

HEGEL'S *SCIENCE OF LOGIC* AND THE 'SOCIALITY OF REASON'

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ABSTRACT: This paper is intended to examine the significance of Hegel's *Science of Logic* for social thought. I attempt to show that the claims advocating directly the social character of reason present in Hegel's thought must be regarded against the background of the logical demand of a presuppositionless thinking. After reviewing the criticisms addressed against the possibility of fulfilling that demand, I suggest that Hegel's demand of presuppositionless thinking could be understood as a transformation of Kant's transcendental philosophy (particularly the concept of the Original Synthetic Unity of Apperception—OSUA). That explanation will allow us to suggest that the demand of presuppositionless thinking works as the recognition of a gathering in which the "meaning" is both unified and dispersed. In base to that idea, it will be explained why most of the interpretations which emphasizes the social character of reason as the key to account the development of Hegel's philosophy fail to recognize that presuppositionless ground. So, it will be concluded that the sociality of reason must be understood as a determination reason gives itself through its self-situating in the field of meaning.

KEYWORDS: Hegel; Kant; Reason; Meaning

This paper is intended to examine the following question: what is the significance of Hegel's *Science of Logic*¹ for social thought?² The straightforward inquietude provoking the question is the awareness of the noticeable divergence between the contemporary reappraisals of Hegel's thought from the standpoint of political philosophy and the recent interest on his *Science of Logic*.² Both areas of Hegelian scholarship seem to have

1. G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller, New York, Humanity Books, 1998 (henceforth cited as SL). I undertook the research leading to this publication in my capacity as a Research Fellow in the Philosophy Program at the School of Communication, Arts and Critical Enquiry, La Trobe University.

2. Although that inquietude is personal, its significance is very far from being original. In that sense I suppose the accounts provided by Dieter Henrich ('Logical form and real totality: the authentic conceptual form of Hegel's concept of the state,' in Robert Pippin and Otfried Höffe, (eds.), *Hegel on Ethics and Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 241-267), Toulia Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos (*Hegel and the Logical Structure of Love*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1999), Richard Dien Winfield (*Overcoming Foundations*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1989), and Allegra de Laurentiis (*Subjects in the Ancient and Modern World*, New York, Palgrave, 2005). All of them have emphasized the importance to understand Hegel's social and political claims from the process of self-determination of the Notion in terms of 'the unity of universal,

experienced a growing development in the last two decades, but they hardly meet each other. On the one hand, Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth claim that some of the key notions that Hegel yielded between 1801 and 1807 (such as love, ethical life, and spirit) provide elements capable to justify the universal validity of liberal political institutions within the framework of a social notion of agency formed through relations of mutual recognition. From that perspective, they use to regard the *Science of Logic* as a tremendous setback into a metaphysics of consciousness which ultimately wipes out any possibility to grasp the intersubjective dimension of reason³. On the other hand, authors like Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard maintain that is possible to combine a reading of Hegel's thought as a support for the 'sociality of reason'⁴—understood as the position advancing the intersubjective constitution of the framework of reference from which is possible to carry on the self-reflection on the conditions of possibility of theoretical discourse, practical mastering of world, and self-description—with an interpretation of his speculative *Logic* as a heir of Kant's transcendental logic devoted to the systematic reconstruction of the of the basic categories at the base of such intersubjective grounding⁵.

I agree with the general project outlined by this latter interpretation because I think that there are good reasons to claim that Hegel championed for a social understanding of reason along all the stages of his thought. Nevertheless, as I will try to show, it is a claim that cannot be straightforwardly maintained from the pragmatic awareness of the social embedding of the social practice of asking and giving reasons, but demands us to deal with the crucial requirement opening the *Logic*: the engagement with presuppositionless thinking. Unless we were prone to neglect that demand as if it were an empty shell ready to be discarded in order to legitimate Hegel's *Logic* in a philosophical scene characterized by distrust toward ontological claims, the clarification of what means to be a presuppositionless thinking is indispensable to grasp the general structure of the *Logic*, and likewise to comprehend its significance for social and political thought. The importance of this explanation has been sharply perceived by Ludwig Siep, who stresses

particular, individual' (Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos, *Hegel and the Logical Structure of Love*, p. 57). From that perspective my intention is to raise the following question: what is the process through which thinking situates itself as an unity of *meaning* articulated in those three moments.

3. It is the position advocated by Axel Honneth, who suggest that we can put into brackets the Hegelian system as a whole in order to focus our attention in his understanding of social issues: 'in the writings that have survived from the period before the final system had been worked out [he is referring to the Jena's period] this model is so clearly recognizable in its theoretical principles that *the premises for an independent social theory can be reconstructed from them*' (*The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1996, p. 6, my italics).

4. The term 'sociality of reason' deliberately echoes the title of the masterful book by Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology. The Sociality of Reason*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

5. In that sense, Pinkard regards the *Logic* as an explanatory enterprise which applies the basic categories of the logic to the political field. As Pinkard writes: 'the rest of his system —the philosophy of nature, the ethical and political philosophy of absolute spirit— is to be no more than an application both of the program and the general categories of the *Science of Logic*. The other parts of the system display in concrete form the more abstract categorical structures elaborated and defended in the *Science of Logic*.' (*Hegel's Dialectic: The Explanation of Possibility*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1988, p. 8)

the importance of Hegel's *Logic* in the following terms:

The ontological condition for both [individual self-understanding and communal understanding] is that individual consciousness and rational communal spirit are structured by a conceptual system that has the form of a self-individualizing whole of meanings [...] In the course of a justification of speculative logic vis-à-vis traditional ways of knowing, the emphasis lies on the implicit thesis about the truth of such phenomena. But given a contemporary interest in Hegel's conception of individuality, it seems justified to focus on his analysis of social phenomena. However, the ultimate basis for the synthesis of individual and communal consciousness lies in Hegel's ontological logic.⁶

I think that Siep announces the importance of coordinating a *global* interpretation of the *Logic* with Hegel's social and political views. However, after that worthy statement he does not discuss the *Logic* anymore. So, the question still remains: 'how the logical demand of a presuppositionless thinking is related to the sociality of reason?' This paper is intended to examine that question.

So, in the first section will be presented the problems involved with the meaning and plausibility of a discourse developed around the demand of a presuppositionless thinking. Next, in the second section, will be examined the criticisms addressed against the possibility of a presuppositionless thinking as well as the attempt to retort them by means of an interpretation of Hegel's *Logic* along the lines of the methodological enterprise of transcendental philosophy. The proper place of this kind of philosophical reflection in the composition of the *Logic* will be explained in the third section; it will be the more extended part of the paper because in there it will be suggested, on the one hand, that the resources of transcendental philosophy are not enough to activate the demand of presuppositionless thinking because they remain external to the way the *Logic* is addressed to the issue of *meaning*. Nevertheless, on the other hand, I will claim that the encounter with Kant's transcendental philosophy (in particular with the concept of the Original Synthetic Unity of Apperception—OSUA) is crucial to understand Hegel's concept of self-consciousness as a gathering in which meaning is both unified and dispersed. That explanation will allow us to suggest, in the fourth section, what is the kind of presuppositionless thinking executed in the *Logic*. In particular, I will argue that it is rather the recognition of a ground more than a methodological procedure to bracket off conceptual assumptions. Finally, in the fifth section, it will be explained why most of the interpretations which emphasizes the social character of reason as the pivotal key to account the development of Hegel's philosophy fail to appreciate the recognition of the presuppositionless ground. Therefore, they overlook the interpretative possibility which will be presented a mode of conclusion: the sociality of reason must be understood as a determination reason gives itself through its self-situating in the field of meaning.

6. Ludwig Siep, 'Individuality in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*', in Ameriks and Sturma (eds.), *The Modern Subject*, Albany, SUNY, 1995, p. 135.

I

I want to deem the position from which is possible to raise the question: ‘What is the significance of Hegel’s *Science of Logic* for social thought?’ The rationale behind that mode of questioning does not pursue a merely rhetorical intention but tries to take seriously what *Logic* reminds us: ‘In no science is the need to begin with the subject matter itself, without preliminary reflections, felt more strongly than in the science of logic’ (SL 42). Even if we are going to approach to that demand keeping in mind a reasonable suspicion about its plausibility, a thoughtful regard of it should take us to ask: ‘since logic demands us to engage ourselves in a task “without preliminary reflections”, which begins “with the subject matter itself”, from where could we be able to understand it in order to eventually compare it to other fields of knowing or experience?’ The interrogation is not aimed to prepare the space for an eventual answer pointing out the kind of privileged object capable to perform the function of providing the position from which is possible a proper understanding of the *Logic* and its ramifications, because it does not work as a doctrine about a specific subject-matter which could be defined by means of the aggregate of its determinations, as Hegel puts it forward: ‘What we are dealing with in logic is not a thinking *about* something which exists independently as a base for our thinking and apart from it’ (SL 50). Of course, along the text we can find explicit propositions stating, for instance, that the *Logic* ‘is to be understood as the system of pure reason, as the realm of pure thought’ (SL 50). However, those pronouncements are always mediated by wider argumentative contexts reminding us that by themselves the simple assertions of the aim of the *Logic* are of not avail because ‘what this subject matter is [...] will be explicated only in the development of the science and cannot be presupposed by it as known beforehand’ (SL 75). In sum, the previous interrogation foreshadows anything but the way *Logic* works: as a discourse⁷ which is put in motion by the questioning about its own beginning. Perhaps such characterization left us empty-handed if we were expecting a neat definition of the *Logic* under a particular heading: ‘epistemology’, ‘ontology’, ‘theory of categories’, etc., but it will take us to the pertinence of our opening question because it suggests that, in becoming involved in the *Logic*’s work, the question about the meaning of something leaves its place to the question about the ground from which the meaning of something can be understood: ‘How is possible at all that some “X” comes to mean “Y” instead of “Z”?’ In other words, as soon as we have taken into account the simple suggestion that *Logic* requires us to engage in presuppositionless thinking, the assumed existence of an anchored theoretical framework lending intelligibility to the question ‘What is the significance of Hegel’s *Science of Logic* for social thought?’ becomes bewildered because if we are thinking without presuppositions, then it does not seem plausible to determine at once which is the *beginning*—the process that establishes and holds the whole set of criteria, concepts, and objectives guiding our question—that provides the ground from which both the *meaning* of Hegel’s *Science of*

7. I use the word in the second sense provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (second edition 1989): ‘The act of the understanding, by which it passes from premises to consequences’ (J.); reasoning, thought, ratiocination; the faculty of reasoning, reason, rationality.’

Logic and the *meaning* of ‘social thought’ do appear as a definite set of problems and thesis whose contents are already available for our interpretative exercises.

Nevertheless, that bewilderment is introduced by a demand, the claim of presuppositionless thinking, which hitherto hardly seems to be philosophically plausible because it looks as though Hegel were asking us to get rid of the network of material, practical, and theoretical elements that pervade the situation conditioning the very beginning of its own discourse (of any discourse indeed) in favour of a ‘conception of the world as simply existing, seen from no particular perspective, no privileged point of view—as simply there, and hence apprehensible from various points of view.’⁸ The problem with such ‘view from nowhere’ would consist in taking the critical⁹ attempt of securing a pure beginning for thinking so far that no longer would be possible to maintain a standpoint from which the more elemental ability to judge could be conceived of.

Along the lines of the interpretation just sketched, putting aside the mere exegetical appreciation of the text, we would not have reasons to take seriously the demand to engage ourselves with the *Logic* without ‘preliminary reflections’. Perhaps, at best, if we were eager to concede a benevolent treatment to Hegel, it could be said that the *Logic* undermines unilateral accounts (coming both from empiricism and rationalism) of our relation to the world but, ultimately, it would prove to be unable to actually realize the way our belonging to history, language and society overturns the intelligibility of a presuppositionless thinking. Therefore, under that ‘charitable’ reading, the efforts to establish a connection between the *Logic* and social issues should be avoided to prevent either an account wherein the alleged ‘realm of pure thought’ pretends to predetermine from a standpoint without presuppositions the political or ethical meaning of our concrete experiences with others¹⁰, or an approach that, in assuming that there is a linear transition from a purely categorial thought obtained by means of abstraction to the ‘existential claims’ coming out from the plurality of social world, produces unidimensional models of social explanation inadequate to deal with real process of social change.¹¹ In

8. Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 56.

9. I use here the term ‘critical’ in the Kantian sense of ‘critique’ as it appears in the first *Critique*: ‘a science of the mere estimation of pure reason, of its sources and boundaries [...] and its utility in regard to speculation would really be only negative, serving not for the amplification but only for the purification of our reason, and for keeping it free of errors.’ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, (hereafter CPR) Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (eds.), trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, A11/B25

10. It seems to be a point of view shared by post-Heideggerian criticisms on Hegel. His contention about the possibility and necessity of a logical beginning in terms of presuppositionless thinking allows him to present an ontological model based on the notion of totality, which ‘produces both the opposed moments of subjective reflection —the subject and the object— and itself as the totality of the medium of reflection.’ (Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 62) The social consequence of that notion of totality, powered by presuppositionless thinking, legitimates an image of ethical experience wherein the encounter with the other is always ‘comprehended or reduced to an object of cognition or recognition.’ (Simon Critchley, *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity*, London, Verso, 1999, p. 7)

11. It is the position of Hartmann, who summarizes up the ‘social impotence’ of the *Logic* in the following terms: ‘the problem of Hegel’s categorial scheme is the linearity of exposition or reconstruction in plural realms. Categories of the social realm —where plurality matters in as much as such categories stand for

sum, thinking in absence of presuppositions seems to be an untenable philosophical request which gets even more precarious when it comes to the field of social thought, either as a reduction of the others to the horizon of pure cognition or as a linear theory of social change.

II

But why we regard the demand of presuppositionless thinking as impossible? The question seems to be thoughtless once it is put against the background of contemporary philosophy, which has taught us to distrust of the ontological claims of those systems which maintain that it is possible for reflective consciousness detaching itself from its linguistic, historical, and social embodiment to lay down a pure ground from which the totality of the structure of reality can be constituted. In that sense, hermeneutics, phenomenology, post-structuralism, neo-pragmatism, deconstruction, or universal pragmatics, have offered different arguments pointing out a general idea: that embodiment actually works as the condition of possibility of any reflective positioning because the very distinction between what supposedly belongs to the doing of pure thinking, on the one hand, and all the other contingent elements accompanying the use of our reason, on the other, already presupposes our acquaintance with a shared web of meanings providing direction both to our reflective awareness of objects and to our own self understanding.

The inability to make sense of the way in which the reflective attempts to get rid of presuppositions in order to gain a pure realm of thought are themselves conditioned by ‘unsuspected horizons’ could be condensed in what Gadamer names the ‘*naïveté of reflection*’, which disregards ‘that understanding is not suitably conceived at all as a consciousness of something, since the whole process of understanding itself enters into an event’.¹² Moreover, this *naïveté* would be particularly present in the project of the *Logic* insofar Hegel would have believed that ‘the reflective spirit [...] in coming back to itself it is completely at home with itself’.¹³ That ‘coming back’ would represent a model of ontology—with far-reaching aftermaths in ethics and epistemology—in which the process of constitution of meaning of the world is a reflection, a mirroring of the progressive self-understanding of consciousness. Instead of that aseptic starting demanded by the reflective account of ontology, the different voices from the ‘constellation’ of contemporary philosophy would have showed how meager are the ontological claims of reflective consciousness because, even if such self-reflection is possible, it depends on a previous web of possibilities of meaning

plural entities and in as much as entities of diverse categorization coexist, such as families, society, and corporations in a state— seem to turn out differently from what we are used to grant because of the linear arrangement.’ Klaus Hartmann, ‘Hegel: a non-metaphysical view,’ in Robert Stern (ed.), *G. W. F. Hegel. Critical Assessments. Volume III. Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit and Logic*, London, Routledge, 1993, p. 254-255.

12. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David Linge, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976, p. 125.

13. Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 122.

However, at this point of the discussion, it could be contended that Hegel's *Logic* is very far from being an instance of the '*naïveté of reflection*' in desperate need of 'charitable' interpretations in order to survive on the contemporary philosophical landscape. More in particular, one of the possible interpretations and defenses of the program of Hegel's *Logic* could argue that the criticisms on it above sketched sharply overlook that the logical requirement of presuppositionless thinking works more like a methodological movement within an ontological project than like a blatant and dogmatic assertion on the metaphysical nature of consciousness. That is to say, we could be able to outline a description of the ontological import of the *Logic*, and then unfolding its methodological requirements in order to show that the global project does not rest on the assumption of the free self-positing of a metaphysical consciousness. This line of interpretation would mean to reformulate the demand of a presuppositionless access to pure beginning along the lines of the transcendental notion of 'conditions of possibility'.

We could begin saying that Hegel's *Logic* aims to make explicit the basic forms of thinking, how they are respectively unrolled and how, in their developing, they become tightly interwoven. From that basis, we could add that just in performing that task, logic is also an ontology because such basic forms of thinking cannot be conceived of as empty devices, whose validity would be severed from the actual content of our experience. Rather, precisely because they are the *basic* forms of thought, they set forth the structure of being. It means that we are able to utter judgments about what is to be accounted as 'the actual content of our experience'—no matter how simple or how skilled such description turns out to be—only because we already make intelligible the meaning of any experience from the logical infrastructure provided by those basic forms of thinking, which Hegel designates 'categories'. So, no matter how heterogeneous, changing and fallible our explanations of experience result, the primary rules specifying what that experience '*is*' (whether it is a cause or an effect, whether it refers to a particular item or to a class of items, etc.) are directly determined by the activity of *thought*. In that way, the aim of Hegel's logic coincides with ontology because the basic categories of thought delineate the essential structure of reality.

Moreover, the accusations of '*naïveté of reflection*' would be nullified because the project hitherto described cannot be accomplished by means of the introduction of a privileged point of view, beyond thinking and reality, from which we could be able to compare the basic categories of thought and the essential structure of reality in order to determine whether the latter actually coincides with the former. Such 'view from nowhere' serving as starting point for the aim of the *Logic* is not conceivable because we are always within the realm of thought; that is, our simplest thinking of something in everyday life already is informed by a set of categories, which 'as impulses [...] are only instinctively active. At first they enter consciousness separately and so are variable and mutually confusing' (SL 37). Therefore, any object or situation (God, cosmos, human subjectivity, the traditions of our community, etc.) contrived to serve as the observatory from which describing the interaction among categories and modes of reality already belongs with that reciprocal influence.

On that account, the closeness between categories and reality would be an insurmountable hindrance to ‘the loftier business of logic [which] is to clarify these categories and in them to raise mind to freedom and truth’ (SL 37) only if Hegel really were to be blamed for committing the ‘*naïveté of reflection*’, and so that clarification were to demand the real existence of a separated ground providing the conditions of possibility for particular determinate thoughts. But Hegel does not need to do that in order to activate the *Logic* because he only needs transforming the attitude toward the way we usually think in order to introduce a *methodological gaze*, which brackets off the content of our ‘variable and mutually confusing’ thinking of something, focusing instead to single out the valid structure of the categories involved there. And that stance would deliver a presuppositionless beginning for ‘the loftier business of logic’ without introducing unacceptable metaphysical claims, which could be reinforced by Houlgate’s suggestion of what it means to think in absence of presuppositions: ‘It is to say that we may not assume at the outset that such principles are clearly correct and determine in advance what is to count as rational [...] To philosophize without presuppositions [...] is merely to suspend our familiar assumptions about thought and to look to discover in the course of the science of logic *whether or not* they will prove to be correct.’¹⁴

Moreover, from this perspective we could intimate the supposition that the real ‘*naïveté of reflection*’ is committed by the positions arguing that the embedding of thinking in passive (that is, pre-reflective) horizons of meaning make totally impossible to conceive—beyond the framework of a ‘metaphysics of subjectivity’—a reflective standpoint from which the categories of thought could be clarified. The motives behind that hypothesis are to be found in the apparent inability of some influential trends in contemporary philosophy (in particular, those coming out from hermeneutics and post-Husserlian phenomenology) to think of what the idea of ‘conditions of thought’ truly demands and supposes. In particular, the criticisms pointing out that the aim of Hegel’s *Logic* involves the unsustainable primacy of reflection would fail to realize how the notion of ‘beginning’ and the notion of ‘mediation’—present in the claims stating the different ways reflection is conditioned—are inextricable because the exhibition of the conditioned character of reflection is already pervaded by thinking insofar reflection compels us to search the actual beginning of thought through the getting rid of the presuppositions that maintain the existence of an external, privileged, and given point of view from which the intelligibility of our relation to the world could be explained. To believe that the disclosing of the conditions of possibility of reflection obliterates the logical demand of presuppositionless thinking would mean to treat those conditions as elements totally external to thought; that is to say, as *already always presupposed* elements that only can be indicated but never appropriated by thinking in spite of the fact that they are its condition of possibility.¹⁵ Hegel exposes in the following example the

14. Stephen Houlgate, *The opening of Hegel’s Logic: From Being to Infinite*, West Lafayette, Purdue University Press, 2005, p. 30.

15. A similar point is made by William Maker: ‘Perhaps the key to demonstrate the authority of reason over what is given to it lies not [...] in searching within reason to discover given determinate principles in which modern claims about rational autonomy in thought and action are grounded, but rather in first

disagreeable consequences of that view: ‘With as much truth however we may be said to owe eating to the means of nourishment, so long as we can have no eating without them. If we take this view, eating is certainly represented as ungrateful: it devours that to which it owes itself. Thinking, upon this view of its action, is equally ungrateful.’¹⁶ So, the attempts to avoid an ‘ungrateful thinking’, which would be the apparently deserved denomination of the presuppositionless endeavour of Hegel’s *Logic*, in order to leave room to a ‘thinking of the absence’¹⁷ would mean the annihilation of thought just as the efforts to refrain ourselves from the ‘ungrateful eating’ would take us to starvation and death. Instead of the naïveté affecting those radical positions. Hegel realizes that were the beginning of thinking an ‘absolute’ and ‘pure’ position—in the sense of total absence of mediations—there would not be thinking at all but perpetual silence.¹⁸

III

Activates the possibility of a presuppositionless thinking the defense, sketched in the previous section, of the Hegelian project of an ontological logic like a transcendental project of disclosing the conditions of possibility of thinking? Well, reasons to think so have been provided. Nevertheless, the advocates of a thinking non-subordinated to the primacy of the ontological language still could argue that that possibility, even if it is conceived of in methodological terms, advances an unacceptable image of thinking based upon the dominion of the modern ideal of self-transparency, which demands the dissolution of any difference and particularity in order to secure a presuppositionless beginning.¹⁹ In turn, these new objections could be met by means of the introduction of

showing that no givens, either internal or external to reason need necessarily condition or determine it in its operations [...] any process of critical reflection which attempts to establish that reason is governed or determined by certain givens (internal or external) is finally aporetic.’ (*Philosophy Without Foundations: Rethinking Hegel*, Albany, SUNY, 1994, p. 49)

16. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Logic. Being part one of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830)*, trans. William Wallace, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, § 12, (henceforth EL).

17. The concept is of James R. Mensch, who finds a paradoxical prolongation of the discourse of foundational philosophy in the thought of Heidegger, Levinas and Derrida: ‘Apparently engaged in an attack on foundationalism, they nonetheless continue its practice of getting at the basis of the things and of using this basis to account for them. This basis is absence, which is variously named. As we shall see, it appears as the ‘lack of intuition,’ which Derrida sees as essential for language. It occurs as the ‘nothingness,’ which Heidegger places at the heart of Dasein. It turns up in the ‘beyond being,’ which Levinas appeals to in his attempt to differentiate his position from Heidegger’s.’ (*Postfoundational Phenomenology: Husserlian Reflections on Presence and Embodiment*, University Park, Pennsylvania University Press, 2001, p. 8)

18. In that line of thinking would be useful to remind the way Hegel opens the ‘Doctrine of Being’ demanding an ‘absolute beginning,’ but at the same time he insists on ‘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.’ (SL 68) The Hegelian remark invites us to suppose that the logical demand of presuppositionless thinking is a movement without definitive starts or finals but a continuous effort that cannot be objectified and, therefore, cannot be exhausted in the knowing.

19. For instance, this position is represented by Emmanuel Levinas, who judges the Hegelian project as a never-ending movement of appropriation of difference and the corresponding affirmation of self-conscious-

exegetical remarks indicating, for instance, that in the *Logic* we already can find severe denunciations of the *violence* exercised by the external form of reflection against what is regarded as alien to thinking.²⁰ Probably new counterarguments would be raised, and thereby more subtle defenses of the *Logic* should have to be imagined. But, at the end of the day, who is right? Is the demand of presuppositionless thinking a really *meaningful* exigency? Those questions are not intended to infuse relativistic or nihilistic overtones in the present discussion. Quite the contrary, they attempt to introduce the following hint: although the arguments presented in the precedent section can be reasonably sound they still do remain external to the actuality of the demand of presuppositionless thinking.

The reason of that claim is not to be found in an alleged absence of clarity, scholarship, erudition, or ‘revolutionary’ impulses, swaying the efforts to endorse a reading of Hegel’s *Logic* in terms of a ‘transcendental ontology’.²¹ As opposed to that supposition, those interpretations have provided strong reasons vindicating Hegel’s *Logic* against traditional and contemporary disapprovals eager to find in that work an anachronistic statement of a pre-critical metaphysics. Nevertheless, I also think that the recent appraisals of Hegel disregard the fact that an approach *exclusively* oriented towards the mere interpretative endeavour of determining what is the most accurate exposition and defense of Hegel’s *Logic* in the contemporary philosophical horizon easily can overlook the kind of presuppositionless thinking that *Logic* demands us to engage to. Why? Because if we just assume the legitimacy of the issues, concepts, and frameworks mapping the field of modern philosophy as if they were something *given*²² authorizing us to use certain exegetical premises, tools and techniques in order to make sense (or to debunk)

ness: ‘For Sartre, like Hegel, the *oneself* is posited as a *for itself*. The identity of the *I* would thus be reducible to a turning back of *essence* upon itself, a return to itself of essence as both subject and condition of the identification of the Same.’ Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, Peperzak, Critchley, and Bernasconi (eds.) Bloomington, Indiana University Press, p. 84

20. So, Hegel writes: ‘Violence is the *manifestation of power*, or power as *external* [...] Through violence, passive substance is only *posited* as what it is in truth, namely, to be only something posited, just because it is the simple positive, or immediate substance.’ (SL 567-568) The violence of external reflection will be overcome in the movement of the Notion.

21. Under the notion of ‘transcendental ontology’ Alan White (*Absolute Knowledge: Hegel and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 1983, p. 6) presents a defence of Hegel’s *Logic* which, I guess, encapsulates the basic features of the view expressed in the prior section: Hegel is not trying to restore the privileges of pre-critical metaphysics by means of the suggestion that does exist a substance, the Absolute, which constitutes the reality and objectivity of the world through its own ‘dialectical’ development. Rather, Hegel’s project follows the pathway opened by Kant’s transcendental philosophy and, therefore, his *Logic* is guided by the question about the conditions of possibility of experience, although Hegel, in contrast to Kant, maintained that we could provide a comprehensive system of such conditions of possibility. I agree with him in almost every point of his description of Hegel’s system, but, as I will try to suggest, I think that interpretations like White’s are not keen to accept the consequences of Hegel’s ontological thinking.

22. I will understand the notion of ‘the Given’ along the lines of the description provided by McDowell: ‘The idea of the Given is the idea that the space of justifications and warranties, extends more widely than the conceptual sphere. The extra extent of the space of reasons is supposed to allow it to incorporate non-conceptual impacts from outside the realm of thought.’ (John McDowell, *Mind and World*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 7.)

Hegel's philosophy, then we will have *supposed* therefore that the ground from which we encounter his *Logic* is perfectly a natural and a valid one. The ground I am referring to is not the one of a particular trend of scholarship but the universal ground of *meaning* within which any philosophical position lives. That is to say, we can talk about the *Logic* and claiming that our interpretation is the most reasonable view and yet we can fail to realize that the very mode of our claim already moves within a strong presupposition: the thought is able to determine the *meaning* of judgments in conflict, so that it is capable to evaluate the validity of the reasons in dispute. In other words, in participating in the 'living dialogue' of philosophy we already have supposed that the thought situates itself as the *forum*²³ wherein the subject matter to be presented and evaluated is not an external thing or a psychological event but a chain of reasons that moves 'in the pure ideality of the meaning [which] exists purely for itself, completely detached from all emotional elements of expression.'²⁴ This *situation* of thinking as a space of meaning makes possible for us to understand Hegel's significance not as a figment of the past dogmatically imposing its authority over us but as a claim whose meaning is intelligible only within an order, which 'is, at one and the same time, that which is given in things as their inner law, the hidden network that determines the way they confront one another, and also that which has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language.'²⁵ Once we have assumed that the clashing interpretations on Hegel (and, in general, on any other issue) are made possible because they are themselves twined in that order, in that ideality of meaning that thinking has become, the possibility of presuppositionless thinking only could be intelligible insofar it recognizes *the given character of the horizon of meaning as the primordial situation setting the conditions of possibility of any thinking activity*. From that recognition, the presuppositionless' demand can be carried on exclusively under the constraints of a methodological enterprise, which, in a similar venue to Kant's transcendental arguments, is devised to work as a 'regressive argument'²⁶ that, starting from the assumption that there is knowledge expressed in particular truth-claims about our experience, moves deductively to disclose and validate the necessary conditions of pos-

23. I use the terms in the double sense of the word: 'as the place of public discussion' and 'a particular court or jurisdiction.' 'Forum.' Def. 1. Rom. Ant., and 1.b. *Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition, 1989.

24. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Weinsheimer and Marshall, London, Continuum, 2006, p. 394.

25. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London, Routledge, 2001, p. xxi.

26. In calling 'regressive' the Kantian transcendental arguments, I endorse the interpretation of the issue provided by Karl Ameriks, whose reading 'takes the *Critique* to accept empirical knowledge as a premise to be regressively explained rather than as a conclusion to be established. Peter Strawson, Jonathan Bennett, and Robert Paul Wolff have insisted at length that such an argument is undesirable [...] They all represent the transcendental deduction as basically aiming to *establish* objectivity, i.e. to prove that there is an external and at least partially lawful world, a set of items distinct from one's awareness, and to do this from the minimal premise that one is self-conscious. Whereas these interpretations see the transcendental deduction as showing that one can be self-conscious only if there is an objective world of which one is aware, my interpretation takes Kant essentially to be arguing that for us there is objectivity, and hence empirical knowledge, only if the categories are universally valid.' (Karl Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2003, p. 54)

sibility flowing of that knowledge. The presence of that kind of methodological move in the logical endeavour seems to find support in Hegel's distinction between thinking in general and comprehensive thinking (which characterizes philosophy)²⁷: 'it is one thing to have such feelings and generalized images that have been moulded and permeated by thought, and another thing to have thoughts about them' (EL § 2).

According to that difference, the *Logic* would already take for given that our 'feelings and generalized images permeated by thought' possess meaning within our shared social life even if we don't have 'thoughts about them'. However, this last movement would be legitimate and exigible when those 'feelings and images' were to give place to conflictive claims. In that case, would be required to introduce a methodological bracketing off *within the sphere of meaning* neutralizing the validity of the sociological, scientific, or religious presuppositions involved in thinking in general, in order to exhibit the necessary categories pervading it and how the seemingly contradictory claims arising from that milieu acquire coherence once they are grasped as expressing different moments and articulations of the general entanglement of categories. Along the lines of this interpretation, surely the possibility, extendability, and the degree of the bracketing proposed by Hegel in the *Logic* can be motive for debate (as a matter of fact, there are reasons to claim that contemporary philosophy lives on the rejection of the possibility of such presuppositionless bracketing off). But what absolutely could be regarded as conclusive is the belonging of the demand of presuppositionless thinking to the realm of meaning. Otherwise we would have to acknowledge the inability of Hegel's *Logic* to embrace the results of Kant's Copernican Revolution.

However, in this point arises a problem which will show how the demand of presuppositionless thinking compels us to reflect on the alleged given character of the horizon of meaning as the primordial situation setting the conditions of possibility of any thinking activity. The problem is that Hegel himself refused to understand the development of the *Logic* in terms of a transcendental argument about conditions of possibility of our

27. Hegel refuses to regard conceptual thinking as an addition to our primal reference to world, a vision which supposes that thought has two levels: the content and the form, and then the main issue is determining how both of them can be connected? How conceptual (reflective) thinking knows that its forms are adequate to the content given in pre-conceptual consciousness? Hegel's answer will insist on the non-existence of a pre-conceptual moment. Even the more basic expressions of experience convey conceptual determinations. Therefore, a third element connecting content and experience is not present: 'the nature, the peculiar essence, that which is genuinely permanent and substantial in the complexity and contingency of appearance and fleeting manifestation, is the notion of the thing, the immanent universal, and that each human being though infinitely unique is so primarily because he is a man, and each individual animal is such individual primarily because it is an animal: if this is true, then it would be impossible to say what such an individual could still be if this foundation were removed, no matter how richly endowed the individual might be with other predicates.' (SL 36-37) Therefore, reflection, and self-reflection, cannot be understood as a turning away from immediacy because such a moment does not exist, we are always in the element of thought. Hegel does not introduce a third term in order to connect content and form because there is no original splitting: 'the pure Notion which is the very heart of things, their simple life-pulse, even of the subjective thinking of them. To focus attention on this logical nature which animates mind, moves and works in it, this is the task.' (SL 37) So, Hegel's enterprise is not introducing mediations. Rather he tries to show that *we are* mediation.

knowledge:

A second method of apprehending the truth is Reflection, which defines it by intellectual relations of condition and conditioned. But in these two modes the absolute truth has not yet found its appropriate form. The most perfect method of knowledge proceeds in the pure form of thought: and here the attitude of man is one of entire freedom (EL § 3).

It is important to recall that Hegel doesn't deny the validity of transcendental arguments based upon conditions of possibility. On the contrary, the notion of 'conditions of possibility' introduces a determination of reflection which is necessary to show that what appears before thinking is not a self-standing 'representational content' requiring a causal explanation within the framework of a psychological understanding of the cognitive process. Rather, what appears before thinking is the outcome of a reflective mediation which posits a basic distinction between the salient features of appearing and the ground that determines the necessary conditions of that mode of appearing. To put it in terms of the history of philosophy, the transcendental notion of conditions of possibility is the highest expression of Kant's Copernican Revolution, which rejects the idea of a 'ready-made world'²⁸ and, instead asserts that the world is the 'normative'²⁹ constitution of the spontaneity of *subjectivity*—a subjectivity understood not in psychological sense but along the lines of the 'Originary Synthetic Unity of Apperception' (OSUA)—, which acts on *a priori* rules to bring the manifold of the intuited under concepts and combine concepts. That action doesn't rest on psychological or anthropological premises; rather it can be traced back to judgments 'so that the understanding in general can be represented as a faculty for judging'.³⁰

Far from repudiate the Kantian idea that thinking in general (that is to say, our direct awareness of some state of affairs) can be justified in terms of conditions of possibility outlined through the notion of *discursivity* (the idea that the basic functions of understanding can be identified following the 'leading thread' of the functions of judgment³¹), Hegel recognizes in it an insuperable moment of thinking which indwells his

28. Hilary Putnam, 'Why There Isn't a Ready-made World', in Paul K. Moser, J. D. Trout (eds.), *Contemporary Materialism: A Reader*, London, Routledge, 1995, p. 225.

29. I will employ the term 'normative' in the sense employed by Robert Brandom, who develops a model of rationality wherein the intelligibility of our relation to the world is not based upon the notion of representation (the idea that our intentional states are meaningful *because* they do refer to external objects) but *inference* (which claims that the propositions are meaningful only because they are embedded in a wider *inferential* articulation wherein they can be used as reasons; either as premises or as *normative* because the previously referred inferential articulation of the meaningful addressing to the world requires our ability to employ and identify norms concerning the proper use of inferences: 'The practices that confer propositional and other sorts of conceptual content implicitly contain norms concerning how it is *correct* to use expressions, under what circumstances it is *appropriate* to perform various speech acts, and what the *appropriate* consequences of such performances are.' (Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1994, p. xiii). According to Brandom this normative notion of reason, based upon the model of inference was already outlined by Kant and eventually developed by Hegel (Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, p. 92).

30. CPR, A69/B94.

31. I take this suggestion about the fate of Kant's deduction of the categories (as well as the translation of *Leitfaden* as 'leading thread') from Béatrice Longuenesse (*Kant on the Human Standpoint*, Cambridge, Cam-

own logic:

The critical philosophy [...] already turned metaphysics into logic [...] Recently, Kant has opposed to what has usually been called logic another, namely, a *transcendental logic*. What has here been called objective logic would correspond in part to what with him is transcendental logic [which] contains the rules of the pure thinking of an *object*, and [...] at the same time it treats of the origin of our cognition so far as this cognition cannot be ascribed to objects (SL 51, 61-62).

The first line of the quotation ('The critical philosophy [...] already turned metaphysics into logic') should provide us a basic guidance to understand the relation between Kant and Hegel: once metaphysics has been turned into logic it is no possible to invoke a supposedly standpoint external to thinking in order to criticize the movement of thinking (which is the main business of logic). Therefore the reasons to put into question the explanations provided by Kant (or by any other thinker) to justify his account of the determination of the world cannot 'begin, like a shot from a pistol, from [...] inner revelation, from faith, intellectual intuition', (SL 67) but they must find their path in the ground of discursivity, what Hegel called in the *Phenomenology* 'the cultivation of the form',³² insofar it is the only way our relation to the world owns sense and significance. On the other hand, also in that quotation, we can find the subject matter of the remarks and criticisms that Hegel addresses to Kant: 'the rules of the pure thinking of an *object*,' that is to say, the polemic between both philosophers primarily concerns more to the discursive justification of the proposed rules rendering a meaningful world than to the elucidation of the reaches of empirical knowledge or the socio-historical boundaries of moral judgment³³. With both provisos in mind we can approach to Hegel's qualification of his own belonging to Kant's Copernican Revolution. He doesn't adheres to the idea of conditions of possibility, but it neither means that he is trying to propose a non-discursive access to a supposed ground beyond our understanding providing meaning to our relation to the world, nor means that he is advocating (at least in the *Science of*

bridge University Press, 2005, p. 81-116), I guess that the problem pointed out by her is also one of the problems indicated by Hegel: if we are under the sign of a critique of pure reason, then the determinations produced by it should derive uniquely from thought. But if we posit instead the table of judgments in order to justify that 'the understanding as a whole is a capacity to judge' our critics have all the right to ask us: 'where do you take the justification from?' The Hegelian point will be: the answer to the question 'how are synthetic a priori judgments possible' cannot follow the transcendental model proposed by Kant. The question, instead, must be answered through the immanent justification delivered by speculative philosophy.

32. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, Oxford University Press, 1979, ¶ 13, (henceforth PS). And, in the same paragraph, Hegel adds, reinforcing its recognition and adherence of the horizon of discursivity: 'Without this cultivation science lacks Understandability, and looks as if it were the esoteric possession of a few singular individuals [...] Only that which is fully determined is also exoteric, capable of conceptualization, and of being learnt and made everyone's possession.' (This quotation comes from Yovel's translation: G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Yirmiyahu Yovel, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 86)

33. Of course that epistemology and ethics are fields wherein there are strong disagreements between Kant and Hegel, but what I want to suggest is that those dissents largely depend on the way each other situates himself in relation to the basic question about the justification and development of the pure rules of thinking.

Logic) an intellectual intuition in which intuition and concept are identical. Rather, Hegel's non-adherence to the transcendental language of 'conditions of possibility' signifies that, according to him, Kant's discursive justification of the rules of the pure thinking of an object is unacceptable because it never really offers a justification of its beginning. In other words, Hegel claims that Kant didn't provide a true discursive justification of the logical movement of thinking, which should be able to answer the following question: 'How thinking situates itself in a position from which it can make reference to the other than itself?'³⁴

The previous contention seems to misrepresent both the actual Kantian justification of the a priori rules acting on the experience as well as Hegel's explicit recognition and appraisal of that justification. In a different manner: in suggesting that Hegel's criticisms on Kant are addressed to point out the absence of a justification of the ground of transcendental philosophy we would be neglecting the crucial role of Kant's 'Original Synthetic Unity of Apperception,' (OSUA) which works as the highest principle conditioning the possibility of the objectivity of conscious experience.

Briefly explained, OSUA refers to the self-conscious character of experience: the consciousness of something as a determinate something, an object, ultimately depends on the possibility of being conscious that I think of it as a particular object. However, it is crucial to remind that the 'I think' represented by the OSUA is not the inner self-awareness of an empirical ego. Rather, it is a rule imposing unity and order to the gathering of the manifold of the intuited as well as to their combination in concepts. So, the OSUA points out that the experience of an object is an active unity of moments brought together by the normative activity of self-consciousness, which is also a rule-governed working whose principle can be stated as follows: the objectivity of experience rests on its reflective character; that is, in the possibility to be aware of the rules constituting that particular experience. In sum, the OSUA is the basic normative structure governing all the other normative structures determining the differentiations through thinking in general makes reference to the other than itself.

The OSUA not only seems to indicate—against the idea hinted above—that Kant's transcendental philosophy actually does possess a principle of justification of the objectivity of experience but also points out the deepest agreement with Hegel, who encountered in that notion of self-consciousness the principle to set free the spontaneity of

34. In other words, the question is: 'how thinking can come to recognize what is other than itself and how is able to determine it just as what is other than itself?' Is important to say that the question is not: 'how is possible for thinking to make reference to *otherness*?' If stated in those terms the question would have presupposed in advance the given existence of an otherness as a bundle of being waiting to be determined. And that is just the point rejected by German Idealists (starting from Kant): they claim that philosophy cannot take for granted that there is an absolute otherness opposed to the nature and deeds of consciousness. It's not a kind of skepticism about the external world or other minds because skepticism already involves an 'assertive' moment: the positing of appearance *as mere* appearance in contrast to the real right thing. But critical philosophy rejects the dualism concocted in that position and, instead, claims that consciousness does exist only in its reference to the other than itself. We cannot dismiss that referentiality as a simple additional feature of consciousness because it is the very life of consciousness. So, the question 'how thought's reference to the other than itself is possible?' is a question about the meaning of thinking.

thinking from any dependence on a given source of meaning:

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 *Notion* [*Begriff*] is recognized as the *original synthetic* unity of *apperception*, as unity of the *I think*, or of self-consciousness. This proposition [...] demands that we should go beyond the mere *representation* of the relation in which the *I* stands to the *understanding*, or notions stand to a thing and its properties and accidents, and advance to the *thought* of that relation (SL 584).

The reason why Hegel praises the OSUA is because it overcomes the metaphysical positions supposing that meaning comes to life only when is bridged the gulf between an inert item and that *thing* called ‘thought’ (the bridging relation described by the phrase: ‘the mere *representation* of the relation in which the *I* stands to the *understanding*, or notions stand to a thing’) through the intervention of the ‘tools’ provided by the rules and principles of thinking. Instead of that ‘non-normative’ position, OSUA offers an understanding of thinking as a dynamic field of ‘gathering’³⁵ rules where the relation between consciousness and its other is conceived of in terms of ‘recognition’ (*Anerkennung*); that is to say, if the meaning of ‘thinking’ only can be determined through the process of determination of objectivity *qua* objectivity, then the relation between subjectivity and objectivity must be considered otherwise than the model of an one-side foundation. On the contrary, that relation is one of reciprocal co-determination in which, on the one side, consciousness recognizes its own doing in the network of mediations determining the intelligibility of the object. And, on the other side, the object is not a passive and monolithic raw material opposed to conscious activity but a concept, a unity of determinations whose rules of composition impose limits and structure to the active doing of consciousness.³⁶

35. The general framework from which I attempt to present my position is totally indebted to George Vassilacopoulos. However, my indebtedness to him reaches its peak when the concept of ‘gathering’ comes to scene. The idea of the gathering refers to the *topos* occupied by the philosopher; a *topos* which could be described as ‘an immanent correlation between the form of the reflecting activity in which the participants engage and the subject matter under consideration in so far as both manifest the finite eternally changeable human collective, or what I shall refer to as ‘the gathering-we.’ (Vassilacopoulos, ‘Plato’s *Republic* and the end of philosophy,’ *Philosophical Inquiry*, vol. XIX, no. 1-2, 2007, pp. 34-45.). In the present paper I have tried to present Kant’s OSUA as the movement of that gathering expressed in terms of the pure articulation of meaning; a movement whose thought is the basic issue of Hegel’s *Logic*.

36. To say it with the language of the *Phenomenology*: consciousness of the world, the consciousness of finite differentiations, must come to recognize self-consciousness as the active pole determining those differentiations. In turn, self-consciousness ought to recognize the consciousness of the world as normatively differentiated and, therefore, as unsurpassable. Self-consciousness cannot engulf the difference of the world by claiming it is only a derivate of its own activity because once the differentiation is posited it acquires ‘autonomy’ (but not total independence) in taking up a place of its own in the order of reasons. The worldly differentiation is not independent because it only appears by the activity of Notion, of self-consciousness, but the Notion does not just mirror itself in the differentiation because it, in turn, splits itself bringing its own normative structure. So, the *dictum* ‘Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness’ (PS, ¶175) primarily is not the formulation of a social theory; rather, it indicates the special kind of reflectivity informing self-consciousness: otherness appears as otherness just because it is already conceptually informed, so it poses a resistance to the attempts of reflective appropriation. In that sense, I

In that sense the *Logic* is just ‘the *thought* of that relation’ of recognition. Its most immediate consequence is to put forward that the rules of the active unity of moments constituting thinking in general are not tools devised to bridge the gap between thought and being because, for a start, there is no such thing as a gulf separating them³⁷ but the unifying activity—the ‘bacchanalian whirl’ of the *Phenomenology*—in which the space of meaning is constituted and from which is possible to draw up the distinction between thought and being. That relation in which the thinking and the thought recognizes each other as differentiated moments of the same gathering, of the same active unity,—insofar their unity is brought about by the same basic rule—is the *Notion (Begriff)*, which can be understood as the motion wherein, at the same time, the rules of objectivity are unified and differentiated. In that sense, the Notion dwells in the space opened by the Kantian OSUA to the extent that both concepts embrace a normative idea of thinking.³⁸ However both of them refuse to understand thinking as a mere ‘syntactical framework for thoughtless contents;’³⁹ instead, they emphasize that at the very moment

think that McDowell (‘The apperceptive I and the empirical self’, in K. Deligiorgi (ed.), *Hegel New Directions*, Chesham, Acumen, 2006, p. 33-49) has good reasons to claim that directly the other self-consciousness is no other mind; rather it is the differentiation produced by consciousness.

37. So, the OSUA allows us to claim that there is no a primal severing to be re-united; rather, there is a misunderstanding to be dissolved: ‘Thinking therefore in its reception and formation of material does not go outside itself; its reception of material and the conforming of itself to it remains a modification of its own self, it does not result in thought becoming the other than itself; and self-conscious determining moreover belongs only to thinking.’ (SL 45) In this way, before the question: ‘What is the element that constitutes the truth of our normative vocabulary about the world?’ The Hegelian answer, following the path opened by the OSUA, would be: nothing. That question becomes a philosophical problem only when we assume that our standpoint, the standpoint of the forms of thought, is an artificial one and, therefore, it needs to recover a ‘given’ source of validity in order to be really meaningful.

38. Is important to notice that in the first edition of the *Critique* Kant refers to the function of unity of consciousness in terms of the notion (*Begriff*): ‘Without consciousness that that which we think is the very same as what we thought a moment before, all reproduction in the series of representations would be in vain [...] this concept consists solely in the consciousness of this unity of the synthesis. The word ‘concept’ [*Begriff*] itself could already lead us to this remark. For it is this **one** consciousness that unifies the manifold that has been successively intuited, and then also reproduced into one representation’ (CPR, A 103).

39. Allegra de Laurentiis, *Subjects in Ancient and Modern World*, p. 70. I think that she has pointed out rightly that ‘syntactic framework’ is the idea permeating most of the ‘transcendental’ interpretations of Hegel’s *Logic* ‘The programmatic rejection of the metaphysical foundations of Hegel’s thought in contemporary reconstructions of it is often accompanied by a summary assessment of the *Logic* as a sort of cabalistic shroud threatening to envelop an otherwise almost intelligible system, rather than providing the key to its disclosure. In this perspective, the role of Hegel’s logical and metaphysical categories as foundations of pivotal notions of the system [...] is ignored, the principles of each part of the system are taken as presuppositionless (ultimately dogmatic) beginnings, and Hegel’s philosophical contribution is reduced to that of an unduly elaborate social theory or of a prolix epistemology.’ (Allegra de Laurentiis, *Subjects in ancient and modern world*, 6-7) By the way, it could seem strange to quote the authority of De Laurentiis since her position is explicitly opposed to Brandom’s account of the normative vocabulary we have accepted before as our guide (see note 31 *supra*). Nevertheless I think that it is possible to combine both interpretations: on the one side, I believe that she is totally right in emphasizing the undeniable importance of Hegel’s metaphysical commitments (an importance disregarded by Brandom’s starting point of analysis: the social institution of norms). On the other side, however, I guess that De Laurentiis dismisses too fast *the potential* inherent in Brandom’s account because his normative pragmatics is not only intended to make explicit the inferential relations conditioning

consciousness encounters the world it is addressed to a gathering of moments articulated in judgments, and, therefore, in that moment such addressing cannot be justified by means of referring back to an existent being in order to prove the rightness of those judgments. On the contrary, thinking is entirely referred to the rules of composition condensed in the Notion.

Nevertheless, in contrast to Kant's OSUA the Hegelian Notion is not a grammatical subject, the 'I think' accompanying my representations, but the deploying of the self-relating activity which articulates the space of determinations. In order to understand why this difference cannot be interpreted as a Hegelian relapse in the metaphysics of consciousness is crucial to insist on that that self-relation of the Notion means self-differentiation, no introspection, insofar each one of its categories is a development of all the others.⁴⁰ So, the self-relating Notion is always speculative because its basic categories refer to its own motion, a motion indicated through the concept of self-consciousness: 'The object, therefore has its objectivity in the *Notion* and this is the *unity of self-consciousness* into which it has been received; consequently its objectivity, or the Notion, is itself none other than the nature of self-consciousness, has no other moments or determinations than the *I itself* (SL 585). The '*I itself*' is not a particular and distinctive consciousness, which has the power to gain self-consciousness but an outcome of the self-differentiating activity of thought from which 'thinking in general' can be understood as the gathering, the conceptual articulation of the basic categories of thinking.

If the main contentions of the previous exposition are right, then it would seem reasonable to think, against the hypothesis we have claimed before, that the disagreement between Kant and Hegel—which triggered out the latter's demand of a presuppositionless beginning—consist in that the former lacks of a true discursive justification of the logical movement of thinking, not only that Kant does actually possess an universal principle of justification of the objectivity of experience (the OSUA) but also that such principle is at the base of the Hegelian understanding of self-consciousness (the Notion). So, there would have good reasons to maintain that Hegel's 'own theory of the Notion, and indeed the relation between the Notion and reality [...] should be understood as a direct variation on a crucial Kantian theme, the 'transcendental unity of apperception'.⁴¹ From this point of view, the absolute idealism advocated by the *Logic* could be understood as an holistic attempt to close the gap between mind and world: it does not make sense ascribing the source of our perceptions to supposed 'things in themselves' because in the very moment we try to conceive its causal role in experience

an alleged non-normative realm of referential relations to the world; on the contrary, Brandom recognizes that the biggest challenge of a normative pragmatics is just providing an integral account of both relations. In that sense, the normative *vocabulary* could make explicit how thoughts are 'able to express the essential reality of things.' (EL § 24)

40. In other words, under the concept of the Notion (*Begriff*) Hegel wants to provide an account of a specific historical moment: the moment in which I think myself as subjectivity (or, perhaps would be better, the moment which subjectivity is thought as an 'I'). The Notion is the self-conscious knowledge of myself as subjectivity.

41. Robert Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-consciousness*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 6.

we have put in movement the whole of our basic categories. Besides, along the lines of this interpretation, the demand of presuppositionless thinking would mean that, in bridging that gap, thinking comes to be directly aware of the *a priori* categorial determinations involved in the apprehension of any object, no matter the empirical contents of that apprehension.⁴²

IV

The *conclusions* of the interpretation presented above seems to be very appealing because it recovers the lines of continuity between Kant and Hegel in such way that rules out the attempts to constrain the Hegelian identification of the Notion and self-consciousness to the ‘mentalist framework’ denounced by Habermas.⁴³ However, I will argue that those conclusions still overlook the force of the main Hegelian criticism to the Kantian presentation of the OSUA as the principle justifying the objectivity of experience: the lack of a self-justification of that grounding; an absence which calls for the activation of presuppositionless thinking in order to recognize that the gathering, the conceptual unity within thinking lives in, justifies itself.

In this sense, I resume to the two basic ideas we have been working with in the previous section: the idea that the OSUA plays the role of the basic principle of justification in Kant’s philosophy and the idea that Hegel’s Notion directly draws on that model of justification. However, in contrast to the conclusions sketched above, I still contend that is plausible to suggest that the Hegelian criticism on Kant’s inability to provide a discursive justification to the question ‘How thinking situates itself in a position from which it can make reference to the other than itself?’ stands up without necessity of introducing metaphysical assumptions. Moreover, the examination of Hegel’s assessments on the subject matter will offer the opportunity to put forward what is the kind of presuppositionless thinking performed by the *Logic*.

On the first hand, let us to quote the following remark that Hegel adds after acknowledging the Kantian legacy on the formulation of the Notion:

A capital misunderstanding which prevails on this point is that the *natural* principle or the *beginning* which forms the starting point in the *natural* evolution or in the *history* of the developing individual, is regarded as the *truth*, and the *first* in the *Notion* [...] But philosophy is not meant to be a narration of happenings but a cognition of what is *true* in them, and further, on the basis of this cognition, to *comprehend* that which, in the narrative, appears as a mere happening (SL 588).

It is an interesting fragment because it appears at the very beginning of the ‘Subjective Logic’, the moment when both the possibility and necessity to present the Notion as

42. “It also seems to be Pippin’s position: ‘[...] the final claim of the *Logic, its Major Thesis*, is that in attempting to render *determinate* any possible object of self-conscious thought, thought comes to understand the ‘truth’ that it is ‘thinking itself’, thinking its own activity.” Robert Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, p. 6.

43. Habermas contends that after the period of Jena, Hegel did turn back to a mentalist model of self-reflection because ‘is still the only model Hegel had available for a higher-level subjectivity to which a higher knowledge could be ascribed,’ *Truth and Sustification*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2003, p. 203.

an *activity* able to grasp its own *movements* is being discussed; that is to say, in a moment when, supposedly, we have overcome the point of view of ‘thinking in general’ in order to enter into the realm of ‘comprehensive thinking’. So, why to introduce those warnings once we have accessed to the Notion as ‘the *absolute foundation*’ (SL 577)? The reason is that Hegel is aware that even if we have gone beyond a conception of thinking as ‘the mere *representation* of the relation in which the *I* stands to the *understanding*, or notions stand to a thing’ still remains the temptation to think of this other comprehension of thinking as a new privileged object demanding *to be represented as a totally different kind of relation in which the Notion stands to the objects*. In other words, leaving behind the image of the ‘I think’ as a substantial ego faced to the world of things in order to embrace the Notion as ‘the absolute foundation’ is not sufficient condition to ‘advance to the *thought* of that relation’ because—insofar philosophy doesn’t realize that the thinking of the Notion demands a change of level: from the relation to objects to the pure relations of meaning within a normative pattern—it is perfectly possible to conceive of the Notion from the standpoint of pictorial thinking: as a particular item (even if that item is a set of rules of synthesis) which relates to the objects of the world in a relation described in terms of condition of possibility but wherein the ultimate ground of that relation remains as a *given* that overwhelms thinking.

On the second hand, that’s the temptation that, according to Hegel, Kant has been unable to exorcize it because transcendental philosophy has not ‘advance(d) to the *thought* of that relation’. Let us to consider the following extended quotation:

[...] the statement or definition of a notion expressly includes not only the genus, which itself is, properly speaking, more than a purely abstract universality, but also the *specific determinateness*. If one would but reflect attentively on the meaning of this fact, one would see that *differentiation* must be regarded as an equally essential moment of the Notion. Kant has introduced this consideration by the extremely important thought that there are synthetic judgments *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 Notion and is completely opposed to that empty identity or abstract universality which is not within itself a synthesis. The further development, however, does not fulfil 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* (SL 589).

The lengthy quotation could be summarized up in a crucial charge: the Kantian infidelity to the gathering movement of the Notion; that is to say, once Kant has introduced the function of the Notion under the term ‘original synthesis of apperception’ (the OSUA we have been referring to) he would have been in condition to justify the ‘consciousness’ movement from the individuality of the subjectively intuited to the universality of the objectively valid concepts⁴⁴ as the to-and-fro motion of gathering and differentiation of thinking which is expressed in the synthetic judgments *a priori*. On the contrary, according to Hegel, Kant behaves toward his own ‘speculative development’, the OSUA, as if it

44. This difficulty is made explicit in CPR, A89-90/B122.

were a different way to set forth a pole from which the relation of representation can be thought instead of discerning that it is rather a logical structure, the systematic activity of conceptual relations of the forms of thought, which is accountable for the totality of differentiations of judgment, and therefore that it is the relation philosophy must consider in order to ‘fulfil the promise of the beginning’.⁴⁵

So, what is the kind of justification the gathering motion of thinking calls for? In the first place we must assess what kind of question has been put forward. If it is ‘what is the condition of possibility of the gathering motion of thinking?’ we are going to find ourselves with the problem of the ungrounded beginning stated above; that is to say, since thinking is immersed in the gathering motion of the active unity of moments, there is no possibility to establish an external standpoint from which the inquiry could be carried on. Hence, inasmuch any positing of thinking already always belongs to the absolute of the gathering, the terms of the justification demanded must be formulated once again: ‘we have to exhibit what the absolute is; but this ‘exhibiting’ can be neither a determining nor an external reflection from which determinations of the absolute would result; on the contrary, it is the *exposition*, and in fact the *self*-exposition of the absolute and only a *display of what it is*’ (SL 530). That is the self-grounding task of the *Logic*: to unfold thinking as an active unity of moments which presupposes no more than its own motion.

This endeavour takes us again to the question on the possibility of a presuppositionless thinking insofar the beginning of the self-justificatory task cannot be caused by the intervention of an external agent (either a prior ground or a predetermined aim) but it is a move prompted by the consciousness of the articulations of thinking as a continuous motion of development. However, if the motion of gathering is admitted as the unique ground of thinking, then the demand of presuppositionless thinking cannot be regarded as a methodological request because the position from which thinking moves does not represent a separate realm demanding the establishment of a via of access. Rather, the absence of presuppositions is a ground which demands to be recognized. In this sense the *Logic* ‘presupposes’ the conclusion of the *Phenomenology of spirit*: what appears before consciousness is always a conceptual determination insofar the intuitive and transcendental attempts to posit the grounding of appearance in non-conceptual terms are

45. In this sense, it could be possible re-evaluate the debate between Kant and Hegel about the boundaries of thinking settled by sensible receptivity. I guess we could interpret that criticism otherwise than pointing out that Hegel is advancing the thesis that thinking is able to create the sensible contents of real world. Rather, what Hegel finds highly unsatisfactory in Kant’s conception of the relationship between understanding and sensibility is the following: Kant argues that thinking is unable to gain access to the determinate knowledge of its own rules of operation because it is constrained by the rules of operation that constitute our knowledge of objects of experience (intuition, space and time, and categories). That is, Hegel is not trying to put forward that thinking has the actual faculty to know a supposed ‘essence’ of things, which would be beyond our sensible experience. The Hegelian objection is addressed to the way Kant makes knowing of thinking dependent upon the same condition which is valid for objects of experience: sensible receptivity. Thus, Kant doesn’t realize that, insofar it is the condition of possibility of the constitution of objects of experience, the ‘I think’ is located in a different *logical* level than possible objects of experience, thereby the rules determining the operation of thinking are not only different, but also they are self-constituted by the own activity of thinking.

self-deceptive. Therefore, presuppositionless thinking refers to that starting point: the awareness of the world is a relation of recognition between two different conceptual moments belonging to the same self-determining activity.

In this way, the real question on method comes to the fore in trying to establish how the presuppositionless ground can be recognized as such. Hegel's answer states that 'the exposition of what alone can be the true method of philosophical science falls within the treatment of logic itself; for the method is the consciousness of the form of the inner self-movement of the content of logic' (SL 53). From the point of view of contemporary understanding of method, Hegel's definition perhaps could appear awkward because it doesn't deliver the steps to guarantee an 'objective' outcome of the research. In contrast to that view, his concept of 'method' is rather the description of an inflection⁴⁶ through which *self-consciousness* grasps itself as the discursive⁴⁷ motion wherein the moments belonging to the active unity of the Notion emerge and articulate each other. From this perspective, the understanding of the philosophical beginning must be understood otherwise than a 'starting point' in the sense of an objective situation from which the actual process of thinking is triggered out and from which it must be grasped. On the contrary, the beginning delivered by the method of the *Logic* is already the very activity of self-consciousness from which the discursive differentiations are made (in other words the activity from which is determined what is to be considered as the other from thought) and not a discursive device different to it; in that sense 'the only true method' posits the logical onlooker, self-consciousness itself, in a spiral movement wherein the method 'is not something distinct from its object and content' (SL 54).

If this interpretation holds, there are strong reasons to put into question, not only the readings of the *Logic* that emphasizes the problems and possibilities involved in the methodological requirements of a presuppositionless thinking, but also those approaches which stress the 'instrumental' role of the *Logic* in the Hegelian system, as if that work were to provide the blueprint of the categories of thought in order to clarify the conceptual misunderstandings of our shared social life; as Houlgate writes: 'The task of the *Logic* for Hegel is thus provide us with a proper understanding of our familiar categories so that we can determine whether or not the way we are used to understanding them is indeed correct'.⁴⁸ So, the self-grounding activity of the *Logic* would bridge the gulf between the normative patterns and expectations of our shared social life and the categories by means of the clarification of the authoritative reasons supporting it. Never-

46. Perhaps the term 'inflection' could seem to convey Heideggerian overtones because of its proximity to the idea of *Kehre*. Nevertheless, I think that Hegel's suggestion of 'a plastic discourse' makes possible to talk of the making explicit of the categories in terms of an inflection.

47. It is very important to insist on the discursive character of self-consciousness because otherwise, it could not justify its own normative pattern of constitutions of differentiations; in other words, the active unity of moments only can be justified making explicit the rule producing that unity. We could say that discursivity remains as the condition *sine qua non* to liberate thinking from the opposition to consciousness because only if we get rid of the idea that thinking is an activity relating external objects to embrace, instead, a conception of thinking as an ability to judge we are going to be able to assert that science 'contains *thought in so far 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.*' (SL 49)

48. Stephen. Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic.*, p. 11.

theless at this point we must inquire whether is really necessary clarifying our categories so we can improve our thinking. The ask is pertinent, I guess, because if we agree with Hegel in that ‘the categories are instinctively active’ (SL 37) then they would not call for improvement unless we harbour doubts about their ability to deal with the world; that is to say, the clarification of our categorial framework would be the rational demand of a presuppositionless thinking only if we were to regard as the beginning of thinking a state of scission wherein thought and being are allegedly opposed, which is just what Hegel rejects in the *Logic*.

On the other hand, if the *Logic* were *exclusively* intended to make explicit the ‘instinctive’ categories of thought, thus providing a reflective understanding of them which could be eventually applied to our everyday world, then Hegel would have been unable to offer a genuine self-justification of the way the activity of thinking entirely pervades the differentiated structure of being because, insofar the purported self-justificatory endeavour comes *after* the empirical and phenomenal expressions of thinking in general, it only can show that ‘we cannot be blamed for believing whatever the [impingements of our spontaneity, our impulses] lead us to believe.’⁴⁹ So, the *Logic* would be, at best, a palliative, a mere ‘rationalization’ of the way we are, but ultimately unable to justify the demarcation between rationality and irrationality.

However, at this moment an objection could be raised against the mode we have put into question the interpretations of the *Logic* in terms of an exercise of clarification. The argument would run along the following lines: the criticisms addressed against those readings are mutually opposed and inconsistent because, in the first case, what is criticized is the inability to recognize that if the categories are instinctively active then they are not in need of a reflective clarification in order to be corrected (a remark which, besides, intimates a dogmatic depiction of thinking); meanwhile, in the second case, what is denounced is just the incapacity to expose the legitimacy of the sources giving birth to the categories. In short, it would be sensible to expect that if an examination of the process of genesis and validity of the categories were necessary and available, then a reflective elucidation of the whole of them would be, in Hegel’s words, ‘the loftier business of logic’.

The objection is perfectly sound if it is posited against the background of the conception of the logical endeavour wherein self-consciousness (which understood *in this context* as the reflective awareness of the framework of categories) is the outcome of the relation between ‘thinking in general’—consciousness—and the given source of the meaning of its activity. In that case the reflection on that relation must produce either the awareness of the inner coherence and intelligibility of the different moments of the thinking activity, or the realization of their inadequate or heterogeneous character, thereby the necessity of clarification. In both cases, the rendering of the *Logic*’s project is the representation of an external relation wherein the movement of self-consciousness is conditioned by its attachment to a primal situation whose nature totally differs from the logical structure of its activity. In other words, although the criticized points of view

49. John. McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 13.

present diverging directions of that project, both of them share a basic assumption: the self-consciousness emerging in the development of the *Logic* is still thought from the point of view of a relation between objects and not as a relation of meaning thoroughly immersed in the motion of thinking. In short, they do still regard the task of the *Logic* as the explanation of a synthesis and not as the discourse describing the gathering—the discursive developing of meaning as an active unity of moments unfolded and recognized by thinking itself.

V

And that is just the prevailing gesture in those interpretations of Hegel's philosophy which immediately point out the social character of his thought without introducing further mediations. In general, they do advocate the thesis that in exercising our ability to judge we already are 'engaged agents' who implicitly presuppose the social, historical and linguistic conceptual frameworks of meaning conditioning the very possibility of any intelligible relation to the world. According to that point of view, which seems to dismiss the foundationalist models of intelligibility since it recognizes the concrete embedding of reason, the logical beginning constructed upon the inner motion of self-consciousness is either a metaphysical denial of the position presented by Hegel himself in his early theological and political writings concerning the social origin of the forms of thought,⁵⁰ or a reflective self-justification of thinking which promulgates the basic social intuition of those early writings.

The remarks coming out from the first position could be answered by pointing out the Hegelian appropriation of the Kantian OSUA to formulate his own conception of the Notion. Indeed it is a model of self-consciousness, however it doesn't introduce psychological or substantialist assumptions in the discursive description of thinking. On the contrary, if, with Habermas, 'post-metaphysical thinking' defines a position which embraces the philosophical task of rational self-reflection putting aside the 'mentalist framework' based upon the transcendentalization of the knowing subject, then a glance at the way *Logic* presents itself as 'the universal which embraces within itself the wealth of the particulars' (SL 58) could be able to put on view the 'post-metaphysical' character of Hegel's thought insofar 'the universal' is not the doing of a metaphysical entity but the discursive unfolding and articulation of the basic categories putting together the active unity of moments informing objectivity.

Nevertheless, being the outlining of the way *Logic* works our focal interest, I would rather prefer to draw attention to the mode in which a defence of Hegel's *Logic* from the accusations of advocating a 'mentalist framework' is attempted from a standpoint that straightforwardly asserts the social character of reason. In particular, I want to suggest that that strategy is not the best help to lend support to the importance of the *Logic* in the landscape of modern thinking because it does follow a similar path to the represented

50. It is the position presented by Honneth, who judges the Hegelian system: 'The turn to the philosophy of consciousness [supposedly after 1807] allows Hegel to completely lose sight of the idea of an original intersubjectivity of humankind.' (Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 30)

by the interpretations delineated by Habermas or Honneth. In agree with both of them, those defences do assume that intersubjectivity is the Archimedean point in the constitution of meaning but in contrast to the contemporary representatives of the Critical Theory of Society they do stress that the intersubjective element is not given up by the *Logic*; rather, even if the discussion of social issues is absent in the corpus of the text, this latter is oriented by a decisive social anxiety: to provide a rational model of self-justification apt to ground the binding character of the norms of a post-conventional world. In other words, both sides of the debate presuppose that the only legitimate starting point available for a self-justificatory endeavour is ‘the pure intersubjectivity of the relationship of recognition’⁵¹ and the point of disagreement concerns primordially to the extent of the recognition of that starting point along the development of Hegel’s thought.

The problem is not the convergence in the presupposition itself but what it implies. For instance, Terry Pinkard explains the movement and structure of the *Logic* taking as starting point the necessity to construct a new ground for the modern forms of life after the collapse of intellectual and political institutions in Europe. In the absence of a shared set of conventional beliefs and principles able to ground the disenchanting and fragmented world of Modernity, the post-conventional justification of the forms of life requires finding a set of reasons which, in principle, can be assessed by any rational subject. The place of *Logic* in this scenery of intellectual distress is to offer reasons supporting the possibility of a secular and universal justification of the social construction of the patterns of rationality:

In his *Science of Logic*, the first systematic part of the ‘system,’ Hegel attempted to show that thought, taken on its own, could be self-grounding thought. Hegel himself thus took his *Logic* as crucial to his program, not in the sense that it gave him a ‘dialectical method’ that he could then ‘apply’ to other areas [...] but in the sense that in his view it was crucial for the modern project to show that the enterprise of self grounding goes all the way down, that there is not some ‘object of consciousness’ that we must simply take as ‘given’ in order to make the kinds of claims that we do.⁵²

In this way, the *Logic* actually is located beyond the metaphysical and mentalist framework denounced by Habermas and Honneth because it extracts its meaning and validity from its belonging to the historical project of providing an epistemological self-grounding demanded by the intersubjective conditions triggered out by Modernity.

So, what is the problem with this interpretation of the *Logic*?

The main problem concerns the status conceded to the recognition of the presuppositionless ground of thinking regarded by Hegel as crucial to activate the method of the *Logic*: the unfolding motion of self-consciousness. Of course, it could be argued that Pinkard’s position recognizes the absence of presuppositions required by the logical enterprise insofar there is no an instance of ‘givenness’ imposing its claims to the social world. On the contrary, the claims of reason operating in it proceed only from the meth-

51. Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, p. 193.

52. Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology*, p. 270.

odological steps and cognitive resources coming out from the critical self-examination of the forms of life. This explanation is right from the point of view offered by history and sociology: the falling down of the authoritative sources of knowledge and action *demand us* to get involved in a project of self-grounding the reasons pervading the form of life we are striving for and its ideal of agency to be fostered. In other words, *given* those ideals and beliefs we develop the appropriate logic to deal with it. However, if that is the way *Logic* works then we have to remain in the perspective of the ‘*natural* evolution or in the *history*’—as Hegel pointed out in a previous quotation—but we will fail to access to the ‘*cognition of what is true*’ in those historical happenings. In that way, the main problem with that interpretation is that, in assuming that the historical and social circumstances condition how thinking in general (and in particular ‘comprehensive thinking’) should be oriented, the methodical identity between the subject matter and the mode of questioning, which ought to activate the *Logic*’s motion, is cancelled because the work of self-consciousness is determined by the contingent unrolling of current affairs.

In order to be fair, we should explain that that determination does not refer to the material contents appearing before consciousness since both parts of the debate reject the existence of a given realm of objects imposing their meaning to consciousness. Rather the conditioning alludes to the way in which the modern historical medium transforms thinking’s self-understanding; that is, it is a conditioning on the form of thinking which changes the mode the latter addresses to the world as well as its mode of self-relation. It means, on the first hand, that thinking can no more think of itself as an entirely free activity constituting the objective validity of the field of external things but it must learn to regard that determinative process as a rule-governed procedure embedded in the linguistic practices of a form of life. On the other hand, that awareness also overhauls thinking’s self-understanding because debunks the representation of thinking as a self-transparent activity able to freely create its own positions. Instead, the consciousness of its belonging to the historical medium forces thinking to understand itself—its genesis, structure and aims—from the admission of its own finitude. This acceptance, however, does not lead to give up the self-reflective task, as if it were unworkable since the impossibility to secure a pure sphere of thinking. Rather, the self-reflective endeavour finds itself now under a double condition: firstly, it becomes part of a wider epistemological project intended to make explicit the way we cope with the world ‘in all the areas of modern life: logic (the science of thought), the philosophy of nature [...] and modern life, with its various institutional structures’.⁵³ Secondly, within its so designated position (‘the science of thought’), self-reflection ought to assume the form of ‘a genetic account, tracing the path of consciousness through history’.⁵⁴ That double conditioning would set up the development of Modernity’s self-justificatory enterprise.

In base to the clarification above presented we can reformulate the thesis claiming that the socially-oriented interpretations of Hegel overlook the actual development and significance of the *Logic*. The problem with those readings is not primarily located in

53. Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology*, p. 270.

54. Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, p. 184.

their bias against the suggestion of a pure beginning for the inner motion of self-consciousness but in the consequences of that exegetical stance; a consequence which could be summarized up in the following words: the inability to understand and to carry on Modernity's demand for self-justification. The rationale behind that statement is that, sooner or later, the positions advocating as starting point—but in different degrees—a 'social' interpretation of Hegel's philosophy have to acknowledge that their proposed beginning for self-reflection, the social form of life, is a *given* source of meaning, which appears either as a non-rational source of shared meanings calling for rational organization, or as a 'moral potential that is structurally inherent in communicative relations between subjects',⁵⁵ which is to be made explicit through the 'detranscendentalized concept of reason'.⁵⁶

On more time is important to insist on that such 'given' is not referred to an external object opposed to consciousness but to a model of relation of meaning in which the discursive justification of the Notion—understood as the gathering motion of the active unity of moments of thinking—is a development conditioned by a source of intelligibility whose meaningful force is structurally independent of that justification insofar this force is said to provide the communicative medium from which the reflective unfolding of the Notion can be understood.⁵⁷

That model of meaning, in which intersubjectivity takes the place of the 'philosophy of consciousness' seems to offer a conception of rationality which not only recovers the non-mentalist elements of Hegel's thought but also reclaim a model of self-justification which avoids the charges of the '*naïveté of reflection*' because it never tries to put aside the intersubjective conditions of possibility of its own doing. However, at the very moment we accept that the *Logic* works, at best, making explicit the given field of intersubjectivity, the forms of thought become a tool useful only to provide exculpations⁵⁸—not justifications—of the kind of rationality we have. Why? Because If the *meaning* of the social char-

55. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 67.

56. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 68.

57. It is the point argued by Habermas in order to claim the impotence of self-reflection to validate modern rationality: 'Even when applied to linguistic phenomena, *self-consciousness —the basic figure of thought of the philosophy of the subject—* does not offer a sound basis for a theory of society. If the subject, in knowing its objects, relates at the same time to itself, it encounters itself in a double position: both as a single empirical entity in the world and the transcendental subject facing the world as a whole [...] Between these two positions of the subject there is no space left for the symbolically prestructured, linguistically constituted domains of culture, society, and socialized individuals.' (*On the Pragmatics of Communication*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1998, p. 186, my italics). Of course, if subjectivity is conceived of either as an empirical subject or as a transcendental subject, then the *meaning* of intersubjectivity cannot be made intelligible. But if we assume the standpoint of the logical structure of the subjectivity, i.e. the gathering motion of self-consciousness, then the meaning of the intersubjective medium can be articulated without introducing mentalist assumptions.

58. I take the general idea of exculpation from McDowell (*Mind and World*, p. 8, n. 7) to indicate the relation through which conceptual thinking describes its relation with the *given*: a relation in which we are situated in a position which cannot be understood as a result of the activity of our network of conceptual abilities. Insofar our belonging to that situation is entirely beyond our responsibility we only can be exculpated for be there.

acter of the normative process of giving and asking reasons within the conceptual space wherein rules of composition are combined and thereby differentiated into different kinds of judgment is depicted as the contingent outcome of specific historical conditions, then reason's claims of validity cannot be ultimately justified because the different paths of any self-reflective endeavour will always take us back to the same extra-conceptual source of meaning: clashes of social forces along history. In that way, the sociality of reason only can be at best 'exculpated': since the processes of secularization, social fragmentation, and scientific understanding of the world foreclosed the possibility of a shared consensus about a self-evident and substantial concept of reason, our models of rationality have no more option than relying on the reconstruction of the conditions of possibility of meaning pervading our concrete social practices. Therefore, we cannot be held responsible for having the kind of rationality we have.

Does it mean the necessity to restore a transcendent metaphysics in order to justify the rationality of our social practices? No. At least the *Logic* does not compel us to do that. It assumes not only the social genesis⁵⁹ of the self-justificatory endeavour but also the concrete existence of different disciplines, which have successfully established their particular meanings without necessity of the self-grounding task. To that extent, the *reconstruction* of the *genesis* of the social character of the normative process of giving and asking reasons within the conceptual space wherein rules of composition are combined and thereby differentiated into distinct kinds of judgment as the contingent outcome of specific historical conditions is an intellectual task different to *justifying* the *meaning* of that process as a valid one. This latter task is the business of the *Logic*: to render intelligible how thinking alone is to be held responsible for positioning itself in the space of meaning. From this point of view, Hegel totally agrees with the thesis asserting that reason is social, but he is more concerned in justifying the rationality of that claim by showing the process through which thinking posits itself in conditions to assert that thesis.⁶⁰

I think that this line of exegesis can be supported by a remark introduced by Hegel about the 'posteriority' of the *Logic*: 'the value of logic is only appreciated when it is preceded by experience of the sciences; it then displays itself to mind as the universal truth,

59. This point has been convincingly argued by Maker: 'logic's timelessness is qualified, or mediated, for Hegel repeatedly insists that his task has been undertake the reform of logic which is necessitated because, unlike other domains of philosophy, logic had been hitherto untouched by the indefatigable spirit of the age. 'Logic shows no traces so far of the new spirit which has arisen in the sciences no less than in the world of actuality [SL 26] A glance at the *Philosophy of History* immediately discloses that the 'new spirit' he is talking about is the spirit of freedom, and he holds that this spirit not only pervades the other sciences and actuality, but is most fundamentally philosophical in character.' ('Hegel's Logic of Freedom', in David G. Carlson (ed.), *Hegel's Theory of the Subject*, New York, Palgrave, 2005, p. 2-3) In that sense, Hegel's *Logic* cannot be understood as the formal description of a given historical content. Rather, as Vassilacopoulos has detected it, the speculative account of the *Logic* 'identifies a formal description of the content.' (*A Reading of Hegel's Philosophy*, Ph.D. Thesis, Melbourne, La Trobe, 1994, p. 40).

60. In that sense, the position presented in this paper shares the general standpoint of Winfield, who claims that 'Only after that investigation, historically initiated by Hegel in his *Science of Logic*, can one proceed to conceive real structures such as consciousness and intersubjectivity not as epistemological foundations but as topics of the philosophy of reality.' (R.D. Winfield, *Overcoming Foundations*, p. 93)

not as a *particular* knowledge *alongside* other matters and realities, but as the essential being of all these latter' (SL 58). At first sight that statement is strange because it seems to be at odds with the pure beginning claimed by the logic. Moreover, the recognition of the precedence of the experience of the particular sciences seems to be in plain contradiction with the subsequent claim on the place of the *Logic* 'as the essential being of all these' sciences. Nevertheless, if we keep in mind the suggestion that the *Logic* is aimed to show how the presuppositionless ground can be recognized as such, it becomes clear that its 'value' can be interpreted otherwise than a metaphysical foundation of particular disciplines but as the showing of a process which is already set in motion. That process is the *meaning*, or, maybe better yet, the motion through which thinking comes to situate itself as an activity entirely composed of relations of meaning. In that sense the *Logic* problematizes what other disciplines or philosophical approaches just take for granted as a situation of thought brought about by the necessity to meet the sceptical challenge after the collapse of the traditional sources of practical and cognitive authority and philosophically expressed by Kant's Copernican Revolution: the idea that thinking is the gathering of an active unity of moments which can be reconstructed through the 'leading thread' provided by the logical functions of judgment allowing us to understand our relation to the world and to ourselves under the light of the linguistic terms of 'sense and significance'. It could be appear that that movement is all natural since the modern breaking down of the metaphysical assumptions in which the representational accounts of knowledge and action rested on forecloses the attempts to explain meaning as something given. However, as Jocelyn Benoist has cleverly pointed out⁶¹, this formulation revolves around a non-justified metaphorical displacement to be found in Kant's transposition of the linguistic usage of meaning and signification into our relation to the world.⁶²

61. In the article 'L'origine du 'sens': phénoménologie et vérité' ['The origin of meaning: phenomenology and truth'] She remarks the problems and polemics engendered by the *metaphorical* usage of 'meaning' in contemporary philosophy: 'if it is natural for us to talk about our perceptions, our living experiences, and our relation to things and world, and eventually about others and ourselves, in terms of 'meaning' we must remind that there is present the transposition and metaphorical usage. Philosophy, and subsequently common consciousness, transposes that usage into the non-linguistic reality, and thereby, in some manner, the concept of signification seems to be enlarged. The underlying model employed in those statements is clearly a *linguistic* one. Initially, meaning is what is said in a statement. World (or 'reality' in general) becomes a book to be read —or to be interpreted— following a metaphor exerted by Kant.' ['S'il peut nous sembler naturel que l'on parle de nos perceptions, de nos vécus et de notre rapport aux choses et au monde, éventuellement aux autres et à nous-mêmes en termes de 'sens', il faut rappeler qu'il y a là transposition et usage métaphorique. Le modèle subrepticement employé dans de tels énoncés est clairement *linguistique*. Le sens, initialement, c'est ce qui se dit dans un énoncé. Or la philosophie, et éventuellement la conscience commune, transpose cet usage à la réalité non-linguistique, et d'une certaine façon para là-même semble élargir la notion de signification. Le monde (ou le 'réel' en général) devient alors comme un livre à lire —ou à 'interpréter'— suivant une métaphore reprise déjà par Kant.'] (Jocelyn Benoist, *Autour de Husserl: Lego et la raison*, Paris, Vrin, 1994, p. 268-269). She is thinking in the problematic usage of the concept of meaning in Husserlian phenomenology, but I think that her general argument is useful to understand the philosophical situation of Hegel's *Logic*.

62. That movement can be exemplified by two examples from the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In one of them Kant remarks that the pure concepts of understanding need to be articulated with 'our sensible and empiri-

Here is where the importance of the *Logic* comes to scene because the self-exposition of the gathering movement of the Notion is aimed to justify that metaphorical displacement. But the justification is not intended to disclose a primal ground conditioning thought's ability to conceive itself in terms of relations of meaning. Rather, the *Logic* is the process through which thinking recognizes that its situation in the field of meaning is the outcome of its own doing.

If that suggestion is pertinent, then the self-justificatory enterprise of the *Logic* and its relation to social and political thought considerably changes. In the first place, not only the modern condition of social world does not impose tasks to the *Logic*, as we have insisted on, *but it does not need also to be justified*. To suppose that the way we experience modern social world calls for a logical justification would signify that a particular happening can be experienced as a social or political event only once we have legitimated its belonging to the categories of politics or sociology through the reflective assessments of categories. Instead of that state of affairs Hegel does insist on that the political, social or moral meaning of a particular event is already experienced as such (as 'feelings and generalized images that have been moulded and permeated by thought') through the judgments provided by political, social or moral criteria and distinctions. So, what *Logic* does is to remind thinking that those distinctions, criteria and methodological orientations are the differentiated expression of its own unifying activity; hence the admonition at the very opening of the *Logic* about the dangers brewing 'when a nation loses its metaphysics, when the spirit which contemplates its own pure essence is no longer a present reality in the life of the nation' (SL 25). The risk is either to suppose that the different ways modern life is articulated and organized is the outcome of anonymous processes devoid of meaning, or to suppose that the rational meaning of those processes is opposed to the meaning expressed in our common social understanding. In both cases we are faced to a social world which could have got rid of pre-modern conceptions of a given source of moral and political meaning (God, the cosmos or the community), embracing instead a post-conventional view of society in which the basic agreements are based upon reasons open to public discussion and revision, and yet assume that the full understanding of those differentiated spheres is an option foreclosed to conscious assessment because individual consciousness has not participated in the constitution of their meaning.

This situation represents a risk because it makes impossible for modern subjects to recognize themselves in the world they live. In other words, at stake here is not only a theoretical issue concerning to the rational grounding of the post-conventional ordering of society against the skeptical attacks, but also a practical difficulty: how the individual subject comes to see her actions as *her own* actions; that is to say, if we are going to ex-

cal intuition' insofar it 'alone can provide them with sense [*Sinn*] and significance [*Bedeutung*].' (CPR, B149). In the other example Kant writes that 'it is also requisite for one to make an abstract concept sensible, i.e., display the object that corresponds to it in intuition, since without this the concept would remain (as one says) without sense, i.e., without significance.' (CPR, A240/B299) In both examples the intelligibility of our relation to the world is displayed upon a linguistic model of meaning, which implies an entire reformulation of the relations between logic and ontology.

plain how the way we are addressed to the world is—as Siep intimated it—a conceptual system articulating the commands coming out from common social life and the claims of individual consciousness, then we need to explain both how the individual commits herself to a normative principle through which she could be able to justify (to herself and to others) the reasons of her action,⁶³ and how that normative principle is activated by the gathering motion of self-consciousness. This latter point is of the utmost importance because refers to an endeavour which cannot be accomplished by the former part of the task. The clearing up of the rational pattern underlying our attachment to community can indicate the shortcomings and dead ends pervading the attempts to reconcile the individual consciousness with the whole of society through the affirmation of a one-sided (that is, lacking of differentiations) source of binding normativity (for instance, a communitarian attachment to a religious icon or a deification of ethnicity), but this engagement is unable to deal with the differentiations of meaning; that is, with the disperse judgments coming out and clashing from different areas of life: politics, economics, religion, ethics, etc. If we remain at the level offered by that approach, we must assume those dispersions of meaning as the unavoidable expression of ‘the structural overloading of the modern subject’,⁶⁴ which could be regarded as a cynical conclusion but is said to be the more sensitive solution to that overloading since, as Habermas insists on, ‘from a postmetaphysical point of view, we can no longer base our judgments on such an authority [the authority of a speculative philosophical diagnosis]’.⁶⁵

At this point emerges the importance of the second part of the task stated lines above, the task of explaining how the normative principle putting together modern subjectivity is activated by the gathering motion of self-consciousness. Hegel would agree entirely with Habermas about the postmetaphysical impossibility of invoking a speculative philosophy to solve the puzzles and bewilderments faced by modern subjectivity if ‘speculative philosophy’ is conceived of as an inert substratum creating disparate meanings to be eventually reconciled through a rational process. But certainly, a speculative philosophy, understood as the discursive motion of dispersing and gathering of the Notion, is able to make sense of the way modern subjects can recognize themselves in the modern world insofar it shows that the never-ending process of differentiations of meaning is not to be interpreted as ‘the structural overloading of the modern subject’, as if it were possible to imagine a *modern* subjectivity exercising *autonomous agency* free from

63. That is the suggestion of Robert Pippin proposes in order to explain the way we become subjects through a rational, self-consciously process: ‘In Hegel’s account, to pursue an end is to subject oneself to a norm; I pursue an end for a reason, a reason I take to have justifying force. This then raises the central question of the conditions under which my attachment to any such ends, any conferring of value, could be expressive of rational agency.’ (Robert Pippin, ‘Hegel’s ethical rationalism’, in Ameriks and Sturma (eds.), *The Modern Subject*, p. 164). I think that Pippin has rightly pointed out that, even if we accept the social formation of individual self-consciousness, we still need to provide an account explaining that an action is rational only if the individual subject has reasons to act the way he does it. However, I guess that the normative pattern Pippin puts forward is not enough to explain the individual attachment to post-conventional practices because we have not explained yet that pattern as a conscious outcome.

64. Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, p. 210.

65. Habermas, *Truth and Justification*. p. 209.

the ‘overloads’ and ‘overtaxes’ represented by that conflictive differentiations. Rather, what the *Logic* does is to show that that differentiating activity is the very logical structure that defines our subjectivity: we cannot find what subjectivity means outside the dispersing and gathering movement of the Notion. In sum: I am a *human* subject insofar self-consciousness *differentiates* that universal concept. In that sense the *Logic* not only does not deny the historical, social and moral determinations of human subjectivity, but also allows us to understand how the political and ethical significance of the personal pronoun ‘I’ can be defended against to the theoretical attempts to reduce it to a mere by-product of anonymous forces just because it is a result of the active situating of self-consciousness in the field of meaning. Only in philosophy is possible to accomplish the task of self-knowledge.

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