

Luca Illetterati

The Semantics of Objectivity in Hegel's *Science of Logic*

Abstract. *The notion of objectivity in the Hegelian conceptual constellation is one that, if not ambiguous, is at least characterized by a strong polysemy. This paper considers the significance that “objectivity” assumes for Hegel in relation to logic; it therefore also raises questions about the kind of objectivity Hegel attributes to logical thought. The thesis defended is that one can understand the Hegelian notion of objectivity only if one recognizes the inextricable bond between the epistemological and the ontological in Hegel’s philosophy, or rather, only if one acknowledges the radical critique Hegel directs at the modern gap between epistemological and ontological dimensions. It is shown that the Hegelian notion of objectivity should be understood neither in traditionally epistemological terms (as a notion belonging to some theory of knowledge or epistemology) nor in purely ontological terms (as a property exclusive to being, facts, or the states of things).*

Hegels Begriff der Objektivität ist ein schillernder Begriff. Dieser Artikel beschäftigt sich mit Hegels Einschätzung der Bedeutung „Objektivität“ in Bezug auf die Logik und deshalb mit der Frage, welche Art von Objektivität Hegel logischem Denken zuschreibt. Die These dieses Artikels ist, dass man den Hegel’schen Begriff der Objektivität nur verstehen kann, wenn man die untrennbare Verbindung zwischen der epistemologischen und der ontologischen Philosophie Hegels erkennt, oder wenn man die radikale Hegel’sche Kritik an die moderne Lücke zwischen der epistemologischen und der ontologischen Dimension erkennt.

1 Introduction

In his introduction to the *Science of Logic*, Hegel writes that “objective thinking is thus the *content* of pure science [*objektives Denken ist denn der Inhalt der reinen Wissenschaft*]” (WdL I, p. 34 [29]). In this paper, I intend to focus on the significance that “objectivity” assumes for Hegel in relation to logic. In particular, I will address the question of what type of “objectivity” Hegel attributes to logical thought. The thesis I would like to defend is that one can understand the Hegelian notion of “objectivity” only if one recognizes the inextricable bond between the *epistemological* and the *ontological* domains in Hegel’s philosophy. In order to approach Hegel’s notion of “objectivity,” one has to interrogate Hegel’s radical

critique of the modern gap between the epistemological dimension (i.e. the discourse relative to the modes through which we seek to know being and reality) and the ontological dimension (i.e. the discourse around being, which includes discourse relative to the basic structures that articulate reality in all of its complexity). I will therefore attempt to show that the Hegelian notion of “objectivity” should be understood neither in traditionally epistemological terms (as a notion belonging to some “theory of knowledge” or “epistemology”) nor in purely ontological terms (as a property exclusive to being, facts, or states of things).

I will proceed as follows: First, I will closely investigate the various meanings attributed to the notion of “objectivity” as it appears in the *Science of Logic*. In fact, the notion is one that, if not ambiguous, is at least characterized by a strong polysemy. In the table of contents of the *Science of Logic*, the word appears explicitly two times. It appears once to indicate the first of the two volumes of which the text itself is composed: *Objective Logic*. It then appears a second time within the second volume, namely *Subjective Logic*—and more precisely, as its second section, “Objectivity” (which follows the first section, “Subjectivity,” and precedes the last, “The Idea.”) I will therefore briefly outline the two major variations on the notion of “objectivity” that are present in Hegel’s text.

I will then investigate the ways in which these two major meanings of “objectivity” are connected to the notion of “objective thinking”. In doing so, I will demonstrate that the latter goes beyond the meanings of “objectivity” as a single notion that were outlined in the first section.

2 Objective Logic

With regard to the notion of “objective logic,” objectivity refers—to use an expression from Hegel himself—to the “*existent* concept” (WdL I, p. 45 [39]). This is the concept as a form of being, as a structure of the real and the existent, which only in a later stage will become concept as concept, that is, self-moving concept.

Accordingly, the first division must be between the logic of the *concept* as *being* and of the concept as *concept*, or (if we want to avail ourselves of otherwise familiar, but very indeterminate and therefore very ambiguous expressions) in *objective* and *subjective* logic. (WdL I, p. 46 [39])

In this remark, the notion of objectivity, in the phrase “objective logic”, implies the dimension of being. It refers in this way to that domain traditionally investigated by ontology.

With the expression “objective logic,” Hegel explicitly recalls the notion of *conceptus objectivus* or of *ratio objectiva* discussed by Francisco Suárez in the second of his *Disputationae metaphysicae*. He also indexes Descartes, who, in the wake of Suárez, discusses this notion in the *Third Meditation*. In order to illustrate the view of Suárez, one can take as example the concept of “man”: if the *formal concept* is the act with which the mind conceives of something as “man,” the *objective concept* is the man himself inasmuch as he is represented in that act. The objective concept, one could thus say, is that which is intended by the mind (what today one might call “the content” of an act of thinking). The act itself, on the other hand, is called the formal concept. In this sense it is evident that, with the notion of “objective logic,” Hegel refers to the metaphysical tradition of both late scholasticism and the early modern age, which—from the time of Suárez, passing through Leibniz and continuing through to Wolff—constituted the basic framework for the philosophy taught in German universities until the early years of the eighteenth century. This tradition served as the very background deconstructed by Kant’s transcendentalist approach.

It is no coincidence, in this sense, that Hegel connects the notion of “objective logic” to Kantian “transcendental logic,” or rather to that operation that, to use Hegel’s own words, had “indeed already turn[ed] *metaphysics* into *logic*” (WdL I, p. 35 [30]). According to Hegel, the distinctive features of “transcendental logic”—the features that distinguish it from what Kant calls “general logic”—basically consist of two elements:

- “Transcendental logic” contains the *a priori* conditions of objects, “the rules of the pure thought of an *object*” (Ak. 4, p. 50 [95]). This kind of logic does not, as in the case of “formal logic,” abstract from every content of objective knowledge.
- By reconstructing the conditions for knowing an object, “transcendental logic” moreover shows that these conditions cannot be found *in* the objects themselves but rather belong non-empirically to the structure of the knowing subject.

With these moves, according to Hegel, Kant brought the traditional domains of ontology and metaphysics into that of logic. Yet with the same operations, again according to Hegel, Kant also ran the risk of conflating ontology with epistemology, the object with the subject. Roughly speaking this means that, for Hegel, Kant essentially ran the risk of reducing the objective world—in all of its reality

and substantiality—to the very knowledge of it, or to the subjective structures through which it gets brought to consciousness.

In his “objective logic” Hegel seems to use Kant against Kant: he radicalizes the Kantian notion of “transcendental logic” by liberating it from the subjective element it still embodies. Hegel certainly aims to show, in the wake of Kant, that the real in its essence is conceptual. Yet this does not mean reducing the real to the forms of transcendental subjectivity; Hegel aims at conferring upon thought itself a status that is not simply “subjective”. Through this step, “objective logic” therefore becomes that part of “science” (*Wissenschaft*) that—by radicalizing the endeavor started by Kantian “transcendental logic”—takes the place of metaphysics and ontology. This is not to say that “objective logic” should be identified with metaphysics and ontology. “Objective logic” should rather be understood as a third option: it is not the reduction of the objective world to the categorical requirements of transcendental subjectivity; at the same time, it also does not name a metaphysical substantialism that assumes that the structures of being are things that are simply *given*. “Objective logic”, like the whole *Science of Logic*, is a path in which the determinations traditionally at the core of ontological and metaphysical discourses (such as Being, Existence, Substance, Unity, Infinity, Identity, Difference, Ground, Matter, Necessity, Possibility, Actuality, etc.) are developed as thought’s determinations, i.e. as categories that find their justification in the very logical movement they produce. In this sense, it is possible to think of Objective Logic as pressing a sort of “epistemological turn” onto ontology (and this is the very effect of modern thought, in particular of Kant’s critical philosophy). At the same time, however, it also gives a peculiar “ontological turn” to epistemology (and this is an effect of the ancient legacy within modern thought).

In his “General Division” of the *Science of Logic*, Hegel asserts in fact that “objective logic” “takes the place [*an die Stelle tritt*] rather of the former *metaphysics* which was supposed to be the scientific edifice of the world as constructed by *thoughts* alone” (WdL I, p. 48 [42]). More specifically, Hegel says that “objective logic” takes the place of ontology, or of that science “intended to investigate the nature of *ens* in general [*der die Natur des Ens überhaupt erforschen sollte*]” (WdL I, p. 48 [42]). It is probably not an exaggeration to maintain that our understanding of Hegel’s philosophy—including the contemporary opposition between so-called “metaphysical” and “anti-metaphysical” readings of Hegel—depends to a large extent on the way we interpret this “substitution.”¹

¹ For further reading on Hegelian thought in the key of “anti-metaphysics” and “practice,” see the classics Pippin 2001 and 2008, and Pinkard 1994. For a broader view of the suggested “anti-

Yet what does it mean to say that logic takes the place of, or is a substitution for, metaphysics? In *The First Position of Thought with Respect to Objectivity*, the peculiar ambiguity characterizing Hegel's relation to that tradition referred to as "metaphysics" emerges: on the one hand, Hegel acknowledges that metaphysics has a legitimate claim to truth; on the other, Hegel criticizes metaphysics and does not allocate any space within his theoretical system to metaphysics understood as a philosophical discipline. Almost a consequence of this conscious ambiguity, "metaphysics" is presented by Hegel, on the one hand, as the most ingenuous position. On the other hand, however, such naiveté—which necessarily depends on a certain lack of justification—expresses an identity of being and thought that, as we will see, the Hegelian notion of "objective thought" itself aims to recall.²

The first position [*that is the one that refers, in fact, to the concept of metaphysics*, LI] is the naïve way of proceeding, which, being still unconscious of the antithesis of thinking within and against itself, contains the *belief* [Glauben] that *truth* is (re)cognized [*erkannt*], and what the objects genuinely are is brought before consciousness, through *thinking about* them. In this belief, thinking goes straight to the objects [*Gegenstände*]; it reproduces the content of sense-experience [*Empfindungen*] and intuition [*Anschauungen*] out of itself, as a content of thought, and is satisfied with this as the truth. All philosophy in its beginnings [*alle anfängliche Philosophie*], all of the sciences [*Wissenschaften*], even the daily doing and dealing of consciousness [*das tägliche Tun und Treiben des Bewußtseins*] lives in this belief (Enz § 26).³

According to Hegel, the attitude or position of thinking that he considers "metaphysics" generally characterizes *common sense*, i.e. our ordinary relation with the world, but also defines the way in which any philosophy or science, at least broadly speaking, relates to reality (*Realität*). Such an attitude is defined by the idea that one can know truth simply through reflection, through the ac-

metaphysics," the volume of Engelhardt and Pinkard 1994 is a very interesting reading. On opposition to the "anti-metaphysical" tendency, see also the positions of scholars convinced of Hegel's indisputable desire to maintain the metaphysical component as constitutive part of his theoretical system, including the fundamental contributions of Houlgate 2006 and 2005, Kreines 2015, and Stern 2009, offer useful frameworks for the metaphysical position. Horstmann, 2008 dedicates particular attention to the epistemological aspect of the relation between subject and object.

2 Cf. Rockmore 1994.

3 Gearets, Suchting, and Harris translate the German expression "dass durch Nachdenken die Wahrheit erkannt werde" into the English one "that *truth* is (re)cognized." In my opinion, the correct translation does not have to do with recognition but with knowing. Instead I propose: "that truth is known."

tivity of thought that reflects on the world. Or rather, it is defined by the idea that reflection is able to relate to the world as it really is. What renders this position one-sided, and therefore makes Hegel's critique and sublation of "metaphysics" necessary, is that this relying on reflection is ultimately based on faith (*Glauben*). It is based on a presupposition—the identification of thought and being—that is only assumed, taken to be true without justification.

From the perspective of the history of philosophy, Hegel is referring here to what he calls the *vormalige Metaphysik*, that is, that metaphysical tradition whose cognitive claims Kant criticized in the "Transcendental Dialectic" of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. But if this is the explicit reference, Hegel nonetheless seems to mean "metaphysics" in a more general sense, as an attitude that goes beyond a specific position in the history of philosophy to resemble the point of view from which most of our ordinary discussions of the world arise. Or, still more generally, Hegel seems to conceive of "metaphysics" as the perspective from which any discussion about the world originates before undergoing the splitting that occurs when the subject reflects on its own practices of thinking and their adequacy or lack thereof with respect to reality.

Metaphysics therefore has a double connotation. On the one hand it inhabits a position that is evidently more rearward as much with respect to empiricism as with respect to critical philosophy. For empiricism removes authority from faith and lays claim to the need for the subject to recognize itself in its own statements; whereas critical philosophy is the attitude of thought that most clearly brings to light the internal contradictions, discrepancies, inadequacies, and therefore, emptiness of its cognitive claims. Metaphysics, because of its naiveté, instead is based on a faith that is not adequately justified and proceeds through determinations of thought that respond to the "*mere understanding* [of] views [die bloße Verstandesansicht]" (Enz § 27).

However, it is precisely because "metaphysics" considers "thought-determinations as the *fundamental determinations of things* [die *Denkbestimmungen als die Grundbestimmungen der Dinge*]" (Enz § 28) that it is placed at a level higher than both empiricism and critical philosophy, in the sense that it does not operate under the assumption (typical of empiricism and critical philosophy, the two positions reflecting the spirit of modernity) that there is a gulf between thought and reality, mind and world, of subject and object – a gulf that prevents thought from comprehending reality in all of its truth.⁴

⁴ See Houlgate 2004, pp. 100–104. Houlgate concentrated his attention precisely on studying the relation between epistemology and ontology, between being and thought (cf. Houlgate 1991), and between nature and logic (Houlgate 2002), and the extent to which they are connected within the development of Hegelian thought.

If we assume that metaphysics is a position committed to the assumption that the true exists outside and independently of thought, Hegelian philosophy is without a doubt radically “anti-metaphysical.” For, in Hegel’s view, thought cannot find justification in anything other than itself. It is this character that renders philosophy, in its radicalness, *the science of liberty*. For Hegel, philosophy does not depend on anything external or given but is able to proceed from itself and therefore justify its own activity. In other words, engaging in “*Wissenschaft*”, one cannot assume foundations that are foreign to the scientific procedure; starting from such givens, essentially assumptions or presuppositions, would undermine the scientific character of the “science.” Likewise, there is no basis outside of thought itself through which thought can support itself or give an account of its own procedures or concepts.

Yet Hegel’s thought is not anti-metaphysical if one means by this that his philosophy retreats from the world, from being and from essence, in order to close itself in a solely logico-linguistic coherence and transform what to “metaphysics” appears naïvely as the objective structures of reality into mere subjective constructions. Indeed, according to Hegel, the “true”—and therefore the real, objective world—is not something simply constructed. Intersubjective practices, although essential for Hegel’s notion of rationality in its historical evolution, cannot constitute the ultimate guarantee or justification for thinking.⁵

The fact that “objective logic” takes the place of metaphysics means for Hegel that the determinations of metaphysical thought come to be considered *non-metaphysically*. That is, such determinations are not assumed as a reality *external* to thought. To use another expression from *The Science of Logic*: they come to be considered as “free of those *substrata*, which are the subjects of *figurative representations* (*diese Formen frei von jenen Substraten, den Subjekten der Vorstellung*)” (WdL I, p. 49 [42]). In this sense, “objective logic” takes the place of metaphysics, occupies its space, and engages that to which metaphysics has traditionally been committed. At the same time, placing itself in that space and interpreting it beyond any naïve foundationalism, “objective logic” also becomes metaphysics’ most radical critique.

According to Hegel, the determinations of “objective logic,” i. e. the determinations of being and of essence, are not in fact simply “found” and “accepted”; they do not belong to anything like a substance that lies outside of thought. Instead, in a Hegelian account, the determinations of “objective logic,” and the modes in which they are articulated, emerge from one another thanks to a logical

⁵ Here one is referred to the thesis expressed in the essays cited above by Pippin 2001, and Pinkard 2004. For a criticism of such a “constructivist” attitude, see McDowell 2009, p. 171.

necessity that only the activity of thought is able simultaneously to justify and to make explicit.

3 The Objectivity of the Concept

The second explicit reference to the concept of “objectivity” in the table of contents of the *Science of Logic* can be found in the last part, the *Doctrine of the Concept*, which Hegel also calls *Subjective Logic*. “Objectivity” constitutes the second section of the *Doctrine of the Concept* and follows the part on “Subjectivity,” in which Hegel shows how the structure of the concept leads to a discussion of judgment, further developing into the unity of the syllogism. “Objectivity” thus precedes the section dedicated to the *Idea*, where the unity of the “subjective” and the “objective” moment is realized first in the *Idea of Life*, then in the *Idea of Consciousness*, and lastly in the *Absolute Idea*. Here it is also evident that the notion of objectivity refers to the dimension of being and of reality. Not, however, in the same manner as in *Objective Logic*. Whereas *Objective Logic* shows the process of the emergence of the Concept from the reality of being and essence, the “objectivity” at stake in *Subjective Logic* instead is the process of the emergence of being and reality *from* the concept: “objectivity is the *real concept* that *has emerged from its inwardness* and has passed over into existence” (WdL II, p. 30 [527]). To put the point somewhat differently, if the internal route of *Objective Logic* is a pathway from *Being* to *Essence* that arrives at the “freedom of the concept,” then the “objectivity” proper to *Subjective Logic* constitutes the being free of the concept that becomes objective. Hegel shows the process through which the “freedom of the concept” takes a concrete, objective and real configuration, so to speak, whereas previously—i.e. in subjectivity as such, in the element of thought—freedom itself has not yet become objective. Previously, freedom was always “in itself” (*an sich*). If thought is not developed into objectivity, then it tends to remain in a closed dimension that is a sort of abstraction. *Mechanism*, *Chemism*, and *Teleology* (the three determinations which make up the object) are in this sense the “objective forms” by which the concept is concretely articulated. Hegel calls “objectivity” that which emerges from the subjectivity of the concept and which therefore constitutes the taking objective and concrete form of the concept, “*das Anundfürsichseiende*.”

Mechanism, *Chemism*, and *Teleology* in fact constitute three *conceptual* relations but also three different modes of syllogistic organization of *objects* themselves. “Mechanism” is a relation among parts that are, albeit to different degrees, autonomous and independent from each other. In “Mechanism”, those parts are put into communication by relations that are for the most part “extrin-

sic” or “external”. “Chemism” is instead a conceptual relation that implies the reciprocal attraction and repelling of parts; a relation that is a tension brought about by the aggregation of parts into a unity that is other than just its constituent components. “Teleology” is a relation that goes one step further in reducing the exteriority of the *relata* among its constituent parts. These three articulations of “objectivity” thus move from the maximum exteriority that is typical of the mechanical relation to the maximum unity among parts that is indicative of the teleological relation. As a processual relation, however, the teleological relation is not the complete sublation of exteriority. In order to reach a structure in which parts and whole are interrelated in such a way that the parts result from the whole and the whole results from its parts, it is necessary to pass to the successive stage, i. e. the domain of the *Idea*, which Hegel identifies as “the unity of the concept and objectivity” (WdL I, p. 174 [671]) or “the congruence of concept and reality” (WdL I, p. 174 [671]). The unity of the “idea,” according to Hegel, is not simply a “given”, namely, is not something that already *is* so much as it is something to identify or to retrieve. Such a unity, for Hegel, is something that should essentially be understood as a process. It is therefore *active*; and because of this processual and active nature, it contains in itself a “*stubborn opposition* [den härtesten Gegensatz]” (WdL I, p. 177 [674]).

It is noteworthy that the insertion of these determinations of thought (*Objectivity* and *Life*) into the structure of the *Logic* immediately sparked a heated debate concerning their legitimacy. With regard to this debate, we can identify two paradigmatic positions: one that emerged immediately after the death of Hegel and was espoused by Karl Rosenkranz, and another that in many ways brought together several nineteenth-century interpretations of Hegel and was espoused by Rüdiger Bubner. Karl Rosenkranz, in his *Wissenschaft der logischen Idee*, observed that concepts like “mechanism,” “chemism,” and “teleology” constitute a “metaphysics of nature” and not, as Hegel instead would argue, “the concept of objectivity” (Rosenkranz 1972, vol. 1, p. 26). In his attempt to give an account of this difficulty presented by Hegelian logic, Rosenkranz referred to a sort of persistence within “the science” of the dichotomy between “subjective” and “objective” that belongs to the phenomenological domain rather than the logical one. *Phenomenology* is the place where this gap should be totally dissolved and sublated (*aufgehoben*). What Rosenkranz missed is that science, and therefore Hegel’s system and above all his logic, overcomes the level of phenomenology, where consciousness is always something other than itself. Yet this does not mean that, with such overcoming, thought has *already* crossed through its subjective and objective dimensions. Rather, surpassing the subjective and the objective at the level of the “idea” still implies, also for pure thought, the crossing through of the different forms of relation between “subjectivity” and “objectivi-

ty” that are constitutive of thought itself. Only by acknowledging that “subjectivity” and “objectivity” are not simply experiences of a divided and torn consciousness but features belonging to the very nature of thought, can thought reach the unity of “subjective” and “objective” that is manifest in the *Idea*.

Albeit within a cultural context profoundly different, the same complications already indicated by Rosenkranz also emerge for Bubner. Bubner maintains that any understanding of Hegel’s *Science of Logic* must essentially take into account the heart of Hegel’s entire process, which is, according to Bubner, the *Logic of the Concept*. However, Bubner upholds the very *Doctrine of the Concept* as an “illegitimate” step, in a manner of speaking, in the logical development. In fact, according to Bubner, in the shift from *Syllogism* to *Objectivity* the *Science of Logic* transcends itself, going beyond its own task. Bubner’s thesis is that Hegel’s section on *Objectivity* constitutes a sort of prolongation of logic beyond itself—that is, beyond the determinations of the concept—and is therefore a sort of trespassing into the domain of the *Philosophy of Nature* and of the *Philosophy of the Spirit*. According to Bubner, the problems that arise in this transition between *Subjectivity* and *Objectivity*—alongside those involved in the final step of the *Science of Logic*, from the *Absolute Idea* to the “idea as nature”—are evidence of the impossibility of logic proceeding beyond itself. This constitutes the basis for Bubner’s critique, which reproaches Hegelian Idealism for advancing the false dream of producing the world out of the concept. Nevertheless, as with Rosenkranz, this type of interpretation cannot expect to save Hegelian logic simply by purifying it of those elements that get interpreted as extra-logical. Such an account, in fact, is not just a critique of Hegel’s conception of objectivity but of his very concept of logic, which is explicitly meant as the science of thinking as *logos*, that is “the reason of that which is [*die Vernunft dessen, was ist*]” (WdL I, p. 17 [19]). Hegel’s immense undertaking is therefore that of thinking “*thought in so far as this thought is equally the fact as it is in itself; or the fact in itself in so far as this is equally pure thought* [den Gedanken, insofern er ebensosehr die Sache an sich selbst ist, oder die Sache an sich selbst, insofern sie ebensosehr der reine Gedanke ist]” (WdL I, p. 33 [29]). To amend Hegel’s logic by freeing it from what goes beyond logic itself would mean to consider the forms of thought as property of the subject, which would be tantamount to removing from Hegel’s logic the very idea around which it develops. The *Science of Logic* is neither a formal logic nor a philosophy of mind: rather it is, according to Hegel himself, the attempt to investigate the logical structure of the world. It is the system of connections that enable us to explain our experience of the world as something unified, on the one hand, but also makes up the dynamic structures underlying reality itself, on the other.

A proper understanding of the logical structure of *Objectivity*—meaning *Mechanism*, *Chemism*, and *Teleology*, as well as the *Idea*—requires an adequate understanding not only of those single sections of the text but also of Hegel's entire system, including the relation between the *Science of logic* and other parts (*Philosophy of Nature* and *Philosophy of Spirit*) of Hegelian thought. In order to get a thorough understanding, one needs a strong grasp of the Hegelian notion of “objective thought”, which is the real issue at stake, not only as it appears in the *Science of Logic* but also in its other forms, such as those in the *Philosophy of Nature* and the *Philosophy of the Spirit*, which are not reducible to pure logic.

Before moving on to the notion of “objective thought,” it is worth dwelling yet another moment on this section on *Objectivity* in order to focus on two particularly significant examples Hegel uses to introduce the notion. Like the notion of “subjectivity,” Hegel writes in the Introduction that “objectivity” has a double meaning. In fact, just as “subjectivity” refers both to the one-sidedness of the subjective point of view (something Hegel was strongly critical of throughout his work) and to the self-movement of the concept (which instead constitutes the specifically Hegelian contribution to the study of thought), so “objectivity” can be understood as much as “standing *opposed* to the self-subsistent concept [*dem selbständigen Begriff gegenüberzustehen*]” (WdL II, p. 131 [629]) as the concept “existing in and for itself [*das Anundfürsichseiende*]” (WdL II, p. 131 [629]).

The first form of objectivity is the exact correlate of the one-sidedness of subjectivity: the objectivity of *subjective idealism*. According to this meaning of objectivity, the object is understood as nothing in itself. The object—in the manner of the Fichtean “Not-I”—lacks any ontological autonomous consistency and has the sole purpose of allowing the “I” to recognize its true nature, or its status as an activity.

The second sense of objectivity instead points to an overcoming of its own opposition with respect to subjectivity. For Hegel, being “in and for itself,” in this sense, means acknowledging a reality that does *not* simply find itself in something other than itself—that is, does not in its essence exist *for another*. Objectivity is thus not the concept that opposes “finite subjectivity” (the subjectivity that arises before an object extraneous to it), but is what sublates the opposition between concept and object, between “finite subjectivity” and “exterior objectivity.” To clarify how this objectivity is established beyond the opposition between subject and object, Hegel proposes two particularly interesting examples. Hegel states:

Rational principles, perfect [*vollkommene*] works of art, etc., are said to be *objective* to the extent that they are free and above every accidentality. (WdL II, p. 131 [629])

These “rational principles”—which Hegel intends both as *theoretical principles*, and thus relative to the logical and epistemic structure of discourse, and as *practical principles*, or moral norms that guide action—have according to Hegel the characteristic of being at once subjective *and* objective. They are *subjective* inasmuch as they do not exist outside their reference to subjectivity, or because they live, so to speak, within the consciousness. On the other hand, consciousness itself relates to these principles not simply as aspects that freely change based on particular needs or interests; rather, although these principles are grasped by consciousness and can exist only in relation to it, they at the same time transcend the subjective dimension and constitute for the subject an *objective something*, with its own peculiar form of independence from the subject itself. Consider, for example, Kant’s categorical imperative. Notably, the first formulation of the categorical imperative requires that you are *to act only in accordance with that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law*. This imperative is, according to Kant, a rational principle of our practical life. It is subjective, inasmuch it functions only as far as it is grasped by the consciousness of subjects. But it is at the same time objective, for it is valid in itself and not only for the subject who thinks it.

In the same way, the perfect work of art is the one that expresses the subjectivity of the artist in the most radical way. But the work also transcends that subjectivity and in some way assumes a life of its own, its own objective substance, which is precisely what renders it a work of art (and therefore a *Form of the Absolute Spirit*) rather than simply an accidental manifestation of a “finite subjectivity.” The work of art is therefore subjective inasmuch as it is produced *by* subjectivity *for* the subjectivity that is recognized in it. At the same time, however, in order to be able to activate this process of recognition, the artwork must be “objective”, i.e. it must no longer involve *only* the subjectivity that produced it but also exist as something “for itself”. These last two examples open the door to what Hegel, in the introduction to the *Science of Logic*, calls “objective thinking [*objektives Denken*].”

4 Objective Thought

The concept of objectivity involved in the notion of “objective thought” is totally reducible neither to the “objectivity” of *Objective Logic* nor to the “objectivity” of *Subjective Logic*. In *Objective Logic*, “objectivity” implies a direct reference to the concepts of ontology and to the metaphysical tradition, which it simultaneously deconstructs and logically justifies; in *Subjective Logic*, “objectivity” refers specifically to those conceptual structures that are articulated in the connections

proper to *Mechanism*, *Chemism*, and *Teleology*. These two meanings of the concept of “objectivity” are certainly implied in the notion of “objective thought,” but they do not exhaust its meaning.

Indeed, when Hegel speaks of “objective thought,” he means to affirm a concept that is radically anti-subjectivist. In order to approach it, one can initially say that Hegel’s notion has certain roots in the classic connection of the Platonic and Aristotelian *logos* and the *nous*, but it also in some ways suggests that which would later come to be known as the Fregean conception of thought (taken in general terms, since the parallel perhaps does not apply to all the details of the two conceptions).⁶ In the ancient Greek world, *logos* is not simply some sort of “property” that “belongs” to thinkers which they are able to apply to the world in order to render it intelligible; rather, it is *logos* of the world, the rational structure of that which is. In a similar way, for Frege, the objectivity of concepts cannot be reduced or fully explained in terms of some psychological or subjective element. As for Hegel, for Frege thinking as such (*der Gedanke*) is never reducible to representation (*Vorstellung*). If thought were identifiable simply by the content of my consciousness, Frege said, one would not have “the Pythagorean theorem” but only “my [*mein*] Pythagorean theorem,” “your Pythagorean theorem,” and so on (here one cannot help but think of the *meinen* that Hegel speaks of in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*).⁷ Moreover, in Hegel as in

6 On the influence of Platonic and Aristotelian views on Hegel’s conception of thought see Chiereghin, 1980. On the specific influence of Aristotle, see Ferrarin, 2001. With regard to the possibility of a relation between the Hegelian and Fregean conceptions of thought, Sluga’s text (1977) is particularly interesting. Contrary to Dummett, who makes Frege an anti-idealist and above all an anti-Hegelian, Sluga shows how Frege’s position has as its critical referents the empiricism of Locke, the empiricist idealism of Berkley, and most of all the “psychologistic” tradition that has its roots in Fries and Beneke. Starting from an interpretation of Kant, these thinkers attacked the objective idealism of Hegel. In this sense, according to Sluga, Frege cannot be counted among the opponents of Hegel.

7 The significance of the Fregean conception of the “third realm of thought” is summarized by Dummett with a formulation that risks being ambiguous, because it suggests a peculiar priority of the subjective with regard to the objective contained in the formula “the extrusion of thoughts from the mind.” This is, according to Dummett, the guiding idea that Frege shares with other German thinkers of the eighteenth century (Bolzano, Lotze, Meinong, the early Husserl): “For Frege, thoughts—the contents of acts of thinking—are not constituents of the stream of consciousness: he asserts repeatedly that they are not contents of the mind or of all that he includes under the general term ‘idea (*Vorstellung*)’.” He allows that grasping a thought is a mental act: but it is an act whereby the mind apprehends that which is external to it in the sense of existing independently of being grasped by that or any other subject. The reason is that thoughts are objective, whereas ideas are not. I can tell you something of what my idea is like, but it remains intrinsically my idea, and, for that reason, there is no telling how far it is the same as your

Frege, the conception of thought is developed in terms of a radicalization, which is also a critique, of Kant's transcendental approach.

Hegel attributes to Kant's philosophy the merit of having traced "objectivity" back to thinking, i.e. of having shown that it is not possible to establish something like "objectivity" if not through thought. That is to say: according to Hegel, Kant recognizes that objectivity is not something other than or even opposed to thought but rather is something that receives its meaning only thanks to and within thought itself. At the same time, however, this position also unveils what, again according to Hegel, is one of the fundamental limits of Kantian philosophy: the fact that "thinking" in Kant—inasmuch as its categories are not considered simple dispositions of thought but as what make the unification of representations in the object possible—is generally conceived as something that is "of" the subject. Thought can be understood as a sort of "instrument" through which the subject tends to harpoon and capture the world. For Hegel, this is the origin of many of the tensions and ambiguities in Kant. In this way, Hegel maintains that Kantian objectivity risks being reduced to a *subjective objectivity*.

If, in fact, thought is considered only as a property of the subject, and therefore as something that belongs to the sphere of subjectivity, the claim that objectivity is possible only in thought risks resulting in a subjectivization of objectivity, according to Hegel. To put it differently, it risks conflating of ontology with epistemology. To avoid this type of outcome—namely to avoid subjectivist drifts and the total absorption of ontology within epistemology—Hegel finds it necessary to think the "objectivity of thought." In other words, Hegel finds it necessary to consider thought in its objectivity.

According to Hegel, thought is not simply the product of a "faculty" of the subject, an instrument through which the subject attempts to grasp a world entirely "other" with respect to thought. Nor is it something other or separate from the thinking activity of the subject. For Hegel, "thought" constitutes the very structure of the world—in an entirely unique sense that does not imply that

idea. By contrast, I can communicate to you the very thought which I am entertaining or which I judge to be true or false: if it were not so, we should never know whether or not we were really disagreeing. No thought, therefore, can be mine in the sense in which a sensation is mine: it is common to all, as being accessible to all. Frege maintained a very stark dichotomy between the objective and the subjective, recognizing no intermediate category of the intersubjective. The subjective was for him essentially private and incommunicable; he therefore held that the existence of whatever is common to all must be independent of any. On Frege's view, thoughts and their constituent senses form a 'third realm' of timeless and immutable entities which do not depend for their existence on being grasped or expressed. The practical consequence of this ontological doctrine was the rejection of psychologism" (Dummett 1996, pp. 22–23).

“thought” is already organized and given, regardless of its articulation in the thinking activity of subjects. The expression “objective thought” is the Hegelian name for a rational structure which, while constituting itself through the thinking activity of the subjects—and therefore also through the sedimentation of rational and intersubjective practices—is never totally reducible to it:

Thought is an expression which attributes the determination contained in it primarily to consciousness. But inasmuch as it is said that *understanding, that reason, is in the objective world*, that spirit and nature have *universal laws* to which their life and their changes conform, then it is conceded just as much that the determinations of thought have objective value and concrete existence. (WdL I, p. 35 [30])

Immediately evident here are the problematic elements underlying the Hegelian theory of “objective thought,” particularly the ambiguous *status* attributed to the notion of thought, which appears to be *just* subjective but cannot but be *also* objective. This fundamental problem traverses all of post-Kantian philosophy (and in this sense also contemporary philosophy): it concerns the relation between thought and reality and is tied to the status of objectivity itself. It moreover raises the question of whether the objectivity of reality depends on the categorical requirements (*conceptual schemes*) imposed upon it by the subject or if one can instead justify objectivity while saving, so to speak, some type of independence for the “world” from what could be seen as its “mentalist” reduction.⁸

Hegel’s thesis is that objectivity cannot find true justification either in the categorical requirements imposed on the world by the mind or in the world’s action upon the subject. Objectivity is made possible only to the extent to which the subject, by thinking, captures the noetic structure that is the real itself. The subject takes thus an active role in the determination of a structure that simultaneously constitutes both the mode of being of the world *and* the mode of being of the subject itself. The idea that we recognize some things as “laws” of reality (the laws of nature, for example, or those laws that enable a predictive consciousness of the phenomena of the natural world) is evidence of this “objective thought”: neither categorical requirements nor the habits produced by experience appear able to ground something like the laws of nature. This awareness,

⁸ Cf. McDowell, 1999. In this regard, Westphal appears to agree with McDowell in arguing that the fundamental task of contemporary epistemology is to reach a cogent philosophical understanding of consciousness that can respond affirmatively to these three questions: 1) Is there a way in which the world does not depend on that which we say or think of it? (“Realism”); 2) If the ordinary realism implied in 1) is true, can we know anything regarding how the world is? (“Anti-skepticism”); 3) Is human knowledge a social and historical phenomenon? (“Moderate collectivism”) (cf. Westphal 2006, p. 274).

according to Hegel, is already present in critical philosophy and in Fichtean idealism (the latter being a radicalization of the former). Hegel maintains, however, that the limit of these positions consists in their having given “to the logical determinations [*den logischen Bestimmungen*] an essentially subjective significance [*eine wesentliche subjektive Bedeutung*]” (WdL I, p. 35 [30]).

The relation between thought and reality, between mind and world, therefore should not be read in Hegel as “hyper-subjectivization” in an idealistic Kantian sense. It is rather to be understood as an attempt to escape from the shackles of “subjective idealism” (within which Hegel understands—not uncontroversially—Kant’s transcendental project). For Hegel, all subjective idealism is able to account for the intimate rational structure of reality only by conceiving of it as the “product” of a complex elaboration, which combines elements provided from our senses with elements belonging to our categorical apparatus.⁹ In a way both Kantian and Fichtean transcendentalism appear to Hegel to be ensnared in the oppositional structure of consciousness, in which the object can be known only to the extent that it can be reduced to the forms of consciousness. It is in relation to these points that Hegel elaborates his theory of “objective thought”—a theory for which his system as a whole (and not only *The Science of Logic*) means to serve as justification.¹⁰

It is clear that Hegel used the expression “objective thought” above all with the intent of challenging its ordinary meaning through a usage that cannot but appear oxymoronic. For in its ordinary meaning, “thinking” is inevitably something subjective, while the objectivity of something implies, just as obviously, its independence from subjectivity (its *mind-independence*). Indeed, as Hegel writes, perhaps the most ordinary and habitual manner of thinking about thought is to consider it one of the “faculties” or “spiritual activities” that *belong* to the subject “side by side with others” like sensibility, intuition, imagination, appetite, or desire.¹¹ Now, leaving aside the problems arising from the attempt to separate these “faculties” in man from their relation with thought,¹² what Hegel underscored is that if thought were simply a subjective activity (if it were reducible

⁹ Cf. McDowell 2009.

¹⁰ It is really in relation to the theory of “objective thought” that, as Wartenberg states, there is a precise sense in which Hegel is an idealist: “[H]e believes that concepts determine the structure of reality” (Wartenberg 1993, p. 103).

¹¹ Cf. Enz § 20.

¹² On this point see Soresi 2012, and Corti 2016. From this point of view, of particular interest is the dialectic that arises with respect to *sense certainty* in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, which, not by chance, drew the attention of McDowell as a decisive element for a conceptualist perspective.

to a mental event), and if this activity was therefore the object of logic, logic would not be differentiable in any way from a *philosophy of the subjective spirit* (understood as a philosophy of mind) or from *psychology*. In other words, it would not be differentiable from an investigation into how our mental processes actually “function”. Logic, from such a perspective, would be a sort of *ancilla psychologiae*, as it would be fundamentally based on psychology.¹³

Yet to say that according to Hegel the notion of “thought” at stake in logic should not be understood solely as a subjective activity does not mean that Hegel employs two different concepts of thought, which are not only distinctive but even opposing. There is not “one” kind of thought that is the subject matter of *logic* and another that instead is the subject of the *Philosophy of Spirit*. In both it is always the *same* thought, just in particularized senses; what can be found in the different “sciences” (for this also applies to the *Philosophy of Nature*) are thought’s different “elements.” Whereas in the *Philosophy of Nature* thought is located in the element of exteriority that is the natural world, and in the *Philosophy of Spirit* it appears in the element of human determination itself, what characterizes logic is that in it thought is treated precisely as “in itself.” It is considered, so to speak, independently from any other determination. To use Hegel’s own words: to say that thought appears in the logic as only “in itself” means that thought articulates itself “in this element lacking contrast.”¹⁴ Whereas logic is the study of the unfolding of the determinations of thinking within the (abstract) element of thought, nature and spirit instead represent elements in which thought does not appear with the same fluidity, since what comes into play with “Spirit” and “Nature” is some form of opposition that thought has

13 This is the direction one of the outcomes of Kantianism takes, one against which Hegel was never generous: that of Jacob Friedrich Fries, who in an explicitly anti-idealistic key intends to provide in his *Science of the Psychological Experience* a complete analysis of the interior experience of the subject through the instrument of introspective self-observation that highlights the forms by which consciousness is developed at an empirical level. Kantian philosophy, in Fries’ framework, becomes eventually a “psychic anthropology.” On Fries and in particular on his *System of Logic*, which constitutes an attempt to find an anthropological and therefore psychological foundation for logic, Hegel expressed himself thusly in a note in the introduction to the *Science of Logic*: “The shallowness of the representation or opinion on which it is based, in and of itself, and of the execution, dispenses me from the trouble of taking any notice of this insignificant publication” (WdL I, p. 36 [31]). On the philosophy of Fries understood as a credible alternative to philosophy of the romantic nature (obviously including that of Schelling and Hegel), inasmuch as Fries would have developed Kantianism in a coherent form with respect to the development of the “mathematical” sciences of nature, see Bonsiepen 1997.

14 Cf. Enz § 467 An.

to face (*objective constraints*) and which compels it to assume specific structures and categorical configurations.

Thus it is not thought, as ordinary consciousness understands it, that deals with “logic” in the sense in which Hegel means it. In the introduction to the *Doctrine of the Concept*, Hegel observes that the Concept is not to be considered “as the act of the self-conscious understanding, not as *subjective understanding*, but as the concept in and for itself which constitutes a *stage of nature* as well as of *spirit*” (WdL II, p. 20 [517]). Avoiding, as Hegel suggests, the “isolation” of thought as a faculty of the *subjective spirit* does not mean, however, that thought is not an activity characterizing the way of being a subject. Represented as the subject’s way of being, thought becomes *the thinker*, the subject that thinks: “[T]he simple expression for the existing subject as thinker is ‘I’” (Enz § 20).

Nonetheless, recognizing the “I” as a thinking subject—a subject in which thought is “active” and in which the self-movement of thought becomes conceivable—does not for Hegel restrict thought to some purely subjectivist determination. Rather, when the “I” engages in the activity of thinking, it has the capacity to go beyond itself, to overcome itself as a determined singularity and bring itself to a distinct level of objectivity through an act of liberation and of emancipation with respect to the elements conditioning it. For as a determined singularity, it is always necessarily situated and conditioned. The product of this activity called “thought” is in fact “the universal,” which contains, Hegel says, “the value of the *matter*, what is *essential, inner, true*” (Enz § 21). Thus thought does not simply mirror or offer another form for what is also provided by feeling, intuition, or representation. Inasmuch as it is *active*, thought grasps and produces the “universal”: it *transforms* empirical content, and “it is only *through the mediation* [vermittelst] of an alteration that the *true* nature of the *object* [Gegenstand] comes into consciousness” (Enz § 22).

For Hegel, the *true* nature of the object is not a “product” of the subject in the sense that the subject itself in some way “created” or “constructed” the object—this is a common reading of Hegel that understands the term “idealism” in a subjectivist sense. But for Hegel this position would have that feature that in the *Addition* he notably calls “the sickness of our time” (Enz § 24 An.). With this expression he refers to the mark of his era, which has reached the *desperate point* of recognizing only the subjective as true, and, in turn, of considering the subjective as the last limit, beyond which no subject is able to go.¹⁵ According to

¹⁵ In Enz § 24, *Addition* n. 3, Hegel speaks of the “subjectivity” of man as his “wickedness.” With reference, on one hand, to the doctrine of original sin and, on the other, to the Rousseauian conviction of the original goodness of man, Hegel maintains the theory of the natural viciousness of man, underscoring that, to the extent to which man is “simply natural,” he is wicked. As

Hegel, the perspective of *critical philosophy* also suffers from this “desperation”, for according to such an approach, the *true* nature of the object is true only because the subject has conferred it “transcendentally” with the nature of truth. The task of philosophy, according to Hegel, is to face this subjectivist assumption and show that the true nature of the object is true *not* because the subject *makes it true* but because, through the activity of thinking, the subject is able to go beyond the subjectivist limits of its own experience of things. *By thinking and through thought* the subject is able to transcend the subjective limits of its experience and is therefore able to grasp the true nature of the object.¹⁶

It is within this complexity that one must situate the Hegelian notion of the *Idea*: since through reflection one obtains the true nature of things, and reflection is an activity of the subject, “this true nature is also the *product of my spirit*, [of me] as thinking subject [...] or it is a *product of my freedom*” (Enz § 23). This is not a simplistic affirmation of the dissolution of the objectivity of things into a subjective or transcendental representation; nor does it imply the conflation of ontology with epistemology. The nature of things is a product of my freedom not because the true nature of things is the result of some voluntary act that *constructs* the nature of things (and consequently grants them some sort of “truth”). Rather, the true nature of things is a product of freedom insofar it is only by freeing itself from the conditioned “dimension” in which it is immersed that subjectivity can bring itself to the level of truth.

Freedom is in this sense the subject's capacity to emancipate above all *itself* from being *only* an individual, finite subject. Such a position, in which thought is both *in* the subject and simultaneously *that which allows* the subject to bring itself beyond its own subjectivity—to free itself—is in turn the condition of possibility for Hegel's peculiar take on objectivity. This view allows Hegel to conceive of objectivity as neither a dimension totally separate from thought (as if essence were totally independent with respect to the reflective process that makes it emerge) nor a mere “product” of the activity of consciousness (as if essence

“natural,” in fact, man does not correspond to his *proper* authentic nature, which is an overcoming of mere naturalness. But radically moving the discourse to a different level, Hegel also maintains that when man leaves his mere naturalness, but follows only his own particular and subjective goals, man continues to be originally wicked. Hegel identifies subjectivity, understood as man's escape from nature in order to satisfy needs through his own thought and actions, as *wickedness*. In this way, one might say that, as long as a human being remains a subject in the particularistic sense of the term, it is *necessarily* wicked.

16 On the subjectivist and transcendental framework as a presupposition to be rejected in order to understand the logical movement of thought, see Houlgate 2006, chapters two and three (*Presuppositionless Thinking and Presuppositions of Presuppositionless Thinking* respectively), pp. 29–71.

were a product of the subject itself and therefore devoid of any real anchoring to things in themselves). It is thanks to this double overcoming—both of an independent “objectivity” impermeable to the subject and of a subjectivist reduction of “objectivity”—that “thoughts can be called *objective* thoughts” (Enz § 24).¹⁷

Hegel, against any subjectivist reduction, intends “objective thought” to mean the organized structure within which something like reality assumes form and sense—the rational pattern that permeates all of reality. But contrary to a metaphysical perspective of the preformist persuasion, which was already criticized by Kant, this “objective thought” is not already given and guaranteed. There is no “objective thought” that is already constituted beyond subjectivity and that subjectivity must simply try to discover—like an archeologist searching in the subsoil for the ruins of a culture. “Objective thought” is nothing outside of the very process of thinking and is constituted only by the reflective activity of the subject on both itself and the world.

The reflecting activity carried out by the subject is, in fact, first of all a work of clarification and criticism of the forms and practices of thought that constitute subjectivity itself—but, as we have seen, are not simply its product. The work of clarification, critique, and reconstruction that the subject performs on its own forms and practices of thinking thus become the condition of possibility for the subject to free itself of its *solely* subjective dimensions. This clarificatory work allows the subject to transcend the dimension of “finite subjectivity” and bring itself to the level of “objective thought.”

In this way, Hegel provides us with a conception of “thought” as an activity that finds its justification—as well its foundation—in nothing other than his own unfolding. There is no firm and stable place for it to rest secure and well-established. The necessity revealed by logical connections is the only necessity “thought” can rely upon in the process of “uncovering” objectivity. This is a necessity that the thinking subject itself reveals in the process of thinking, on the one hand, and which at the same time is imposed normatively upon it as a framework within which to think, on the other.

However, if one intends “objective thought,” as Hegel indicates, to mean the rational pattern of the world, this cannot be understood as something given that has simply to be “uncovered” or that the subject must in some way only “find”. This rational pattern is constituted by the same work the thinking subject puts

¹⁷ In this sense, Enz §§ 20–24 tends to show how, departing from the notion of “thought” understood as activity of the subject and by analyzing the workings of this same thought (i.e. its attempt to grasp the universal and the essence of things), one reaches the notion of “thought” understood as “objective thought.” Consequently, one gets to the identification of “logic” as science of thought with “metaphysics.”

into action, yet still without being purely subjective. This rational pattern finds its justification first of all in the critical analysis the subject itself performs on the forms of thought within which it moves, which are initially given and therefore not justified. A first outcome, therefore, is that the subject frees itself from the limited point of view that accepts these forms as simply given. Yet through this process of logical critique and reconfiguration, the subject's thought is brought to that level of objectivity at which thought recognizes itself in things without thereby making them just mental constructs.

Thought, for Hegel, is therefore not a product of the subject. It does not *belong* in a strict sense to the subject. This is not because the subject is not properly thinking but because the subject is not, if we change the expression, “the master of the thought,” i.e. the one who can determine the very structures of thought:

It is all the less possible, therefore, to believe that the thought determinations that pervade all our representations—whether these are purely theoretical or hold a material belonging to sensation, impulse, will—that such thought determinations are at our service; that it is we who have them in our possession and not they who have us in theirs. (WdL I, p. 14 [15])

Thus determinations of thought are not simply instruments or “intellectual prostheses” that we use to *subjugate* the world. Similarly, the latter is not understood as the sphere of “the other”, or that which is separate with respect to thought. To the contrary, thought determinations constitute the horizon within which our thought moves.¹⁸

It is precisely because thought determinations are not simply a *product* or *instrument* we make use of thanks to one of our “faculties” that Hegel can arrive at the conclusion that the domain of thought determinations is the domain to which “our thought must limit itself” (WdL I, p. 14 [15]). Determinations of thought constitute the framework within which both our thought—which is essentially an activity of thinking—and the objective concepts of things find their meaning. Or rather, said still differently, *thoughts* (*die Gedanken*) are not intended “as a medium between *us* and the *things*”. This instead is how Hegel characterizes “critical philosophy,” as the position that understands thoughts as marking the *distance* between the thinking subject and a reality that presents itself in the form of the object of this thought. *Thoughts*, for Hegel, are rather the element in which both thinking activity and things find their realization.¹⁹

¹⁸ Obviously tied to this is the theme of language as structure in which “[t]he forms of thought are first set out and stored [*herausgesetzt und niedergelegt*]” (WdL I, p. 10 [12]).

¹⁹ The theoretical implications of the notions of objective thought in relation to today's philosophy of mind are developed in Halbig 2002. On the notion of “objective thought” as the most

5 Conclusion

It is in the sense we have just outlined that one can speak of Hegel's "conceptual realism."²⁰ This conceptual realism does not imply the naïve assumption of some existence of concepts independently from the existence of thinking subjects—since it is only through the work of subjectivity that these concepts actually find their reality. Highlighting the realistic dimension of thought is what allows us to grasp the specific "anti-idealistic" thread of Hegel's idealism.

The Hegelian position in fact intends to situate itself, on the one hand, beyond a subjectivist and instrumentalist conception of thought, i.e., a conception according to which the reality the subject speaks of is always and only its own construction, the appearance of something that remains inaccessible in its truth. On the other hand, Hegel's view goes beyond a conception in which reality is determined as simply other and opposing to thought itself and, precisely for this reason, is once again inaccessible. Such a conception is, for Hegel, simply the flip-side of the previous coin.

Hegel's *conceptual realism* thus is meant as a response as much to a constructivist approach—according to which the objectivity of reality depends above all on categorical requirements, on *conceptual schemes* imposed on reality by the subject—as to a realism that, in the attempt to save the independence of the world from its "mentalist" reduction, ends up declaring the impossibility of accessing the world and therefore legitimates precisely that subjectivism from which it hoped to escape.

In summary, it is possible to say that the concept of objectivity within the *Science of Logic* has an ontological meaning, for it involves a logical-conceptual redetermination of concepts traditionally belonging to ontology. The notion of "objective logic" in fact refers to the concept that *is*, or rather to the concept

pregnant expression for indicating thought that is the same in the subject and in the object, see also Höhle 1987, in part. vol. I, pp. 66–68—according to which the expression *objektive Gedanken* "summarizes in an excellent way the *Grundmotiv* of Hegel's objective idealism" (p. 67). According to Höhle, in fact, the Hegelian conception can be considered a sort of synthesis of both a position of the realistic persuasion and one that is idealistic (understood however in the subjective sense). In fact, in Hegel we cannot say, according to Höhle, either that our thoughts are oriented towards being or that that being is oriented toward our notions and subjective representations, since both being and our thoughts are oriented *in the direction of* and *starting from* "objective thought." More recently, Nuzzo 1992 has called attention to the notion of "objective thought." See also, again Nuzzo 1995.

²⁰ Cf. Stern 2009.

that has not yet become concept—i. e. the concept implicit in the determinations of “being” and “essence.”

Yet if *Objective Logic* is the path to freeing the conceptual form from “being” and from “essence,” the concept of objectivity in the *Logic of the Concept* (that is, in *Subjective Logic*) points to some kind of inverse movement, with the freedom of the concept obtaining an objective character. The Concept, in fact, as long as it remains a concept, is in some way a form of restricted freedom. To use Hegel’s vocabulary, it is only an “*an sich*” and not yet an “*anundfürsich*.”

With the notion of “objective thought,” Hegel aims instead at implementing a new determination of objectivity. In this way, Hegel radicalizes the Kantian idea according to which objectivity is a product of the *a priori* forms of subjectivity. Objectivity is thus concept that cannot be thought in opposition to “thought” but rather is a determination whose condition of possibility lies in thought itself. The step Hegel believed to have accomplished by taking Kant beyond himself could be understood as a sort of *de-subjectivation* of thought: Hegel rejects every form of the idea that thought is a “faculty” of the subject, embracing the position that sees “thought” as the condition allowing the subject to transcend its own subjectivity. Thanks to “thought,” the subject obtains an objectivity that is at once produced by the subject and yet never subjective.

It is therefore evident that the Hegelian concept of objectivity has neither a simply epistemological nature nor belongs purely to ontology. Hegel’s notion of objectivity does not refer to the problem of what allows the subject’s consciousness to be consciousness of objects, and therefore *objective*. By the same token, it is not a notion that indicates an ontologically understood “being” or reality that is as independent from thought and therefore from subjects (as happens in a realistic approach). Hegel’s concept of objectivity involves an overcoming of both an epistemological perspective—totally directed toward the conditions for knowing the world—and an ontological perspective that purports to make claims concerning some “being” that is independent (*mind independent*) from thought.

Objectivity is instead a process in which the thinking subject is freed of its own subjectivity, transcending its own being subject in order to go on to construct—and not simply discover—a dimension of reality, the “*Wirklichkeit*,” that is neither *mind independent* nor *mind dependent*, since it implies the overcoming of both these perspectives.

References

- Ak. | Kant, Immanuel (1900 ff.): *Gesammelte Schriften*. Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften (ed.). 29 vols. Berlin: De Gruyter. – English translation: Kant, Immanuel

- (1995 ff.): *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*. Guyer, P.; Wood, A. (eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [quoted with page number after the page number of the German edition].
- Enz | Hegel, G. W. F. (1991): *The Encyclopaedia Logic (with the Zusätze)*. Part I of the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*. Geraets, T. F.; Suchting, W. A.; Harris, H. S. (trans.; eds.). Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- WdL I | Hegel, G. W. F. (2008): *Wissenschaft der Logik. Erster Teil. Die objektive Logik. Erster Band. Die Lehre vom Sein* (1832). Gawoll, H.-J. (ed.). Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag. – English Translation: Hegel, G. W. F. (2010): *The Science of Logic*. Giovanni, G. di (trans.; ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press [quoted with page number after the page number of the German edition].
- WdL II | Hegel, G. W. F. (2003): *Wissenschaft der Logik. Zweiter Band. Die subjektive Logik. Die Lehre vom Begriff* (1816). Gawoll, H.-J.; Hogemann, F. (eds.). Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag. – English Translation: Hegel, G. W. F. (2010): *The Science of Logic*. Giovanni, G. di (trans.; ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press [quoted with page number after the page number of the German edition].
- Bonsiepen, Wolfgang (1997): *Die Begründung einer Naturphilosophie bei Kant, Schelling, Fries und Hegel*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann.
- Chiereghin, Franco (1980): *Dialettica dell'assoluto e ontologia della soggettività*. Trento: Verifiche.
- Corti, Luca (2016): *Pensare l'esperienza. Una lettura dell'Antropologia di Hegel*. Bologna: Edizioni Pendragon.
- Dummett, Michael (1996): *Origins of Analytical Philosophy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Engelhardt jr., Hugo Tristram/Pinkard, Terry (eds.) (1994): *Hegel Reconsidered: Beyond Metaphysics and the Authoritarian State*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Ferrarin, Alfredo (2001): *Hegel and Aristotle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Horstmann, Rolf-Peter (2008): "The Phenomenology of Spirit as a 'Transcendentalistic' Argument for a Monistic Ontology". In: Moyar, Dean/Quante, Michael (eds.): *Hegel's 'Phenomenology of Spirit'. A critical Guide*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 43–62.
- Houlgate, Stephen (1991): "Thought and Being in Kant and Hegel". In: *The Owl of Minerva* 22, No. 2, pp. 131–140.
- Houlgate, Stephen (2002) "Logic and Nature in Hegel's Philosophy: A Response to John W. Burbidge". In: *The Owl of Minerva* 34, No. 1, pp. 107–125.
- Houlgate, Stephen (2004): *Hegel, Nietzsche and the criticism of Metaphysics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Houlgate, Stephen (2005): *An Introduction to Hegel. Freedom, Truth and History*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Houlgate, Stephen (2006): *The Opening of Hegel's Logic. From Being to Infinity*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press.
- Kreines, James (2015): *Reason in the World: The Philosophical Appeal of Hegel's Metaphysics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- McDowell, John (1994): *Mind and World*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- McDowell, John (2009): *Having the World in View. Essays on Kant Hegel and Sellars*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pinkard, Terry (1994): *Hegel's Phenomenology. The Sociality of Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pippin, Robert (2001): *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pippin, Robert (2008): *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Rockmore, Tom (1994): "Hegel's Metaphysics, or the Categorical Approach to Knowledge of Experience". In: Engelhardt, Hugo Tristram/Pinkard, Terry (eds.): *Hegel reconsidered. Beyond Metaphysics and the Authoritarian State*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, pp. 43–57.
- Sluga, Hans D. (1977): "Frege alleged Realism". In: *Inquiry* 20, No. 1–4, pp. 227–242.
- Soresi, Sergio (2012): *Il soggetto del pensiero. Modi e articolazioni della nozione di pensiero in Hegel*. Trento: Verifiche.
- Stern, Robert (2009): *Hegelian Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Westphal, Kenneth R. (2006): "Contemporary Epistemology: Kant, Hegel, McDowell". In: *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, No. 2, pp. 274–301.
- Wartenberg, Thomas E. (1993): "Hegel's Idealism: The Logic of Conceptuality". In: Beiser, Frederick C. (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 102–129.