

*Thought and metaphysics: Hegel's critical  
reception of Spinoza*

*Dean Moyar*

In this chapter I examine Hegel's criticisms of Spinoza in order to address the ongoing dispute about Hegel and metaphysics. This debate is consistently framed in terms that refer to Spinoza as a philosopher with a robust metaphysical view. The assumption is that if Hegel is shown to be closer to Spinoza than to Kant, his view should be considered metaphysical.<sup>1</sup> By examining Hegel's criticism of Spinoza, focusing especially on the relation between thought and substance, I clarify some of the central issues in the debate over Hegel's metaphysics and situate his position on metaphysics in relation to both Spinoza and Kant.

The basic issue in Hegel's critical comments on Spinoza, and indeed for thinking through a meaningful contrast with the metaphysical tradition, is the relation of *thought* and *substance*. I take it that the textual evidence is overwhelming that for Hegel thought is the measure of the real, of what counts as actual and necessary. But recognizing this does not in fact decide the metaphysical question. Although there is a short road from the primacy of thought to a non-metaphysical view of Hegel as concerned with the conditions of human thought, there are ancient and modern metaphysicians par excellence (Aristotle, Descartes) who give thought a very central place, and there is a plausible case to be made that Hegel belongs in this strong metaphysical tradition.

I will not in this chapter be concerned with the *accuracy* of Hegel's criticisms of Spinoza. I will *assume* that Hegel's criticisms are largely correct, even though recent work on Spinoza has brought out some of the problems with Hegel's reading and some of the ways in which Spinoza is

I would like to thank John Brandau, Eckart Förster, James Kreines, and Yitzhak Melamed for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

<sup>1</sup> A recent exception is J. Kreines, "Hegel: Metaphysics without Pre-Critical Monism," *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* (2008), 48–70.

more of an idealist than Hegel took him to be.<sup>2</sup> The contrasts that Hegel thought he could draw between Spinoza's positions and his own are the subject of this chapter, for it is largely those contrasts that Hegel used to mark out his own distinctive contribution to the metaphysical tradition.

#### THE DEBATE OVER HEGEL AND METAPHYSICS

One wonders what the last four decades of Hegel scholarship would have been like if Klaus Hartmann, instead of calling his essay "Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View," had called it "Hegel: An Ontology of Thought." For there are two sides to Hartmann's essay, and it is attention only to the non-metaphysical label that has fostered the impression that Hartmann's "category theory" reading of Hegel's Logic<sup>3</sup> must ignore Hegel's statements of his systematic aims. Yet Hartmann is quite true to these ambitious aims when he writes that "what Hegel wishes to give is an account of the determinations of the real, or of what is,"<sup>4</sup> and that the Logic is "an ontology of thought as the ground for categories,"<sup>5</sup> and finally that "the virtue of Hegel's philosophy is that it offers a comprehensive scheme of explanation for the world's 'what.'"<sup>6</sup> These claims certainly give the impression that Hartmann does not wish to downplay the all-encompassing character of Hegel's philosophy.

There is a *limitation* that Hartmann ascribes to Hegel in labeling him a category theorist, namely that we are limited to the element of thought. So Hartmann claims that "We could not account for being in terms other than those of thought,"<sup>7</sup> and "the mind's reference to being can be discussed, this side of being, only in thought."<sup>8</sup> Hartmann's "the mind's reference" and "can be discussed" do invite confusion, since he can seem to be simply assuming that we cannot go beyond the theater of the mind or the terms of language. His *least misleading* definition of the non-metaphysical comes in the following passage: "There need be no anchorage in existences by-passing categorization or understanding, in order to make ontology possible. Or, there need be no metaphysics."<sup>9</sup> This non-metaphysical interpretation amounts to the claim that Hegel holds

<sup>2</sup> See Y. Melamed, "Acosmism or Weak Individuals? Hegel, Spinoza, and the Reality of the Finite," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 44 (2010), 77–92; M. Della Rocca, *Spinoza* (London: Routledge, 2008); and Della Rocca's chapter in this volume.

<sup>3</sup> When I speak of the "Logic" I am referring to Hegel's logic as presented in the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopedia Logic*.

<sup>4</sup> K. Hartmann, "Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View," in A. MacIntyre (ed.), *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), p. 103.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111. <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114. <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108. <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115. <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

that we cannot *account for* the real in a way that bypasses thought and its concepts.

How much of a limitation is this? If we assume a realm outside thought – a realm of genuine existence or reality – that competes with Hegel’s categories, Hartmann’s non-metaphysical claim can seem like quite a serious limitation. Unfortunately Hartmann at times seems to make just this assumption, such as when he writes that Hegel’s view is “non-metaphysical because devoid of existence claims and innocent of a reductionism opting for certain existences to the detriment of others.”<sup>10</sup> Since existence is itself a category in Hegel’s *Logic*, it is misleading to write about “existence claims” as if we can think naively about existence after Hegel’s treatment of it in the *Logic*. It is also misleading to contrast Hegel’s position with “reductionism,” for though Hegel is generally opposed to reductionism of one level of being to another, he makes plenty of claims about categorical determination of the real that will fit some sense of the term “reductionism.” Hartmann’s own “ontology of thought” claim implies that thought originally constitutes the real, so to contrast thought with some more full-blown conception of existence or knowledge is wrong by Hartmann’s own lights. This mistake is the source of some of Hartmann’s deflationary claims, such as when he writes that “Hegel’s position in the *Logic* is an innocuous one, as it cannot possibly conflict with knowledge,”<sup>11</sup> and “Hegel’s claim appears, contrary to a metaphysical interpretation of his philosophy, as a very modest one. His achievement is seen to lie in a hermeneutic of categories.”<sup>12</sup> These references to the innocuous and modest are unfortunate, not least because they diverge so greatly from Hegel’s own pronouncements about philosophy’s ability to comprehend the world as rational.

The essential point of Hartmann’s reading can be captured with what I call the *Concept Dependence* thesis:

*Concept Dependence (CD)* The only way to account for the-world’s-what<sup>13</sup> is through our concepts.

There are a number of ambiguities in this basic formulation, ambiguities that led to the confusion in Hartmann’s position and in much of the subsequent debate. We can see Hartmann as going back and forth between

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.    <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.    <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>13</sup> I use this phrase of Hartmann’s precisely because it is so unnatural. We need a neutral placeholder here, which means that none of the terms that appear in Hegel’s *Logic* is appropriate (such as being, reality, actuality, necessity, substance, objectivity, etc.).

two versions of the thesis, one that highlights our *access* to being through concepts and another that holds that being is *constituted* through our concepts.

*Access Concept Dependence (ACD)* Our only route of access to the-world's-what is through our concepts.

*Constitutive Concept Dependence (CCD)* The-world's-what is constituted through our concepts.

This is a contrast between an *epistemic* claim (taking access as a relationship of knowing) and an *ontological* claim (the dependence of the-world's-what itself on our concepts). While commentators of all stripes hold *ACD*, the traditional metaphysical line does not take *CCD* as primary. It is oriented instead by the Spinozist *Substance Dependence* thesis.

*Substance Dependence (SD)* The-world's-what stems from a single all-encompassing substance that is prior to and the source of our concepts.

Sometimes the metaphysical readers say that substance (or God) is not transcendent but rather immanent, meaning that substance is revealed and instantiated within human concepts or practice. They thereby bring *SD* and *CCD* quite close, holding that God is the source or guarantor of our constitutive conceptual activity. Hartmann's reading has an element of *CCD*, but in his more deflationary pronouncements he tends to emphasize *ACD* and thereby clouds some of the main issues.

In *Hegel's Idealism*, Robert Pippin advocates a Kantian reading of Hegel that clearly distinguishes *ACD* and *CCD*, and that affirms *CCD* against *SD*. Pippin gives the following characterization of the traditional metaphysical view that accepts *SD*: "the essential point of the 'metaphysical' Hegel has always been that Hegel should be understood as a kind of inverted Spinozist, that is, a monist, who believed that finite objects did not 'really' exist (only the Absolute Idea exists), that this One was not a 'substance' but a 'subject'."<sup>14</sup> In opposition to this "inverted Spinozist view," Pippin's basic line is that Hegel largely accepts Kant's critique of metaphysics and defends a version of Kant's argument for pure concepts grounded in the unity of apperception. With his rejection of intellectual intuition, Kant clearly endorses *ACD*, and with his doctrine of the pure categories argues in favor of a version of *CCD*. But Kant's version of *CCD*

<sup>14</sup> R. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 4.

is rather weak, given that he leaves open the possibility of an order of being (things-in-themselves) beyond our concepts. One of Pippin's main goals is to understand how Hegel could go further than Kant in arguing for the self-determining character of thought and subjectivity, and yet could still think that this limitation to thought was not a limitation vis-à-vis objectivity and truth.

Kant's transcendental idealism and Hegel's more strongly constitutive view show that we can distinguish several versions of *CCD*. These are:

*Weakly Constitutive Concept Dependence (WCCD)* We can only constitute the-world's-what through our concepts and other subjective conditions, though the-world's-what could be otherwise constituted.

*Moderately Constitutive Concept Dependence (MCCD)* The-world's-what is necessarily constituted through our concepts, though there are other conditions that can also jointly (together with concepts) constitute the-world's-what.

*Strongly Constitutive Concept Dependence (SCCD)* The-world's-what is constituted by our concepts, and only by our concepts.

The *WCCD* position is intended to represent Kant's position in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, while *SCCD* is supposed to represent one branch of the classical rationalist metaphysics that Kant critiqued. The *MCCD* position is vague, with its indefinite reference to "other conditions," and at this point it is just intended to mark out a middle ground between the two clear alternatives. Pippin's Kantian reading of Hegel clearly shies away from *WCCD*, holding that Hegel's limitation to conditions of our thought is not supposed to leave a realm of unknowable things-in-themselves. Yet he sometimes does suggest a weakly constitutive view, as when he writes of the Logic, "Hegel is introducing his version of 'subjective conditions' for objects, the fundamental, purely determined conceptual structure indispensable in the differentiation, the qualitative identification, necessary for there to be determinate objects of cognition."<sup>15</sup> Even with this claim, however, Pippin's Hegel subscribes to a moderate (*MCCD*) rather than a weak (*WCCD*) concept dependence.

A brief look at Frederick Beiser's strong metaphysical reading will show the tensions within readings that stresses Hegel's affinities with Spinoza. Citing Spinoza's doctrine that the two attributes of thought and extension must have a single source in substance, Beiser writes "That Hegel wanted

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

to give his principle of subject-object identity this Spinozist meaning there cannot be any doubt.”<sup>16</sup> This appears to be a straightforward attribution to Hegel of *SD*. Defending the mind-independence of Hegel’s absolute or substance, and presumably distancing himself from a divine mind or cosmic spirit view of *Geist*, Beiser writes that “The purpose that governs the world is only its inherent form or structure, and it does not necessarily imply the intention of some agent.”<sup>17</sup> Beiser clearly endorses *ACD*, writing of what he calls metaphysics “on a grand scale,” that “Through pure thinking alone Hegel attempts to give us knowledge of reality in itself, the absolute or the universe as a whole.”<sup>18</sup> Our only *access* is through thinking, or concepts, but presumably this departs from Hartmann’s view of the non-metaphysical and Pippin’s Kantian reading in that substance is prior to and the source of the conceptual order. Yet when Beiser writes about the *Logic*, his metaphysical view does look like a version of *CCD*. He writes that “in the *Science of Logic* the dialectic is a metaphysics whose main task is to determine the general structure of being ... it has a content all of its own, even if a very general one, namely, the most general categories of being.”<sup>19</sup> Does this not support a “category theory” reading of Hegel’s *Logic* and thus of his metaphysics as a whole? It could be that in this passage Beiser means “determine” as an epistemic category, and so his claim is once again about access, but that seems unlikely. Rather, it seems that Beiser’s Hegel takes *ACD* and *SD* to go together with *SCCD*. It could be that Beiser thinks that Hegel’s version of *SD* has priority over *SCCD*, so that the origination of being and concepts in substance (i.e., the *primacy of substance*) is not compromised by the claim that it is our concepts that constitute being. In what follows I will try to show that Hegel, on the contrary, thinks that the claim for an original substance is overcome by the moderately constitutive function of concepts, through thought itself.

#### THOUGHT’S DISTINCTION FROM SUBSTANCE

In the *Science of Logic* Hegel situates Spinoza’s substance as the first stage in “Actuality,” the third part of the “Logic of Essence.” The main issue that Hegel presses in that text is how to conceive of the relation in Spinoza between substance and the attribute of thought. The following long passage contains many of Hegel’s criticisms of Spinoza’s view:

<sup>16</sup> F. Beiser, *Hegel* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 64.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68. <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155. <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 161–162.

True, substance is the absolute unity of *thought* and being or extension; therefore it contains thought itself, but only in its *unity* with extension, that is, not as *separating* itself from extension, hence in general not as a determinative and formative activity, not as a movement which returns into and begins from itself. Two consequences follow from this: one is that substance lacks the principle of *personality* – a defect which has been the main cause of hostility to Spinoza's system; the other is that cognition is external reflection which does not comprehend and derive from substance that which appears as finite, the determinateness of the attribute and the mode, and generally itself as well, but is active as an external understanding, taking up the determinations as *given* and *tracing them back* to the absolute but not taking its *beginnings* from the latter. (W 6:195–196; SL, pp. 536–537)

Hegel is clearly concerned in the opening of this passage with Spinoza's lack of appreciation for the self-determining character of thought apart from its union with extension in substance. Hegel claims that Spinoza's cognition is implicated in the shortcomings of what he calls “external reflection.” Spinoza's philosophical cognition *presupposes* the finite determinations, takes them as given and links them to substance simply by pointing out their finitude and negating them. This knowing is external because the connection between the determinations and substance is unexplicated (“does not comprehend and derive”). The cognition (*Erkennen*) at issue here is philosophical knowing. Hegel points out that it has a problem not only with finite determinations, but also with its very own status as knowing – “and generally itself as well.” Hegel holds that only if substance is thought itself can the cognition of substance account for itself.

It is important to bear in mind that for Hegel reflection is itself a logical or metaphysical category, not just an epistemic one. In calling Spinoza's cognition a form of external reflection, Hegel is attributing to him a version of *CCD*. In fact, the three main versions of reflection for Hegel – positing, external, and determining – correspond to the three different versions of *CCD*. In this section I make the case that the *determining* reflection model that Hegel endorses supports *MCCD*. The positing reflection model matches up roughly with *SCCD*, for it is the claim to constitute the world simply through the positing activity itself, completely eliminating anything outside reflective activity. Hegel views *positing* reflection as primarily a mode of dogmatic metaphysics.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See B. Longuenesse, *Hegel's Critique of Metaphysics*, trans. N. Simek (Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 51–53. Longuenesse provides an excellent discussion of the stages of reflection and the central moves within the “Doctrine of Essence.”

A closer look at Hegel's discussion of *external* reflection shows that it corresponds to *WCCD*. I have associated weakly constitutive concept dependence with the Kantian view of the dependence of objects on the categories, but Hegel also aligns it with Spinoza in that Spinoza's attribute of thought is an external reflection on the determinate modes. In the description of external reflection in the beginning of the "Doctrine of Essence," Hegel focuses his discussion on the relation of essence and immediacy, which in the critique of Spinoza corresponds to the relation of substance and mode. Hegel writes, "Its relationship to its presupposition is such that the latter is the negative of reflection, but so that this negative *as* negative is sublated" (W 6:28–29; SL, p. 403). The immediate (or mode) only has being through being-the-negation-of-essence, but as *external* this status (the contrast-by-negation with essence) is itself negated and the immediate is simply taken as externally given. So while Spinoza's modes are within substance, their determinacy according to Hegel does not derive from substance but rather is assumed already to be there.

Hegel most clearly presents the crucial transition to determining reflection through a discussion of reflective judgment in Kant. In Hegel's view, Kant essentially overcame himself in his doctrine of reflective judgment (and in related doctrines) in the third *Critique*, though Kant did not recognize his achievement as such. According to Hegel's presentation within the "Logic of Essence," reflective judgment starts from an immediate manifold and reflectively looks for a concept to unite that manifold, a process that seems external in that the material for the concept is taken as given. But in that the concept for the manifold is identified, or the judgment is successful, the original determinacy of that manifold disappears and becomes identical with the concept. Hegel writes,

for the universal, the principle or rule and law to which it advances in its determining, counts as the essence of that immediate which forms the starting point; and this immediate therefore counts as a nullity, and it is only the return from it, its determining by reflection, that is the positing of the immediate in accordance with its true being. Therefore, what reflection does to the immediate, and the determinations which issue from reflection, are not anything external to the immediate but are its own proper being. (W 6:31; SL, p. 405)

This is an important statement of Hegel's own *CCD* thesis. To say that reflection or conceptual activity is the "own proper being" of the immediate is to say that the concepts constitute being. To contrast this constitutive activity with sheer positing and with external assumption is to situate the activity between the strong and weak versions of *CCD*, and thus to endorse *MCCD*. Hegel writes of the determinations that result from this



reflection, “In so far, therefore, as it is the positedness that is at the same time reflection-into-self, the determinateness of reflection is *the relation to its otherness within itself*” (W 6:35; SL, p. 408). The key point of this reflection for understanding the criticism of Spinoza is that for Hegel the finite modes are determined through thought, but only in that thought can incorporate finitude as its own other. Since thought, as an attribute, must also be considered part of substance, the challenge is to think through substance’s relation to a form of thought that can constitute the finite modes.

Hegel’s attack on Spinoza can be read as the claim that *SD* is only compatible with a very weak and untenable version of *WCCD*, for *SD* must relegate thought, conceptual activity, to a subordinate position vis-à-vis substance. If the really real is only substance itself, even the attributes will appear as two reflective *perspectives* on that single substance. Hegel thus writes that the “absolute essence” in Spinoza is treated in a way typical of modern philosophy: “The distinguishing falls outside the absolute essence, also in modern times. ‘The absolute,’ one says, ‘seen from this side’; – the sides thus fall outside of it. It is further [characteristic of] the standpoint of reflection to view only sides, nothing in itself” (W 20:185). Spinoza of course aimed to overcome the standpoint of subjective reflection, but he does not justify there being only two *known* attributes of substance, and he holds that there are infinitely many attributes, so our knowing of the modes is only weakly constitutive, a function of our subjective limitations.

In light of Hegel’s charge that modern metaphysicians, including Spinoza, have gone astray in looking at the absolute from various perspectives, one might think that Hegel wants to go *more* metaphysical. In a certain sense this is true, but it is not true in the sense that Hegel thinks that we should identify the “in-itself determinate” *beyond* the conditions of *human* thought in an original substance. The trouble with this proposal is that the demand to go beyond perspectives can only be met through thought itself. But the lesson from the discussion of positing reflection is not to imagine that thought (reflection, concepts) can do all the work alone, without any “otherness.” The answer is not *SCCD*, a return to dogmatic metaphysics, but rather *MCCD*. The negation of otherness must simultaneously be an incorporation of otherness in its determinacy. Hegel holds that only *thought*, and not substance qua substance, can accomplish this feat.

Hegel thus criticizes Spinoza for not recognizing the concept of infinity that Spinoza himself describes within the attribute of thought as

essentially constitutive. Hegel writes that “he has not recognized this Concept as the absolute Concept, and therefore has not expressed it as a moment of essence; for him the Concept falls outside of essence, into the thought of essence” (W 20:187; LHP, Vol. III, p. 263). The most natural reading of this claim is that we must simply do away with the gap separating thought (or the concept) from essence (or substance). All developments of determinacy, and the grounding of that determinacy, take place in thought itself, so why invoke something beyond thought when it does not work?

#### SPINOZA’S “CAUSE OF ITSELF” AND HEGEL’S CONCEPT

In the introduction to the “Logic of the Concept” Hegel insists that his critique of Spinoza in the “Logic of Essence” is an immanent critique. The exposition of the relations internal to substance resulted in a dynamic *Wechselwirkung*, or “reciprocal effect,” with a structure identical to that of the Concept. Hegel writes, “The exposition of substance (contained in the last book) which leads on to the Concept is, therefore, the sole and genuine refutation of Spinozism. It is the *unveiling* of substance, and this is the *genesis of the Concept*” (W 6:250–251; SL, p. 581). The immanent critique has “unveiled” substance by showing that it consists of moves that thought itself has made. The critique is immanent because it “penetrate[s] the opponent’s stronghold and meet[s] him on his own ground [*in den Umkreis seiner Stärke stellen*]” (W 6:251; SL, p. 581). Within Spinoza’s “stronghold” the idea that leads to the self-overcoming of substance is the idea of the *causa sui*, the “cause-of-itself.” Hegel claims that Spinoza did not take this idea seriously enough, did not draw out all of its consequences. Hegel writes, “the cause of itself produces only itself; this is a fundamental concept in all that is speculative. It is the infinite cause, in which the cause is identical with the effect. If Spinoza had further developed what lies in the *causa sui*, his substance would not have been fixed and unworkable [*das Starre*]” (W 20:168; LHP, pp. 258–259).

Hegel’s version of conceptual dependence includes the idea of “cause of itself,” though it is the conceptual activity of thought rather than substance that is the cause. In his treatment of Spinoza in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel cites Spinoza’s claim that God as “the absolutely infinite ... contains no negation” (W 20:170; LHP, p. 261). The attributes for Spinoza are not negations within substance (since substance contains no negation) and it is that very fact that Hegel finds

problematic.<sup>21</sup> Against Spinoza's conception of absolute infinity, Hegel claims that the intellectual infinity of thought is the true model of infinity. He aligns intellectual infinity and cause-of-itself with his own idea of the "negation of the negation" (W 20:172; LHP, p. 262), a structure of conceptual activity that overcomes the externality of Spinoza's thought.

Hegel's effort to retain the cause-of-itself thesis as a claim about thought looks as though it forces us into the inverted Spinozist, divine mind theory of thought's self-production in the Logic. But we will feel this pressure only if we overlook the fact that the Logic is an account of the self-creation of conceptual determination, not of the universe as a whole or of substance as an all-inclusive super-entity. The conceptual *content* is the key to the Logic,<sup>22</sup> and the method of double negation works by "causing" determinations to generate their opposite and to overcome that opposition in new concepts. This is not to endorse a "conceptual scheme" reading of Hegel, for that would imply that there is a neutral content outside the scheme that could be otherwise constituted, and Hegel is not interested in that *weakly* constitutive thought. The Logic is oriented by an idea of conceptual *form*, but Hegel is very clear that this form is not to be opposed to *content*. So in the introduction to the Subjective Logic, he writes,

This absolute form has in it a content or reality of its own; the concept, since it is not a trivial, empty identity, obtains its differentiated determinations in the moment of negativity or of absolute determining; and the content is only these determinations of the absolute form and nothing else – a content posited by the form itself and therefore adequate to it. (W 6:265; SL, p. 523)

In Hegel's view, every claim in metaphysics can be read as a claim with a certain conceptual content, including (as we have seen) Spinoza's claims about the cognition of substance and the modes. In fact, in the Subjective Logic Hegel *reconstitutes* many traditional metaphysical issues as issues of conceptual content.

<sup>21</sup> I would like to thank John Brandau for a useful discussion of Spinoza's views on negation.

<sup>22</sup> The view closest to this in the literature is that of Robert Brandom, who calls Hegel's theory fundamentally a *semantics* because of the central place of conceptual content. See especially R. Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); and *Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2009). While Brandom's view certainly is closer to the non-metaphysical than metaphysical reading, I think that the focus on content is compatible with some versions of metaphysics. Brandom moves too quickly to the deontological level, but his view does leave room for a reconstructed metaphysics. In any case, the focus on content certainly need not make Hegel into a logical positivist or a pragmatist.

A very brief look at Hegel's discussion of the ontological proof for the existence of God will help us see how the content issue takes precedence. The discussion comes in the transition in the "Doctrine of the Concept" from the disjunctive inference (the final stage of "Subjectivity") to "Mechanism" (the first stage of "Objectivity"). In claiming that this unusual transition really is the same as that from the concept of God to God's existence, Hegel's first point is that for philosophical thinking "God" begins as just a name, a subject-term that "only obtains determinateness and content in its predicate ... with its determinateness" (W 6:403; SL, p. 706). Taking on more directly the issue of being that worries some metaphysical readers, Hegel characteristically writes, "*Being* merely as such, or even *determinate being*, is such a meager and restricted determination, that the difficulty of finding it in the Concept may well be the result of not having considered what being or determinate being itself is" (W 6:404; SL, p. 706). The goal for Hegel is not being, but rather *richness of determination*. He thus writes, "Yet objectivity is just that much richer and higher than the *being or existence* of the ontological proof, as the pure Concept is richer and higher than that metaphysical void of the *sum total of all reality*" (W 6:405; SL, p. 707). The inference to the existence of the Cartesian God might seem a much weightier issue than the inference to mechanical forms of explanation, but for Hegel existence is a concept with its own content, and is ranked by its conceptual richness well below mechanism (not to mention teleology).

I close this section by noting that there is a sense in which the question of Hegel's proximity to Spinoza returns in full force even on my content-based reading. It might seem that Hegel is offering a *strongly constitutive* view (SCCD) that is very close to SD because the Concept, like substance, is all-inclusive. If the Logic exhausts conceptual content, and all attempts for an unmediated grasp of the non-conceptual are shown to be fruitless, then the Logic might still appear to be strongly constitutive. The objection is that since the-world's-what gets all its content right here, the concepts are necessary and sufficient.

The short answer to this objection is that the Logic does not on its own determine the world, but does so only in conjunction with nature and spirit. In the above passage, he says that the Logic is formal *in contrast to* the sciences of nature and spirit. One instructive way in which Hegel differs from Kant is that Hegel's accounts of space and time come in the philosophy of nature, *after* the theory of conceptual content has been laid out in the Logic. Whereas for Kant the "Transcendental Aesthetic" account of space and time in the first *Critique* conditions the theory of

the categories, thus making the categories only *weakly* constitutive, for Hegel's *moderately* constitutive view the concepts have an internal logic that gives them a standing apart from the specific perceptual and psychological limitations of the human subject. The result of Hegel's innovation is a theory of conceptual content that gives *primacy* to the conceptual element as constitutive of the world (the strong element), but that is *open* to the world being jointly constituted by other conditions (the weak element).

#### LOGICAL FREEDOM

Hegel's view of the concept as cause-of-itself comes into better focus when we examine his criticism of Spinoza, cited above, that "substance lacks the principle of *personality* – a defect which has been the main cause of hostility to Spinoza's system." To understand Hegel's claims about personality and the issue of *freedom* we need to look not to Kant, but to Fichte and his theory of freedom. Hegel actually contrasts his immanent critique of Spinoza with the external critique in Fichte's famous First Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*, where Fichte opposes the freedom of his system to the fatalism of the dogmatist system. In my view Hegel's own position on logical freedom is quite close to Fichte's. He shows that without the subjective or psychological residue of Fichtean idealism, a view of conceptual determinacy inspired by Fichtean self-consciousness can overcome Spinoza's position. While the core debate is over *logical freedom*, or conceptual self-grounding, this issue is closely linked for Fichte and Hegel to *agent freedom*, the freedom of the will in human action. The view of agent freedom that emerges from Hegel's view of cause-of-itself is a *moderate* view of the self-determination of the individual that is consonant with Hegel's moderately constitutive view on concept dependence.

According to Fichte, neither the Spinozist dogmatist nor the Fichtean idealist can refute the other.<sup>23</sup> He writes that both sides admit the phenomenal consciousness of freedom, but they interpret that consciousness in very different ways. Whereas for the idealist this is an act of consciousness that is the "explanatory ground" of everything else, the dogmatist explains freedom as an effect of the thing-in-itself. Without a rational ground to decide between them, there is simply a choice between the two positions, a choice that Fichte thinks is settled by inclination and

<sup>23</sup> In the "immanent critique" passage, Hegel writes of Fichte, "Thus it has been said that for anyone who does not presuppose as an established fact the freedom and self-subsistence of the self-conscious subject there cannot be any refutation of Spinozism" (W 6:250; SL, p. 581).

interest. One chooses freedom based on a moral interest fraught with existential implications for the individual, but reason itself seems powerless to refute the dogmatist on the dogmatist's own terms.<sup>24</sup> Hegel found this claim insufferable, and he insisted that reason can in fact resolve this dispute. For Hegel the problem is that Fichte, like Spinoza, starts with the absolute as a first principle or definition. Hegel thinks that if he can show instead that a (roughly) Fichtean position *arises out of* Spinoza's position, the impasse would be resolved. The key move in the "Doctrine of Essence" from substantiality and causality to *Wechselwirkung* and the Concept is clearly modeled on a set of moves in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*. Hegel goes from the necessary self-causation of Spinoza's substance to the free self-determination of the Fichtean I (an I that Fichte himself identified with the Concept). It takes only a quick look at Fichte's conception of *Wechselwirkung* to see that Hegel is showing that Fichte's concept properly conceived is the result of the dialectic of substance.<sup>25</sup>

But how could Hegel's Logic, which I have claimed is a theory of conceptual content, be so close to Fichte's consciousness-based "subjective" idealism? Hegel himself answers this question in the following important passage from the "General Division of Logic" at the opening of the *Science of Logic*, where his difference from Fichte appears to be mainly one of terminology.

If other disciples of Kant have expressed themselves concerning the determining of the *object* by the I in this way, that the objectifying of the I is to be regarded as an original and necessary act of consciousness, so that in this original act there is not yet the idea of the I itself – which would be a consciousness of that consciousness or even an objectifying of it – then this objectifying act, in its freedom from the opposition of consciousness, is nearer to what may be taken simply for *thought* as such. But this act should no longer be called consciousness; consciousness embraces within itself the opposition of the I and its object which is not present in that original act. The name consciousness gives it a semblance of subjectivity even more than does the term *thought*, which here, however, is to be taken simply in the absolute sense as *infinite* though untainted by the finitude of consciousness, in short, *thought as such*. (W 5:60; SL, pp. 62–63)

Hegel comes close to saying that his Logic depicts the same dialectical process that Fichte had discussed under the rubric of consciousness, and that what Hegel is calling "thought as such" is the same "original and necessary act[s]" that Fichte had discussed with the I (self-relation), not-I (other-relation), and the I determining itself as determined through the

<sup>24</sup> FW 1:433–434; IW, pp. 18–19.    <sup>25</sup> See FW 1:218.

not-I (determinate self-relation). Hegel's critical point is that because consciousness is a mental activity that involves embodied subjects set against a world of objects, it is inappropriate as a medium for logic. The otherness or difference should not be figured as an object set against the thinking subject, but rather as itself a conceptual determination, or pure content.

How does this view of logical freedom help us with the question of agent freedom? It can look as though Hegel holds the view of freedom espoused by Descartes (in Meditation Four), that the will is the most free when it has the least choice, namely in that it is determined or compelled by the clear and distinct knowledge of the intellect. That counts as freedom because it is knowledge that accords with the nature of the mind, and so does not leave anything to outside chance or contingency. This thesis has a practical version that accords very little weight to the will's indeterminacy or freedom of arbitrary choice. This is the practical equivalent of the strongly constitutive concept dependence (*SCCD*) view, for it holds that freedom is strongly constituted by thought, or that in free action the intellect fully determines the will. By contrast the weak version of agent freedom's practical constitution by thought would give thought a relatively minor role, for example, in setting up the options between which the will is free to choose. Hegel's rejection of such a weak view is well known, but his relation to the practical *SCCD* view is much harder to decipher. On my view Hegel's account of agent freedom follows rather closely the *moderately constitutive* view of concepts that I outlined in the previous section, and in fact highlights the attractions of *MCCD* as a reading of the Logic.

Once again, Beiser is a good representative of the view that links Spinoza and Hegel quite tightly. Beiser holds that there is an objective structure in the world or in reality, to which we must conform if we are to be free. Beiser in effect contrasts a Fichtean *WCCD* view of agent freedom with a Spinozist *SCCD* view. He writes,

Both Fichte and Hegel see freedom in terms of self-determination; but their concepts are similar in name only. Self-determination in Hegel means that (1) I have a specific essence or nature, and that (2) it is natural and necessary for it to be realized ... Hegel adopts the same solution to this problem as Spinoza: I am free in so far as I am really identical with the whole universe.<sup>26</sup>

Beiser claims that Fichte denies these two points in holding that humans have no nature and because the self "can choose between different courses of action."<sup>27</sup> It is true that Fichte consistently stresses the *indeterminacy*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.    <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

of the free agent at the time of action, and that he insists that the self does not exist outside its acts. Yet it is not clear that Fichte is so far from Spinoza as Beiser claims, given that Fichte does have a view of true ethical content tied to a theory of human nature.<sup>28</sup> I think it is an open question whether Fichte really holds such a *weakly constitutive* view of thought's relation to free action.

Questions of Fichte's interpretation aside, Beiser clearly overlooks elements on Hegel's view that count against ascribing to him a Spinozist view of freedom. Hegel's view of freedom includes the very moment of indeterminacy or choice that Beiser claims separates Fichte from Spinoza and Hegel. In his outline of the rational will as having the structure of the Concept in the introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel emphasizes this point (especially in §5). The first moment of the rational will, pure universality or absolute freedom, is just this abstraction or indeterminacy. The second moment is particularity or determinacy, the willing of finite purposes. The full concept of the rational will unites these moments as self-determination, the double negation that is personality and cause-of-itself. This model is designed to serve as the basis for an account of ethical content, of determinate duties rather than abstract principles. Yet Hegel does not think that this content is determined once and for all, as a fixed expression of human nature. Rather, Hegel's model of agent freedom is one of development and progressive incorporation of new circumstances into the agent's identity. One can know why one's actions are necessary, but this is not settled in advance through knowledge of a fixed human nature. It is rather a retrospective grasp of the necessity that has been made manifest through the exercise of freedom. Hegel takes it that the will's indeterminacy is fully compatible with an account of the content of right that has the form of necessity, and that is constituted at the highest level by "necessary relations." But this requirement clearly does not prevent agents from acting in novel ways, and indeed, from changing the character of those necessary relations themselves.

To tie together these reflections on Hegel's view of agent freedom with the issues of the logical freedom of the Concept, I want to remark briefly on the light that the agent freedom issue sheds on the puzzling ending to the Logic. The Logic concludes with "The Absolute Idea," which consists of a discussion of method. Hegel's claim is that this method is the all-powerful, for "no object ... could not be penetrated by it" (W 6:551;

<sup>28</sup> See Allen Wood's chapter in this volume, pp. 121–135 for a discussion of the influence of Spinoza on Fichte's views.



SL, p. 826), and he identifies the method with reason's "highest and sole drive to find and cognize *itself by means of itself in everything*" (W 6:552; SL, p. 826). This use of "drive" can seem very strange, but reading Fichte and Hegel together it makes perfect sense as a reinterpretation of Fichte's absolute drive to self-determination. The difference is that Hegel thinks his version of immanent negativity can capture determinate content in a way that Fichte's merely reflective method could not. The trouble with the Fichtean drive was its inability to come to terms with conditions outside the strict derivation, leaving Fichte with an idealist philosophy of freedom striving *against* the actual world. Hegel's view of logical freedom expressed in the method, like the model of freedom as practical incorporation, is a *moderately constitutive* view because it allows for outside conditions, but subordinates them to thought through negation. The method does not create the-world's-what *from nothing*, but rather constitutes the necessity of the world by incorporating it within the system of rational inferences.

While Hegel's criticisms of Spinoza do draw us away from some traditional readings of Hegel as a metaphysician, in the end they highlight the element of determinacy or rational content that is shared by metaphysical and non-metaphysical readers alike. The Logic is a theory of conceptual content, where that includes the content of the concepts of "being," "existence," "actuality," and "objectivity" that are often used to indicate a metaphysical view. Hegel resists all attempts to say that these are *only our concepts*. We can and do think ontologically with them. The general requirement to make our thinking *non-dogmatic* metaphysics is the requirement not to leave opaque what determinate work our concepts are doing, and thus not to posit substrata or essences impermeable to thought. To some this reliance on content will seem an attempt to smooth over an important distinction between a Kantian view of subjective conditions and a direct revelation of the-world's-what through thought. Hegel endorses neither of these extremes, but rather a middle position on concept dependence that I have called moderately constitutive. It is characteristically Hegelian not to accept one-sided positions, and I for one do not see why his position on this distinction should be any different.