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# Review

**Myriam Gerhard**. ***Hegel und die logische Frage***. **Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015. ISBN 978-3-11-044034-8 (hbk). Pp. x + 178. € 79.95.**

Debates about the status of Hegel's *Science of Logic* still frequently assume that the metaphysical import of the text is something external to it rather than a feature of its actual dialectical progression. Still less often is the most blatantly 'logical' portion of the text consulted to resolve the issue: the main body of the *Doctrine of the Concept* is amongst the aspects of the work that are least often engaged with. Myriam Gerhard's book helps to remedy this neglect, providing a glimpse of the larger significance of Hegel's logical thought. Without being a commentary in the strict sense, *Hegel und die logische Frage* provides a concise overview of Hegel's 'subjective logic', with a view to restoring the credibility of Hegel's approach to the 'logical question'.

Gerhard treats the 'logical question' as a term of art pertaining broadly to nineteenth-century philosophy, one introduced by Trendelenberg's 1842 work, *Die logische Frage in Hegels System*. In brief, the logical question concerns the relation of formal logic to the empirical sciences. Putting it in Kantian terms, as Gerhard sometimes does, the question concerns the 'constitutivity' of logical form (18), that is, the question as to whether the form of 'our' reason does justice to how things are. The 'chasm' opened up by Kant between discursive reason and 'things in themselves' put the objectivity of logic in a problematic position (15). In particular, Kant established the possibility of considering logic as a mere canon of reason, standing apart from all objects, instead of an organon or 'tool' for the proper application of reason (10). This set the stage for the complete formalization of logic in the nineteenth century. Hegel's logic, since it is not logic in a traditional sense, is not often considered against this background, but it proves illuminating to do so. The logical question thus connects Hegel with the post-Kantian attempts at logical reform undertaken by Reinhold, J. S. Mill and Frege, amongst others. Yet Hegel's own logic fell into disrepute largely because of the way his interpreters in the middle of the century understood the relation of the logic to his *Realphilosophie*, particularly the philosophy of nature (12). Critics such as Trendelenberg frequently assumed that Hegel intended a kind of deductive relation between logic and nature and duly criticized him for failing in this regard, claiming that his system presupposes empirical content rather than somehow 'generating' it.

Gerhard uses this nineteenth-century debate to frame the main portion of her book, which deals with the whole of the subjective logic. She has both interpretive and systematic aims. Her interpretive aim is to exonerate Hegel of the claims made against the status of his logical thought. This is achieved mainly negatively, since Gerhard primarily shows how Hegel's *Doctrine of the Concept* does not deduce the principles of the empirical sciences from the empty forms of pure logic. On the other hand, Gerhard's substantive philosophical aim, one she believes is supported by Hegel's text, is to contend that 'the reduction of philosophy to logic', a temptation stemming from the success of symbolic logic, 'cannot lead to a comprehension of what there is' (x). On Gerhard's view, far from being a panlogicist, Hegel provides a means to resist the attempt to understand everything, especially nature, in purely formal and rational terms. This is his response to the 'logical question'.

Since the heart of the book follows the order of Hegel's text quite closely and is not divided up into chapters in a standard way, giving a linear summary will fail to do justice to the book's main contribution. Instead I will reconstruct what I take to be the interpretive focal points running throughout the commentary portion.

First, Gerhard argues that Hegel in his subjective logic does expect a kind of content to emerge from logical form. On her account, Hegel here intends 'to show how the concept forms reality in and out of itself' (100). The key here is *how* Hegel expects this to come about and *what* should count as conceptually generated content. Gerhard shows how Hegel's concept of 'singularity' (*Einzelheit*), the third aspect of conceptual form, serves the task of mediating the conceptual and real. Not only does Hegel identify the singular and actual (33), the singular is the point at which conceptual form and content are inseparable (34). This suggests that whatever is singular has a content that can be fully accounted for in terms of conceptual form. Yet Gerhard points out that the singular is not deduced from conceptual form, but is rather the result of (presumably *a posteriori*) abstraction (35). Singularity, then, is given in terms of a distinction in conceptual form (and has its content thereby), but nevertheless comes from 'outside' the internal relations of pure reason. For this reason, real, physical things can serve as 'singulars' in Hegel's sense, while they are still fully compatible with conceptual form.

Gerhard's treatment of singularity puts Hegel's theory of the judgement and syllogism in their proper context. These properly logical forms are tasked with providing the means of reconciliation between the externality of singularity and the conceptual whole (30, 60f.). Gerhard goes through a detailed consideration of the forms of judgement and syllogism, culminating in the disjunctive syllogism. The disjunctive syllogism leads to the 'realization' of the concept insofar as it makes a claim to being the totality of determinations. If the form of the



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disjunctive syllogism exhausts all determinations, then nothing in principle stands apart from some relation to the conceptual whole (102). This does not suggest that we can deduce real objects by purely conceptual means, but rather that the concept provides the universal standard by which objects are assessed as what they are (62). It thus pertains to all objects without being the existential source of objects, or an inferential source of our knowledge of them. Gerhard provides a provocative interpretation here, which puts Hegel's version of the 'ontological argument' centre stage. In her view, the argument does not prove the extra–conceptual existence of God or the world, which would put Hegel in the camp of dogmatic metaphysics; it rather shows that the syllogistic 'middle' of the concept contains every genuine determination that could be identified in 'external' reality (104). That is to say that the completeness of conceptual determinations guarantees their connection to the objective world. But since this content of the concept is developed out of its form, Hegel can construct a form of objectivity without 'the metaphysical presupposition of a given and discoverable [*vorfindbaren*] content' (28).

Gerhard's positive account, then, shows that Hegel uses purely conceptual means to demonstrate the realization of the concept in objectivity. However, this is for Gerhard a *qualified* objectivity; it involves a self-restriction of conceptual content to what can be developed out of conceptual form: 'That the concept itself gives itself its reality corresponds formally to the negatively modest demand of Kant that the thinking subject itself becomes the object of its own thinking' (135). Thus, rather than making a metaphysical claim about everything *tout court*, Hegel implicitly restricts his metaphysics to what is commensurate with thought: 'The fact that the thinkable is unlocked as something to be comprehended by thinking alone does not imply that everything that is must be thoroughly and exclusively rational' (59). Though Hegel does not frequently broadcast any limitation on reason or thinking, Gerhard takes his logical thought to involve a restriction to its own sphere nonetheless. 'Hegel does not want to demonstrate how a concept can be ascribed to something existing independently from cognition. … The sphere of the concept as such is not to be transcended; the concept is not to be hypostatized' (101). This, then, is an important *negative* part of Hegel's response to the logical question: the purely rational relations of the concept are not supposed to line up cleanly with the kind of content presupposed and discovered by the empirical sciences.

This leads to a final point of Gerhard's reading: Hegel's notion of 'the impotence of nature' (*die Ohnmacht der Natur*). Since one of the main nineteenth-century objections to Hegel's logical thought was its purported capacity to generate the content of the philosophy of nature, this focus is not as peculiar as it may seem. For Hegel's concept of the impotence of nature pertains to the 'weakness of the concept' (*Schwäche des Begriffs*) in nature. This is Hegel's way of



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admitting that logical form is restricted in its application to empirical content; it is the reason there can be no logical 'transition' (*Übergang*) to nature (156). Hegel's development of a form of logical objectivity fitting to the concept thus does not require him to suggest that logical form is sufficient to apprehend the variety of the natural world. As Gerhard insightfully notes, the impotence of nature serves as Hegel's version of a 'critique of pure reason', since it provides an internal critique of reason's constitutive relation to reality (33). According to Gerhard, Hegel points the way towards a 'critical philosophy of nature', since for him the concept always serves as a standard against which our empirical knowledge of nature should be measured (165). In short, Hegel agrees with Kant that reason is not strictly constitutive of natural things.

Gerhard briefly indicates, however, that things are otherwise in the realm of spirit, where the concept can assert its 'omnipotence' (*Allmacht*). As she writes, 'Only in spirit is the identity of object and concept shown to be complete. In spirit the comprehending and the comprehended cannot be separated from each other; for spirit is, as Hegel writes, the concept "which has for its existence the concept itself as the reality corresponding to it"' (161). Thus Gerhard helps to explain why Hegel's conception of conceptual reason does not have to take the same shape in the realms of nature and spirit, since it is only in the spiritual realm that the concept is completely subject and object at once. Here the concept is the 'revealing' (*Offenbaren*) of itself within itself.

The line of thought just recounted does not exhaust the fascinating detail of Gerhard's book. Gerhard's clear and illuminating commentary, which is badly needed for this portion of the *Logic*, is interspersed with discussions pertaining to a number of nineteenth-century thinkers and controversies. Besides frequent reference to Kant's theoretical philosophy, the topics considered include Reinhold and Bardili's attempts at a reform of philosophy *via* logic, the controversy between systems of natural and artificial classification of nature (Linneaus and Cuvier), Mill's doctrine of induction, natural laws, and natural kinds, and Russell's conception of analysis. Much of this material is not often discussed in the literature on Hegel and is a valuable feature of the book.

Since some of the literature devoted to this portion of the *Science of Logic* is quite technical, Gerhard's accessible account of Hegel's main line of thought is to be welcomed. However, since the book covers so much ground that does not directly relate to her thesis, it is not always easy to bear in mind her larger concern with the 'logical question'. The only weakness of the book lies in the tension between its near-commentary form and its argumentative aims. Given the progressive development of Hegel's Doctrine of the Concept, and the dependence of each section on the preceding ones, Gerhard's argument practically demands a reconstruction of the whole, even if a commentary as such is not her aim (x). Discussion of the main claim of the book is virtually put off to



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the end, where it does not receive as full a treatment as the reader may expect. Little is said, for example, of how Hegel's positive—if qualified—notion of the concept's ability to generate content pertains to his *Realphilosophie*, apart from brief remarks on its 'critical' nature: these remarks are suggestive but unsatisfying. Moreover, since Gerhard seems to take Hegel's view to have implications for contemporary philosophy, her account might have benefited from an engagement with current philosophical debates, especially concerning the limitations of formal logic in philosophy itself. One final point of criticism is the space devoted to Mill in the prolonged excursus (about 30 pages). While this could be valuable to some readers, the excursus seems out of balance with its contribution to the argument. Gerhard recounts Mill's attempt to provide a completely inductive basis for logic, but apart from brief comments pertaining to Hegel's treatment of the syllogisms of reflection, not much is made of this account. By the end, we know much about Mill, but little about the promised connection of Hegel's thought to Mill's inductive logic.

Despite these minor flaws, *Hegel und die logische Frage* is a welcome contribution to the literature on Hegel's logical thought. Gerhard rightly puts Hegel's 'concept of the concept' at the centre of his work and lays the groundwork for a nuanced appreciation of the relation between thought and reality in Hegel, based on his challenging use of logical vocabulary. Too often, Hegel's own extensive treatment of the relation of concept and objectivity is passed over when slogans on the metaphysical status of Hegel's logic are recited. Gerhard shows that we can find Hegel's own view on this issue by following his response to the 'logical question' as it unfolds in the subjective logic. More has to be done here, especially concerning the peculiar conceptual structure of spirit to which Gerhard all too briefly alludes. But her work is an illuminating place to begin for those looking for a textually sensitive and historically informed account of Hegel's logical thought.

**W. Clark Wolf**
**Marquette University, USA**
**william.c.wolf@marquette.edu**



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