

Introduction

Thinking Transformation

This is an unconventional book on Hegel's logic. It is a book that arises out of the need to provide a philosophical account of the puzzle that is our present time of crisis. Indeed, the prelude that opens the first chapter has been written over and over again during the years I have been working on this book: there always seemed to be a situation of crisis going on—the content changing (an environmental crisis, a financial crisis, a political crisis), the predicament of crisis always the same. At stake is the dialectical puzzle of how we can provide the story of the present—a present of deep, unsettling, critical transformation—while living immersed in it. How can or should transformation be thought? Moreover, since our thinking is immanent in the very transformation it aims at comprehending, thinking itself must be able to change with the actuality it describes. Hence the previous question goes hand in hand with a second one: How can or should thinking transform itself? (I articulate these questions in chapter 1.)

This work proposes to view Hegel's logic as what I call a "logic of transformation" or a "logic of transformative processes." The two questions I just formulated occupy its very core. This work also proposes to view the logical forms or determinations developed therein as pure *figures of action*. (I justify this idea in chapter 3.) Hegel's logic is concerned with the transformation of pure thinking's most proper action. The question then is, How can transformation be assessed and performed at the same time? This I take to be the central problem Hegel addresses in the last chapter of the *Logic* dedicated to the method. But this is also the problem that we all face in living in our times of deep historical transformation. We are, inescapably, trying to make sense of what is happening in our world as well as agents constantly engaged in this world.

There is a sense in which thinking's own transformation can be followed in a linear reading of Hegel's logic that moves from the sphere of Being to Essence on to the Concept. But there is another possibility, which, I suggest, Hegel outlines at the end of the book in finally bringing to light the "method" that has been immanently developing the linear progression throughout those logical spheres. This is a *synchronic* reading of the logic—the reading that occupies the long argument of the present book. The idea is a simple one, an Aristotelian idea. The "absolute method," Hegel argues, has three moments: beginning, advancement, and end. They are the structures that articulate the *mythos-method* that is the logic; they are the structures of all meaningful story. Now, if the dialectic-speculative forms of the logic are figures of action, at stake in the method are the pure figures of the action that begins, advances, and ends. What is the action of beginning *as such*, in its pure form, independently of *what* it is that begins, independently of *who* it is that begins? This is the question raised by the method (and the topic of chapter 2).

Now, if at the end of our first linear reading of the Logic, instead of closing the book and moving on to some other activity, we start all over again, we are confronted with Being's action of beginning. At this point, instead of reading on to the end of the first logical sphere, moving linearly to Essence as the sequence of the book suggests and as we have done in our first reading, we will skip right to the beginning of Essence, and from here again right to the beginning of the Concept. What we produce, in this way, is a synchronic presentation or reconstruction of three logical actions of beginning in their respective specificity: Being's action, Essence's action, the Concept's action. By doing so, we are able to confront, synchronically, these three figures of the beginning and assess in one overarching account the transformation that occurs as the way of beginning changes across the three logical spheres. The three chapters of the second part of the book (chapters 4–6) offer precisely such a synchronic reading with regard to the action of beginning, advancing, ending. Thus, the synchronic reading is a device, suggested by Hegel's own account of the method, whereby the *transformative* character of Hegel's logic is brought to center stage.

Why is the reading proposed by this book important, both with regard to Hegel's logic, given the overwhelming baggage of interpretations and interpretive problems raised and debated during almost two centuries, and with regard to the issue I addressed earlier, namely, the understanding of transformation in reality and in thinking? Many are the interpretive questions that constitute the background of my present inquiries—issues that

have occupied me for many years and that I presently take on in a somehow indirect and unconventional way (I discuss interpretive issues in chapters 2 and 3). Let me mention here only two major ones. The first regards the way in which Hegel's logic, which, he suggests, explores the "realm of shadows" of pure thinking, relates to the 'real' world—the world we live in, the world Hegel investigates in his *Philosophy of Nature* and *Philosophy of Spirit*. The second issue regards the task Hegel poses to us, philosophers who think and act *after* him. What is to be done with his famous-infamous "system"? What with his "dialectic" and dialectical "method"? I address both issues indirectly, answering them through the method I use in articulating the synchronic reading of the logic's multiple beginnings, advancements, endings. In order to show the *real* import of the logical forms, their significance for human action in a context that is not necessarily nor exclusively Hegelian (and also, in addition, not exclusively philosophical), I appeal to literary texts such as Herman Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative)*, Molière's *Le Tartuffe, ou l'imposteur*, Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, and Giacomo Leopardi's and Elizabeth Bishop's late poems. Importantly, I do *not* offer an alleged "Hegelian" reading of these texts; rather, I use other voices and other narrative forms in order to offer a fresh and utterly unprecedented analysis of Hegel's text, an analysis able to bring to light how concrete, versatile, open to unimagined possibilities, the argument of the logic is.

This is, very briefly, how it works. The claim that the forms of Hegel's logic are *logical* figures of action allows me to *exemplify* their validity with regard to specific *real* figures of human action. I take Violence as one of the many possible real figures of the action that begins, and with the help of Melville's last novella, I show what is the difference between the violence—or the beginning—of Being, Essence, and the Concept (chapter 4). I take Fanaticism and Hypocrisy as the real figures of the action that refuses to advance, and with Molière's *Tartuffe* I show the importance of parsing out different forms of fanaticism (chapter 5). The end has a split story. Indifference is a real figure of the end pursued with Beckett's *Endgame*. But the end as the highest imaginative and creative action is exemplified by the poets—Leopardi and Bishop (chapter 6).

I close my introductory remarks here. The argument of this book is already way too extensive, and I want to leave the reader with the curiosity to pursue the relation between Hegel and Melville, Molière, Beckett, Leopardi, and Bishop further—with the chance to be thrilled, as I am, or skeptical and unconvinced, or perhaps even outraged as many other readers I am sure will be.