analysis between Hegel, on the one hand, and contemporary thinkers such as Quine, Davidson, McDowell, Levinas, Derrida, and Brandom, on the other. It does not set itself the task of rescuing contemporary analytic topics from within the Hegelian texts.⁴ Rather, it prepares the ground for such a goal by offering an interpretation of Hegelian philosophy that does not stand at odds with the philosophical impulse behind current analytic, neo-pragmatist thought, or behind philosophies of particularity.

The topics dealt with here have a direct link to contemporary issues. Reference to them is not designed to lend Hegelian philosophy a credibility sorely needed. Rather, the goal is to place Hegelian philosophy, not only certain rescued themes, at the center of current philosophical debates. With this in mind, each chapter shall begin by linking its interpretive axis to contemporary discussions as an example of its timeliness.

In the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* Hegel confronts certain epistemological issues that arise mainly due to the dualisms emerging in Kantian philosophy: spontaneity/receptivity, understanding/sensibility. He explains what the consequences are for a position that presupposes these dualisms, mainly skepticism and relativism, and attempts to reveal a prior unity behind them that would dissolve their aporetic structure. Some of the moves he makes parallel Davidson's claims against the conceptual scheme/content dualism, raised in his article "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," where he shows the impossibility of having incommensurate conceptual schemes and, more importantly, the need for a shared background of true beliefs for there to be

the possibility of error. The position Davidson takes against a relativism based on the dualism scheme/content mirrors Hegel's move in the Introduction against the skepticism entailed by Kant's transcendental philosophy.

In the section on finitude the issue whether there can be an irreducible other, a transcendence that escapes the pull of Spirit or thinking, comes up in the form of the distinction between the true and the bad infinite. According to a common interpretation the bad infinite seems to constantly place otherness in an unreachable beyond, whereas the true infinite would amount to its inclusion in the totality. The apparent impossibility of an absolute otherness in Hegel's philosophy has been a deep source of criticism raised against him early on, defining his thinking as the high point of logocentrism, a thinking that absorbs everything within it. This is the main critique lobbed at him by Levinas and Derrida. They attempt to rescue a remainder that escapes the all-penetrating force of reason and thinking. It is true that Hegel situates absolute otherness within reason. However, the interesting question is whether anything gets lost by doing so when this otherness located within thought itself can never be absolutely overcome. Is there a significant difference whether we confront otherness from the outside or from the inside? The elucidation of Hegel's concept of the true infinite will reveal that finitude is not overcome with the true infinite, but just more accurately grasped.

In the section on Modality Hegel reveals the structural connection between necessity and contingency as he moves from contingency to absolute necessity and proposes a complete identity between them. If there can be no absolute necessity that is not riven by contingency, then necessity is posited as presupposed, that is, it is made and not found. This would mean that the necessity of his system is posited as presupposed, placing his philosophical claims in a sort of anti-metaphysical parenthesis by revealing their own unstable ground. The first section of Quine's article "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" attempts to reveal the limitations of the concept of analyticity by showing the difficulty of reaching meaning invariance. He shows that meanings are processes that are not guided by any necessary force behind them but rather subject to change, disallowing any claim to absolute necessity. With the conceptual determination of "what is" as actuality Hegel reaches a stage in which the conceptual strategy for thinking "what is" determines it as a process instead of an object: it is its having become what it is. The necessity of this process can only be posited from its endpoint *as* having existed all along, powering and directing the process. Only in this way

can actuality be made sense of or be assigned meaning. However, this process is always subject to further change given its historicity. Meaning is subject to a continuous transformation in the movement of recollection or remembrance (*Erinnerung*).

In the section on the syllogism Hegel makes the claim that “everything rational is a syllogism.” What distinguishes us from non-rational animals is our inferential capacity: not only that we have beliefs about the world, but also and mainly that we give and ask for reasons for our beliefs. The truth of a claim lies in the inferential process that leads to it. Otherwise, as Hegel says: “One bare assurance is worth just as much as another.” To be rational consists in giving and asking for reasons. The minimum unit of meaning lies for Hegel neither in the concept nor in the judgment, but in the syllogism. Using Wittgensteinian vocabulary, neither a concept nor a judgment makes a move in a language game; only an inference does. This is one of the main themes running through Robert Brandom’s *Making It Explicit*. His starting point is to find out how to distinguish ourselves from non-rational beings: the difference between sentient and sapient beings. He takes over from Hegel mediation and determinate negation: relations of consequence and incompatibility, by means of which we commit ourselves, and our partners in conversation hold us accountable, to certain beliefs about the world. Rationality and inference are the birthplace of objectivity. The world comes forth in the constant “to and fro” of giving and asking for reasons.

In the section on the Idea one encounters the “most stubborn opposition.” The ideas of the true and of the good constitute this most stubborn opposition since they are “eternally created and eternally overcome.” The Absolute Idea in Hegel consists in grasping the oppositional structure contained in our theoretical and practical relation to the world. This most stubborn opposition takes the form of a gap between mind and world, to use vocabulary from McDowell’s *Mind and World*. McDowell wants to steer a course between two different ways of running into an insurmountable gap between mind and world: the myth of the given, where there is a merely causal connection between both sides that cannot account for knowledge of any kind, on the one hand, and, on the other, a coherentism that leaves the external world in a hopeless beyond and the mind spinning frictionless in its beliefs about that beyond. His solution is not to attempt to bridge the gap but to start off with no gap in the first place, by means of the Aristotelian concept of second nature. We are always already in the (conceptually given) world. The role of the eternal creation of the stubborn opposition in Hegel is to guarantee the hardness of the world and avoid the

frictionless spinning in the void. The role of the eternal overcoming of the stubborn opposition is to show that despite the fact that the opposition does not disappear, we are nonetheless on both sides of the gap and thus always already in objectivity.

Metaphysics and necessity go hand in hand. The conclusion of Chapter 3 consists in the belief that the necessity ascribed to Hegel's system is posited in recollection and thus riven by contingency. Therefore, the *Science of Logic* should not be read as exhibiting the necessary a priori sequence of concepts that determine our relation to the world. The concepts encountered in it are precisely those we have come up with when attempting to make sense of our world.⁵ To assert that it is complete must not be understood as saying that the system offers a final and definite account of "what is", no longer subject to revision since subject and object, mind and world, work as like to like and completely interpenetrate each other.⁶

One of the impulses behind the present study is the attempt to make sense of the meaning and location of Hegel's statement regarding the most stubborn opposition, its eternal creation and eternal overcoming. To announce the completeness of a system while structuring it in such a way that it will eternally encounter opposition within it reveals that such completeness does not lie in its claims to particular truths (about nature or society) but rather in how truth claims work in general. They are historical, rooted in a linguistic community that has a certain relation to the world and gives itself the measure of their correctness. However, they are always subject to being falsifiable by human experience. The absoluteness of Hegel's system lies in his belief that he is the first to reveal this structure. He is the first to create a totality of meaning in order to explain the present as the result of all the preceding developments of thought and human experience. Aristotle set for himself a similar task in the first Book of his *Metaphysics*, though he did not think he was *constructing* this totality but rather uncovering different parts of it in his predecessors and offering it in full for the first time. He presupposed his system, whereas Hegel is positing his system *as* presupposed. He is the first to tell us that a system can only be posited, and that its universality, absoluteness, and objectivity are constructed and thus subject to change. There is no outside from or against which to measure our claims about the world and ourselves. The totality and completeness of Hegel's system does not consist in reaching final and definite claims about the world but in realizing that the only definite claim possible concerns the impossibility of definite claims.⁷ Hegel's system is closed only insofar as we have its structure before us. However, its particular content will

constantly be changing. This is distinguished from Pyrrhonian skepticism insofar as in the latter the opposing equipollent claims cancel each other since they are all equally justifiable, leading us to *epoche* in order to gain *ataraxia*. In Hegel's view opposing claims are an equally constitutive part of the truth since the truth is the whole. It is just that we never reach the "whole" whole.

Hegel's thinking constitutes the moment of self-realization of spirit: he is the first thinker to create a system that is absolute insofar as it does not purport to be absolute. The truth he reaches is the whole since it includes the totality of the process of thinking that leads to the present moment where what is true is understood as that conceptualizing process itself. The absolute character of the system lies in its permanence since what is held to be true will *always* be determined by the process of its search despite it being always different.⁸

1

The In-Itself-For-Consciousness: The Third Dogma

1.1 Introduction

In the Introduction to the section on the Idea Hegel asserts that it possesses the most stubborn opposition.¹ This stubbornness is grounded in the oppositions encountered in both the idea of the true and that of the good, that is, in theoretical and practical philosophy. These oppositions are being eternally created and eternally overcome. Human knowledge is eternally producing and overcoming an opposition between subject and object, concept and content, mind and world. The goal of philosophers from Descartes to McDowell has been to overcome this opposition once and for all. Different strategies have included God, forms of intuition and categories of the understanding, intellectual intuition, knowledge by acquaintance, second nature, coherentism, and so on. These strategies instead of overcoming the opposition have ended up producing either a loss of the world (frictionless spinning in a web of beliefs), a loss of our knowledge of the world (causal interaction without justification), or some type of dogmatism (appeal to God or to intellectual intuition). In the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* Hegel lays out the problematic of the idea of the true using as guiding thread the opposition between the object in itself and the object for consciousness. The “in-itself” is the content thought, what is real, undisturbed by its being thought, whereas the “for-consciousness” is what is thought about the content, the identification of it as something, determined by a particular scheme. Any identification of the content as object of thought would already imply a particular conceptual scheme without which that content could not be thought. The strategy he proposes in confronting the stubborn opposition is to transfer the two poles of content and scheme, in-itself and for-consciousness, into thought itself

as the “object in itself for consciousness,” though without collapsing them. This will not overcome the opposition, but rather reveal the structure due to which it is constantly created and overcome. That it is not completely overcome amounts to saying that it is intrinsic to human beings to always find themselves at theoretical odds with the world, to never be able to decipher it in a permanent manner, and thus to always be prone to having the world reveal itself as different than expected. This is what Hegel understands by *experience*. In this manner, he avoids losing the world without either falling into dogmatism or renouncing knowledge of it. We shall follow this strategy as it is laid out in the second half of the Introduction by means of the issue of the measure and its continuous alteration in experience. We give ourselves the measure against which we compare our beliefs about the world, while simultaneously altering this measure when we alter our beliefs in the face of our negative experience with the world. The Introduction emphasizes the dynamic at work between these two poles of consciousness and reveals the structural necessity of this opposition for the problem of knowledge and the constitution of human beings insofar as they are characterized by making truth claims. The source of objectivity, the hardness of the world, lies in our getting it wrong. The world only reveals itself in our false knowledge as being that *about which* our knowledge was wrong. Friction with the world is experienced only insofar as we err *about* it.

1.2 Detour via Davidson

In Donald Davidson’s 1974 article “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme”² we find a variation of this stubborn opposition of the idea of the true. He calls it the third dogma of empiricism: the distinction between content and conceptual scheme. A conceptual scheme can be understood as a set of rules of construction by which content is unified or synthesized into the kinds of objects common sense takes as making up the world. If the content lies beyond the conceptual scheme representing it and is only accessible through this scheme, then it will forever lie beyond our reach in its independence since we will only relate to it as determined or formed (and therefore altered) by the scheme we approach it with. There will be no criterion or measure (*Maßstab*) from which to determine anything common to schemes since the content they are attempting to represent or depict lies outside their scope. If one grants the world independence yet does not believe in the myth of the given, in the possibility of an unmediated connection between the world and us that goes beyond the merely causal stimulation of

nervous endings and impresses upon us facts that serve as justifications for beliefs about the world, then the independence of the world becomes an unbridgeable barrier and we are led to either skepticism or relativism. We are led to skepticism if we emphasize the fact that there is no measure or criterion accessible to us against which to compare our beliefs about the world. Thus we can never know if they are true, if they correspond to the way the world really is. We are led to relativism if we emphasize the fact that since there is no one measure or criterion accessible to us, we end up having an indefinite number of conceptual schemes, determined by the particular historical, cultural, or linguistic standpoint of the observer, making the truth of our beliefs relative to the particular scheme in which they are formed. Some of these beliefs may be incommensurable with others, that is, they might not share anything in common and thus be incomparable/untranslatable. This belief in the dualism of content/conceptual scheme is the third dogma of empiricism. Davidson's attack on it would, according to him, leave nothing distinctive to call empiricism.

By rejecting the third dogma, Davidson aims at regaining the world, at stemming the danger of relativism in which the world itself disappears into a multiplicity of perspectives. He concludes the article by saying: "In giving up the dualism of scheme and world, we do not give up the world, but re-establish unmediated touch with the familiar objects whose antics make our sentences and opinions true or false."³ However, the truth of the sentences regarding this "unmediated touch" has been qualified in the previous sentence as remaining "relative to language, but that is as objective as can be." If Davidson clearly distinguishes between a causal interaction with the world and an epistemological one based on beliefs about the world, and the latter cannot be grounded on the former (*pace* the myth of the given), then "nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief."⁴ The objectivity reached is not one understood as correspondence to an external, independent world, but rather as coherence among beliefs in a language. And as his article has attempted to show, truth relative to a language can be reduced to truth relative to language given the impossibility of having incommensurable languages. Any language as language must share enough common background with any other in order to be able to be identified as a language. This commonality of background among languages is what allows for divergences among them, that is, for error. Objectivity is to be found in the nature of beliefs themselves, not in their comparison to the external world. Davidson says: "The basic claim is that much community of belief is needed to provide a basis

for communication or understanding; the extended claim should then be that objective error can occur only in a setting of largely true belief. Agreement does not make for truth, but much of what is agreed must be true if some of what is agreed is false.”⁵ Objectivity is given in belief due to the nature itself of beliefs.

However, as McDowell raises the issue,⁶ if this is the case, what role does the causal transaction with the world play if it cannot justify our beliefs about the world? We are left spinning in a frictionless void of beliefs, without ever knowing with certainty whether they correspond to the world or not. What can the “antics” of the familiar objects consist of, which determine whether our statements and beliefs are true or false, if the causal space of perceptions and the logical space of reasons are kept separate? Davidson would need to either renounce any type of friction (as he seems to be doing when he says: “truth of sentences remains relative to language, but that is as objective as can be”) or produce friction by coming up with some type of relation of justification between the simple causal transactions with the world, which determine (or co-determine) the antics of the familiar objects, and the beliefs formed about them. This second alternative would lead straight back to either the myth of the given or to skepticism/relativism.

Davidson seems to want to undo the dualism of scheme/content in order to save our immediate connection to the world, given that with it we fall into relativism. However, it would seem he just substitutes one dualism for another by substituting the term “belief” for “conceptual scheme.” Instead of talking about the scheme/content dualism, we now have a logical space of reasons constituted by beliefs and a causal space of sensory information impinging on us (“experiential intake,” in McDowell’s vocabulary). The objectivity of our beliefs has not been sufficiently grounded insofar as we are left spinning in a frictionless void of beliefs cohering or not among each other, without any epistemological anchoring to the hardness of the world, except for the bombardment of nervous stimuli that cannot qualify as knowledge.

* * * *

Hegel’s Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* can be divided into two sections. The first section would run from paragraphs 73 to 80, the second from paragraphs 81 to 89. Our main concern lies in the second section, which regards, in Hegel’s own words, “the method of carrying out the inquiry.”⁷ In the next sentence he further clarifies what kind of inquiry this is: “an investigation and *examination of the reality of*

cognition."⁸ I intend to focus on and analyze the structure appearing in the discussion of the "in-itself" and the "for-consciousness," understood respectively as content and scheme, and of the problem of the criterion. Before delving into the passages in question, an overview of the first section of the Introduction will help contextualize the discussion of the criterion. For this purpose I shall elucidate three main topics to be found in the first section: (1) certain epistemological paradoxes; (2) the starting point and drive of the *Phenomenology*; (3) the particularities of natural consciousness and its relation to the question of truth.

1.3 Introduction to the Introduction

1.3.1 Epistemological paradoxes

Hegel starts off by pointing to the paradoxes faced by an epistemological endeavor that separates cognition (*Erkennen*) from the true (*das Wahre*) and decides to focus on an analysis of the functioning of our conceptual schemes before dealing with content or "what truly is."⁹ This does not mean that Hegel finds no value in epistemological endeavors that attempt to clarify the structure and limits of cognition, and that he merely wants to return to a pre-critical thinking that believes in an immediate access to "what truly is." As was mentioned above, the *Phenomenology* is itself an "examination of the reality of cognition." Hegel is also a major foe of the immediate character of any type of knowledge. Science in its immediacy only "comes on the scene."¹⁰ It is an appearance that has to exhibit itself as what it is. What Hegel criticizes from epistemological endeavors is the fact that they completely separate knowledge from truth, falling thus into the third dogma. This would lead to a renunciation of knowledge of "what truly is" and to its limitation to appearances, which would be a completely unacceptable compromise for Hegel regarding what knowledge should be about. This path describes in a general sense the move Kant makes in his *Critique of Pure Reason*: things in themselves are inaccessible to human cognition and to think about them leads to contradiction. Only appearances (phenomena) constituted by a manifold of sense data intuited through the pure forms of space and time and subsumed under categories of the understanding, united by a transcendental synthesis of apperception, make knowledge possible. There can only be cognition of things as they appear to us. It is by renouncing knowledge of the absolute that Kant is able to secure a universal knowledge against empiricism. Thus, he is able to overcome the limitations of both rationalism and empiricism. On the one hand, he renounces knowledge of the objects of reason, such as God, the soul and the world, due to the fact that there

is no intuition of them (concepts without intuitions are empty). On the other hand, he nonetheless saves the possibility of universal knowledge due to the a priori character of both the pure forms of intuition and the categories of the understanding (by means of which not just the possibility of experience but also that of the objects of experience themselves is established). He merely limits the field of knowledge to phenomena, to things as they appear to us. Hegel has Kant in mind when he talks about "a type of cognition which, though it does not cognize the Absolute as Science aims to, is still true," and when he says that "cognition in general, though it be incapable of grasping the Absolute, is still capable of grasping other kinds of truth."¹¹ This is the "hazy distinction between an absolute truth and some other kind of truth,"¹² which Hegel cannot accept since it is already a compromise regarding his strongly asserted starting point "that the Absolute alone is true, or the truth alone is absolute."¹³ A philosophy that settles for less than the absolute shall not bear such a name. The presupposition of the separation between scheme and content must be justified: why should one start from such a separation? This presupposition leads to the insoluble problem of separating scheme from content while simultaneously only having access to content through conceptual schemes: how does one have access to this content to verify if knowledge of it is correct, if the only access to it is precisely through our conceptual schemes? And if there were another type of access such as revelation or belief, why bother with epistemological matters at all?¹⁴ Here one already sees emerging the problem of the "criterion." How does one know that the conceptual scheme being used to grasp reality does not distort it, if there is no direct access to this reality itself? This clearly brings out the problem faced by an opposition between two entities, one of which should account for the other: either there must appear a third element uniting them, or the two heterogeneous entities must be revealed not to be heterogeneous at all. The only way to approach the absolute is by means of reflection.¹⁵ The only way to approach the true is by means of our knowledge of it. The content depicted by our conceptual scheme must already reside somehow in the scheme itself, in order to overcome an otherwise unbridgeable gap leading to skepticism or relativism.

The dead end that the separation of scheme from content leads to occurs when the scheme is taken as assuming an active role and as assuming a passive one. In the former it works as an instrument (*Werkzeug*), which leads to the problem of the effect it has on what it works on. It does not leave it unaffected, thus excluding all possibility of having access to "what truly is", independent of our attempt to grasp it via a particular scheme. In the latter it works as a medium

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