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Hegel and the Problem of Beginning

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Abstract

In this article I develop an interpretation of the opening passages of Hegel's essay 'With what must the beginning of science be made?' I suggest firstly that Hegel is engaging there with a distinctive problem, the overcoming of which he understands to be necessary in order to guarantee the scientific character of the derivation of the fundamental categories of thought which he undertakes in the *Science of Logic*. I refer to this as 'the problem of beginning'. I proceed to clarify the nature of the problem, which I understand to be motivated by a concern to avoid arbitrariness, and then to detail the nature of Hegel's proposed solution, which turns on understanding how the concept of 'pure being', understood in a specific sense to be both mediated and immediate, avoids the concerns about arbitrariness which accompany attempts to begin merely with something mediated, or merely with something immediate. On this basis, I offer a number of criticisms of alternative approaches to the beginning of Hegel's *Logic*.

I. Introduction

At least the first two books of Hegel's *Science of Logic* are commonly taken to constitute Hegel's version of Kant's metaphysical deduction of the categories, in so far as the work presents a derivation, a priori, of the set of fundamental categories or 'thought-determinations' with which we think and know.[1] It is clear that Hegel is motivated, at least in part, by his dissatisfaction with Kant's deduction and the desire to replace Kant's set of categories, just as Kant, dissatisfied by what he took to be Aristotle's excessively empirical procedure, sought to replace the latter's.[2] It is also clear that Hegel is of the opinion that Kant's deduction of the categories is insufficiently rigorous or *scientific*. The most obvious reason he gives in support of this judgement is that he takes Kant's reliance upon the classical forms of judgement in his deduction of the categories to amount to reliance upon unjustified or arbitrary presuppositions. Kant, as Hegel puts it, 'pick[ed] […] the functions of judgements, for the determination of categories, and simply accepted them as valid presuppositions' (*WL*: 525/12:28).[3]

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Hegel obviously thinks that this procedure is inadequate if one wants to present a properly rigorous deduction of the fundamental categories of thought. Indeed, he is committed to the idea that philosophical science should involve no reliance upon arbitrary or unjustified presuppositions. As he puts it,

> While engaged in thoughtful contemplation […] it soon becomes apparent that such activity includes the requirement to demonstrate the *necessity* of its content […] and to make or accept *presuppositions* or *assurances* regarding it appears illegitimate. (*EL*: §1)

In light of this perceived failing of Kant's, Hegel recognizes that '*thought-determinations* must be exhibited in their *necessity* and that it is essential that they be *derived*' (*EL*: §42). This demand, that the presentation of the fundamental categories should amount to a derivation which has the character of a demonstration of necessity, rather than, for example, a mere cataloguing of what might plausibly be thought to be the fundamental categories of thought, should in turn, according to Hegel, crucially inform 'the method of doing logic' (*EL*: §42). It is on this basis that Hegel begins the task of deriving the categories anew in his *Logic*, by exhibiting the 'necessary development' (*WL*: 19/21:18) of thought.[4]

Wolff has suggested that an adequate account of Hegel's improved 'method' for logic would include not only an account of the nature of the dialectical progression of Hegel's derivation of the categories, but also an account of the *beginning* and the *end* of that project (Wolff 2014: 86). The justification for the focus on the progression is clear: if Hegel's derivation of the categories *a*) lays claim to establishing the necessity of its content, and *b*) proceeds dialectically, then some attention must be paid to the nature of dialectical logical progression in order to see whether this claim to necessity is legitimate. The justification for the focus on the *end* of the project is less clear, but could be taken as a reference to Hegel's remarks which might be taken to suggest that the overall, systematic deduction of the categories has a holistic or circular character (*WL*: 49/21:57; 748/12:249), itself perhaps essential to the claim to necessity. I shall not have much to say about this issue here.

The justification for focusing on the *beginning,* I take it, is clear again. It is all very well to suggest that categories might be shown to dialectically imply one another, or develop out of one another, in a manner that can be rigorously tracked, but if this progression begins either from a misstep, or merely from an unjustified assumption, then this might be thought to undermine any claim to necessity that Hegel would want to claim for his own deduction. The beginning of Hegel's *Logic*, and the distinctive problem Hegel encounters there, is the focus of this essay.

In section II I shall suggest that Hegel begins his *Science of Logic* with the examination of a problem concerning how one ought to begin which he subsequently takes himself to have solved, and present an interpretation of the nature of

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Hegel's 'problem of beginning'. In section III I shall present an interpretation of Hegel's proposed solution to that problem. On that basis, in section IV, I shall defend my account against some anticipated objections, and offer criticisms of competing ways to understand the beginning of Hegel's *Logic*.

I should emphasize that my primary contention here is an interpretative one, concerning the nature of both the problem and the solution I take Hegel to be presenting. I will attempt to make the best possible sense of Hegel's solution, but I will not be evaluating its success in this essay.

II. The problem of beginning

It seems clear that, with the insertion of an essay entitled 'With what must the beginning of science be made?' between the introduction to the *Science of Logic* and the main body of the text itself, Hegel takes the issue of where one ought to *begin* such a project seriously.[5] The essay, at least in its second edition, begins with a statement of a problem:

> The beginning of philosophy must be either *something mediated* or *something immediate*, and it is easy to show that it can be neither the one nor the other; so either way of beginning runs into its rebuttal.[6] (*WL*: 45/21:53)

I will refer to this as the 'problem of beginning'. Upon a first reading its meaning is not clear, but what is clear is that three and a half pages later a solution has been found: 'The beginning is therefore *pure being*' (*WL*: 48/21:56). The rest of the essay is made up of clarificatory material on what is involved in thinking, and beginning with the concept of pure being, after which the main body of the text does indeed begin with this concept, with Hegel satisfied that he has justified this beginning in such a way that the derivation of the categories which follows from it can proceed on the basis of a beginning which has overcome the problem in question.

Whatever has taken place then, between the statement of the problem of beginning and its solution, must be taken by Hegel to have launched his scientific account of the fundamental categories of thought in a rigorous manner, so that the beginning can play its part in contributing to a logical project which can 'demonstrate the necessity of its content', or which is not open to the kind of sceptical objection that I mentioned earlier: an objection to the effect that if the beginning is unjustified or arbitrary, then what follows from it cannot lay claim to the status of a scientific investigation.[7]

Before proceeding to an interpretation of the nature of this problem, I will make one brief, clarificatory point. The problem of beginning as I understand it here is not the problem of the relation of the first categories of the logic: being,

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nothing and becoming. This issue is often discussed in terms of the 'beginning' of Hegel's *Logic*, for example in Henrich (1971: 75–84) or Pippin (2019: 195–210).[8] The relationship between this issue and the problem of beginning is a straightforward one. The problem of beginning comes *before* the issue of how to understand the dialectic of being, nothing and becoming. Hegel's proposed solution to the problem of beginning is supposed to justify beginning the *Logic* with the concept of pure being. After this has been achieved, one can then look at the manner in which this concept gives rise to and relates to the concepts of nothing and becoming. With that noted, I can turn back to the problem of beginning and attempt to provide a compelling interpretation of the passage.

The primary difficulty we face in grasping Hegel's problem of beginning is to understand what Hegel means by asserting first the necessity, and then the impossibility of beginning either with something immediate or with something mediated. I shall attempt to clarify the meaning of the problem before turning to Hegel's proposed solution.

The first thing to notice when reading the passage in question is that Hegel is giving voice to the problem in such a way that clearly renders it irresolvable:

(P1) One must either begin with something immediate or with something mediated.
(P2) One cannot begin with something immediate.
(P3) One cannot begin with something mediated.
(C) Therefore beginning is impossible.[9]

There is nothing unusual about posing a problem in this way before going on to present a solution, usually either by challenging a crucial inference or by rejecting a premise. And this is clearly an impasse Hegel thinks he has a way out of. This is made evident simply by the fact that the book which opens with the statement of this problem does not end straight away once the apparent impossibility of beginning has been stated.

The issue we face is that Hegel does not do a great deal straight away to make explicit the meaning of the terms utilized in the expression of the problem. He says that 'it is easy to show' that one cannot begin with something immediate or with something mediated, but he does not make it clear why this is the case. If we are to understand Hegel's proposed solution to this problem, we need to do more to understand the problem itself.

The manner in which I propose to go about clarifying the nature of the problem is to examine the relevant passages from the remainder of 'With what must the beginning of science be made?', especially those following shortly after the expression of the problem. In particular, I will concentrate on Hegel's usage of 'immediacy' and 'mediation' in this context. Admittedly, this material deals with Hegel's solution to the problem, but it also sheds some light on the meaning of the

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problem itself. Those elements of the material which pertain specifically to the solution to the problem in question I will ignore until section III.

We find in this material that Hegel does explore the two possibilities mentioned in his expression of the problem of beginning. First Hegel suggests that a 'beginning is *logical* in that it is to be made in […] *pure knowledge*; it is thereby *mediated*' (*WL*: 46/21:54). He elaborates:

> logic has for its presupposition the science of spirit in its appearance, a science which contains the necessity, and therefore demonstrates the truth, of […] pure knowledge and of its mediation. (*WL*: 47/21:54)

Leaving aside for now the meaning of terms such as 'pure knowledge' or 'the science of spirit in its appearance', this tells us clearly what is involved in beginning with something mediated: to begin with something mediated is to begin with a result. In other words, it is to begin with something supported by some argument, which it accordingly presupposes. Here 'to presuppose' does not imply an illegitimate assumption, but the legitimate sense in which a conclusion presupposes the argument which supports it, or perhaps even demonstrates its necessity. The motivation for beginning with something mediated is therefore clear. We have already seen that Hegel believes that philosophical logic must 'demonstrate the necessity of its content', and applied to the beginning this appears to imply that we should begin with something which is supported by or presupposes an argument which does exactly this.

The question now becomes why such a beginning must 'run into its rebuttal'. I think that the answer to this is precisely that we are concerned with *beginning*. Because of this, the validity of the purported supporting presuppositions in question cannot be taken for granted. Since they precede the inquiry, they are not themselves candidates for justification. Hegel makes this clear when he distinguishes logic from other sciences by appeal to the notion that only other sciences are entitled 'to apply presupposed forms of definitions and the like without further ado […] in order to establish their general concepts and fundamental determinations' (*WL*: 23/21:27). Logic is not permitted to make use of such practices. The support offered by what it is that a mediated beginning presupposes is therefore nullified, so that the necessity of the beginning in question has not been demonstrated after all. This is to render the proposed beginning effectively arbitrary, despite its apparent support. In so far as it is arbitrary, its necessity has no more been demonstrated than that of an opposing candidate for the beginning. In this sense, it can run into its rebuttal.[10]

Next, Hegel suggests that,

> if no presupposition is to be made, if the beginning is itself to be taken *immediately*, then the only determination of this beginning is

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> that it is to be the beginning of logic, of thought as such. There is only present the resolve, which can also be viewed as arbitrary, of considering *thinking as such*. (*WL*: 48/21:56)

This clarifies the matter. In the context of the problem of beginning, 'immediacy' implies making no presuppositions, or presuppositionlessness. The motivation for this idea is also fairly straightforward. If depending upon presuppositions at the beginning is to render the beginning problematically dependent upon material which is taken for granted, then perhaps it is better to begin without any presuppositions at all.[11]

Why should this approach run into its rebuttal? The answer, I think, is quite clear. Such an approach may avoid a problematic dependence upon presuppositions, but to describe a beginning as presuppositionless is in fact just another way of saying that it is a beginning which has nothing supporting it, or nothing in its favour. Hegel makes this clear when he rejects the possibility of beginning from some definition, suggesting that this amounts to beginning from something 'determined only arbitrarily. In this method of beginning science […] no mention is made of the need to demonstrate the *necessity* of its *subject matter*, and hence the necessity of the science itself' (*WL*: 29/21:33). Beginning with something immediate, or without presuppositions, is *just as arbitrary* as beginning with something mediated, or supported by presuppositions. Indeed, Hegel explicitly states in the passage above that a presuppositionless beginning can be viewed as arbitrary. As such, it has nothing to recommend it over any other beginning, and is therefore immediately open to rebuttal.

We can now see exactly why, in the context of beginning either with something mediated or with something immediate, 'it is easy to show that it can be neither one nor the other'. The problem of beginning is a problem about *arbitrariness*. If we begin with something mediated then we rely problematically on unexamined presuppositions, which undermines the attempt to render that beginning non-arbitrary by relying on the support of those presuppositions. If, on the other hand, we begin with something immediate, or presuppositionless, then the beginning is straightforwardly arbitrary. In both cases, it seems that no good answer is available to a sceptical interlocutor who asks, 'Why should I not begin with something else?'

With the nature of the problem of beginning clarified, I shall now turn to exploring the nature of Hegel's solution to the problem.

III. The solution to the problem of beginning

Hegel's response to the problem of beginning is not to abandon hope of beginning his deduction of logical categories in a rigorous or scientific manner. Nor is it to

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settle on one side of the dilemma he has constructed between beginning with something immediate or with something mediated, and to attempt to overcome the charge of arbitrariness encountered there.

Instead, Hegel proceeds by calling into question one of the premises in his presentation of the problem of beginning. The position Hegel is challenging is the one that supposes that the 'or' in 'The beginning of philosophy must be either *something mediated* or *something immediate*' must be understood *exclusively*. Hegel says of immediacy and mediation, 'that both these determinations prove to be *unseparated* and *inseparable* and the opposition between them nothing real' (*WL*: 46/21:54). This claim has broader philosophical implications, but here we should focus only on the solution to the problem at hand. The form of that solution has now become clear: 'It looks as though you must begin *exclusively* either with mediation or immediacy', I take Hegel to be saying, 'but if that is the case then beginning is impossible. *If*, however, we give up this presumption concerning the exclusivity of mediation and immediacy and instead examine the possibility of beginning with some thought which can be characterized in terms of *both* of these elements, it may be that we can begin in a scientifically rigorous manner after all'.

Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning, then, consists in locating a beginning for logic which is both immediate *and* mediated, or a beginning which is presuppositionless *and* which presupposes something which renders it non-arbitrary. Crucially, it will be the coincidence of these two determinations that enables each to overcome the problematically arbitrary status of the other.

Hegel's claim is therefore the following: for a beginning to be truly non-arbitrary, it must presuppose something or be mediated by something that renders it non-arbitrary, *but in such a way that this presupposition or mediation does not undermine or clash with the status of the beginning as at the same time presuppositionless or immediate*, and, it must be presuppositionless or immediate, *but in such a way that this presuppositionless or immediate status does not undermine or clash with the element of mediation or presuppositions rendering the beginning non-arbitrary*. This claim expresses the criteria that Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning must satisfy.

What follows the statement rejecting the opposition of mediation and immediacy in the *Logic* is an attempt on Hegel's part to spell out how this move renders possible a beginning for thought which is non-arbitrary, and therefore a candidate for beginning his deduction of the categories of thought in a rigorous manner, in so far as it is not open to sceptical objection. He identifies and describes the two determinations, first mediation and then immediacy, and explains that their coincidence yields the first category proper of the *Logic*, that of pure being.[12]

The rejection of the exclusive opposition between mediation and immediacy on Hegel's part must be a necessary but not sufficient condition for solving the problem of beginning. If it were sufficient, this would imply that any thought which exhibited both of these determinations would be an acceptable place to

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begin. Since Hegel clearly thinks that in some sense the two are present in *every* concept, but the *Logic* begins specifically with the concept of pure being, there must be something in particular about the accounts of mediation and immediacy which coincide in the concept of pure being which solves the problem of beginning.

The questions that must now be answered in order to render Hegel's solution intelligible are as follows: (*i*) What is the element of immediacy? (*ii*) What is the element of mediation? (*iii*) How do they coincide in such a way as to eliminate the problems which occur when beginning with either alone? The bare bones of this solution, one can hypothesize, will be that the mediated element in the beginning remedies or alleviates the arbitrariness of the element of immediacy taken alone, while the element of immediacy does the same for the arbitrariness threatened by the element of mediation. We can suppose that in such a situation, because the thought in question does not have the character of a problematic arbitrariness, it will not 'run into its rebuttal'. Instead, Hegel can assert the concept of pure being with security and his *Logic* can begin in a scientifically rigorous fashion.

I shall start with the first two questions. As previously stated, Hegel proceeds to identify the two elements of mediation and immediacy, and to argue that they coincide in the concept of pure being. Here is an abridged excerpt of that material, with the discussion of the element of mediation indicated with a [1], and the discussion of the element of immediacy indicated with a [2]:

> [1] [The beginning] is thereby *mediated* because pure knowledge is the ultimate, absolute truth of *consciousness* […]. [T]he *Phenomenology of Spirit* is the science of consciousness, its exposition […]. To this extent, logic has for its presupposition the science of spirit in its appearance, a science which contains the necessity, and therefore demonstrates the truth, of the standpoint which is pure knowledge […].
>
> [Pure] being is what makes the beginning here; it is presented indeed as originating through mediation, but a mediation which at the same time sublates itself; and the presupposition is of a pure knowledge which is the result of finite knowledge, of consciousness. [2] But if no presupposition is to be made, if the beginning is itself to be taken *immediately*, then the only determination of this beginning is that it is to be the beginning of logic, of thought as such. There is only present the resolve, which can also be viewed as arbitrary, of considering *thinking as such* […] and so there is *nothing* it may *presuppose*, [it] must not be mediated by anything or have a ground […] It must therefore be simply *an* immediacy, or rather only *immediacy* itself […] it cannot have any content, for any content would entail distinction and the

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> reference of distinct moments to each other, and hence a mediation. The beginning therefore is *pure being*. (*WL*: 46–48/21:54–56).[13]

As I explained in section II, Hegel associates mediation in this context with an argument, the content of which is presupposed in order to justify the beginning of the logical project, and immediacy with the notion of presuppositionlessness. The passage just quoted enables us to identify these elements. In brief, the element of immediacy, or presuppositionlessness, is identified as 'pure knowledge' or 'empty thinking', while the element of mediation, or the argument which the beginning is to presuppose, is identified with the critical interrogation of ordinary consciousness which Hegel undertakes in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. I will elaborate on these in turn.

By its very nature, it is difficult to say much about the element of immediacy in the beginning. In addition, we should be cautious about referring to other instances of Hegel's use of the term 'immediacy' for clarification, as no other use of the term on Hegel's part appears to signify genuine 'presuppositionlessness', since every other concept examined in the *Logic* presupposes, at the very least, the logical development which precedes it. It is clear then that the immediacy at the beginning of the *Logic* is a special case.

The first striking term used in the description of immediacy in the context of the beginning of the *Logic* is that of purity. The element of immediacy is described as the 'result' of a mediation, or the point at which it is called 'pure knowledge'. As Hegel puts it, 'Pure knowledge […] has sublated every reference to an other and to mediation; it is without distinctions and as thus distinctionless ceases to be knowledge; what we have before us is *simple immediacy*' (*WL*: 47/21:55). This emphasis on purity is not surprising, as we know that the concept that is to be thought at the beginning is that of 'pure being'. A lengthy discussion of this concept goes beyond what I want to achieve here, but we should notice that Hegel suggests that it is a concept which has no *content* (*WL*: 49/21:58). Hegel writes, later in 'With what must the beginning of science be made?', '[T]he beginning itself, is to be taken as something unanalysable, taken in its simple, unfilled immediacy; and therefore *as being*, as complete emptiness' (*WL*: 52/21:62). This characterization of the concept which the element of immediacy grasps as 'empty' is reiterated in the discussion of pure being proper, where Hegel uses the term 'empty thinking' (*WL*: 59/21:69).

This description of 'pure knowledge' as a kind of 'empty thinking' connects it to two other important terms shared by the characterization of the element of immediacy. The first is that what is at stake in the element of immediacy is the idea of considering 'thinking as such', and the second is that this has the character of something 'simple'. It seems that what Hegel has in mind is the idea of a purely

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reflexive thought, a thought where we simply think thought itself, but without characterizing it in any way, or without that thought having any content at all, beyond the simple understanding that thought is occurring.[14] As Hegel puts it more fully, the thought which he identifies as that of the element of immediacy 'is pure indeterminateness and emptiness […]. Just as little is anything to be thought in it, or it is equally only this empty thinking' (*WL*: 59/21:69).

What is important here is that we acknowledge that Hegel's claim is that, although this immediacy is the result of some mediation, in being empty, pure or simple, it makes no reference to the mediation which demonstrates its necessity, or which it presupposes. Hegel clearly thinks that this entitles him to characterize the element of immediacy as 'presuppositionless'. Analysing this claim about how it is that this element of immediacy can retain its presuppositionless status while presupposing some mediation which necessitates it, and therefore crucially renders it non-arbitrary, must wait until the element of mediation has been examined.

Potentially problematic in the context of Hegel's account of the element of immediacy, however, is the acknowledgment on his part of the possibility of arbitrariness. As he says, the element of immediacy amounts to a resolve 'which can also be viewed as arbitrary' that we propose to consider thought as such. This seems problematic, given that I have argued that Hegel's approach to the problem of beginning is motivated by the attempt to avoid arbitrariness. I think that there are two possible ways to render this passage unproblematic. The first is to notice that it sounds as though what is being described as arbitrary is not the thought, but the resolve on our part to think. If this is the case then there is no problem, because *why* one has decided to pursue some line of questioning should have no bearing on the justificatory status of what is thought.

If, however, one were not to accept this, and to insist that the element of immediacy itself is being characterized as potentially arbitrary, then it seems that this could be read in such a way that it supports my interpretation, rather than undermining it. Hegel says only that the element of immediacy 'can' be considered arbitrary. I would suggest that this 'can' indicates the two possibilities for considering the problem of beginning. If one has retained the exclusive opposition between immediacy and mediation and attempts to begin simply with the immediacy of empty thinking, then it will be problematically arbitrary. If, however, one gives up the assumption of that exclusive opposition, and engages in the immediacy of empty thinking on the basis of a mediation which necessitates it and coincides with it, then the charge of arbitrariness will not apply.

At this point I should identify the element of mediation. This is more straightforward than attempting to grasp the notion of empty thinking, as Hegel is quite explicit. The element of mediation is identified with the critical investigation of consciousness carried out in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. A lengthy investigation of the *Phenomenology* cannot be accomplished here, but from the perspective of a

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concern for the problem of beginning, it is clear that the *Phenomenology* amounts to an argument, the conclusion of which demonstrates the necessity of the beginning of the *Logic*.[15] More specifically, the argument of the *Phenomenology* begins from an account of consciousness which *opposes* itself to the idea that a priori thought might provide us with the fundamental categories with which we judge, because it insists that 'the beginning is made from empirical, *sensuous* consciousness' (*WL*: 47/21:55). The argument of the *Phenomenology*, regardless of whatever else it might also achieve, has the function of providing 'liberation from the opposition of consciousness' (*WL*: 29/21:33).

The element of mediation, or what the beginning must presuppose if it is to be justified, is the overcoming of the opposition of consciousness by way of the critical interrogation of consciousness undertaken in the *Phenomenology*. Some indication of how this must occur is required in order to answer the third question relevant to making sense of Hegel's proposed solution to the problem of beginning, to which I now turn.

The third question can be rephrased as follows: How do the elements of mediation and immediacy, or the phenomenological criticism of consciousness and empty thinking, *coincide* in the concept of pure being in such a way that they overcome the deficiency of beginning *merely* with something immediate, or *merely* with something mediated? The rough answer has already been suggested in the examination of the two elements: if the *Phenomenology* amounts to an argument, its conclusion *is* the pure knowledge or 'simple immediacy' which Hegel calls empty thinking. It is a mediation which results in an immediacy. From the perspective of the beginning of the *Logic*, the *Phenomenology* is an argument which is presupposed, and which has presuppositionlessness for its result.

This coincidence of the conclusion of the *Phenomenology* and the beginning of the *Logic* prompts the question of the compatibility of the two works, or of how it is that Hegel is able to say both that the beginning of the *Logic* is presuppositionless, and that it presupposes the work of the *Phenomenology*. I will attempt to provide a sketch here of how the argument of the *Phenomenology* and the beginning of the *Logic* might be thought to be compatible, although a lengthy engagement with the argument-structure of the *Phenomenology*, required for an in-depth, critical investigation of the compatibility or incompatibility of the two works, cannot be accomplished here.[16]

As stated above, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is an investigation of ordinary or 'natural consciousness' (*PhG*: ¶78), where this refers to a position, or a series of common positions on the relationship between thought and the object of thought, which take as their starting point the prejudice that thought must begin from some empirical or sensuous content, given to it from outside of itself. In so far as Hegel, in his *Logic*, is attempting to provide an a priori deduction of the basic categories of thought, or a scientific examination of thought by thought itself,[17] he therefore

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encounters this prejudice of natural consciousness's as a position fundamentally opposed to his own. In this sense, he says, 'the standpoint of consciousness […] counts as the *other* to science' (*PhG*: ¶26).

The argument of the *Phenomenology* is, accordingly, a critical investigation of the variations of natural consciousness, aimed at validating the self-examination of thought which characterizes the procedure of the *Logic*. It is, however, an *immanent* critical investigation, in that the criterion according to which such positions are evaluated is that of consistency between the standard which a given position of natural consciousness affirms as the standard of knowledge, and individual first-order knowledge claims demanded by the objects of knowledge.[18] This means that Hegel need not illegitimately presuppose the validity of the position he adopts in his *Logic* when evaluating natural consciousness in the *Phenomenology*. As he puts it, 'concept and object, the standard and what is to be examined, are present in consciousness itself […] the only thing that remains to us is purely to look on' (*PhG*: ¶85). The argument of the *Phenomenology* traces the modifications that the positions of natural consciousness must make to themselves in the face of the discovery of internal inconsistencies, with the ultimate result, according to Hegel at least, that the prejudices of natural consciousness are replaced with a position in which thought is able conduct its self-examination along the lines of the investigation of his *Science of Logic*. In this sense, the argument of the *Phenomenology* charts the '*cultivation* of consciousness itself into science' (*PhG*: ¶78).

This last point indicates the difficulty of rendering the conclusion of the *Phenomenology* compatible with the beginning of the *Logic*. The problem can be put in the following way: the conclusion of the *Phenomenology*, despite being the result of all of the developments of the examination of consciousness in that work, and despite needing to necessitate the beginning of the *Logic*, seems as though it cannot actually amount to anything that could be considered as a substantive presupposition from the perspective of the beginning of the *Logic*. Were it to amount to such a presupposition, it would be incompatible with--rather than coincide with--the presuppositionless immediacy of the beginning of that work. If such a conclusion is to be presupposed at the beginning of the *Logic*, it seems clearly incompatible with the characterization of that beginning as empty, immediate or presuppositionless. Yet one might well think that some sort of substantive presupposition is indeed suggested by the notion of the cultivation of consciousness into science, if this amounts to the replacement of one model of knowledge with another 'scientific' one, or if one agrees with readers like Houlgate, who takes the argument of the *Phenomenology* to result in 'a determinate conception of being as universal reason' (Houlgate 2006: 162).

It seems to me that the only way to overcome this difficulty is to suppose that the trajectory of the argument of the *Phenomenology* is fundamentally negative in character, so that its conclusion, or the cultivation of its original position into

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that adopted by Hegel in his *Logic*, consists neither in the establishment of a rich notion of being, nor in the replacement of one account of knowledge with another, or one set of presuppositions with another, but *only* in the total removal of the presuppositions of natural consciousness, so that the conclusion of the *Phenomenology* is no more than the total absence of the presuppositions characteristic of natural consciousness which were encountered along the way. This interpretation of the argument of the *Phenomenology* has been notably defended by Maker, who claims that the argument of the *Phenomenology* has just such a 'radically negative outcome' (Maker 1994: 93). As he puts it:

> '[T]he task of the *Phenomenology* as introduction to science is the *critical* task of showing that […] consciousness, as a determinate and presupposed structure, comes to eliminate itself' (Maker 1994: 78).

The virtue of this account is clear: if the *Phenomenology* does indeed have this negative trajectory, so that its conclusion is the total absence of presuppositions, then this conclusion coincides with the presuppositionless, empty thinking of the beginning of the *Logic*, while if the conclusion were instead some substantive doctrine about the nature of 'spirit' or some set of metaphysical, epistemological or methodological scientific principles, this coincidence would be impossible.

Although I cannot critically evaluate this interpretation of the *Phenomenology* here, the account given so far of Hegel's approach to solving the problem of beginning lends it some support. We saw earlier that Hegel takes it that the argument of the *Phenomenology* 'demonstrates the truth, of the standpoint which is pure knowledge' (*WL*: 47/21:54–55). We saw also that the account of pure knowledge at the beginning of the *Logic* is an account of a thinking without any content, or an empty thinking. At the end of the *Phenomenology* Hegel refers to the position he arrives at there as 'absolute knowing', or 'the simple unity of knowing' (*PhG*: ¶796), noting that what this form of thought produces '*is science*' (*PhG*: ¶798). If this mention of 'science' is taken, as seems reasonable, to be a reference to Hegel's logical project, then one might suppose, with Maker, that Hegel's 'absolute knowing' is identical to his 'pure knowledge', and therefore that the *Phenomenology* does have the kind of 'radically negative outcome' that Maker takes it to.

A detailed discussion of Maker's approach to this issue must be accomplished elsewhere.[19] What matters here is that, from the perspective of Hegel's statement of the problem of beginning, it looks as though an interpretation of the *Phenomenology* which takes it to have a radically negative outcome might allow us to overcome the concern about the possible incompatibility of the conclusion of that work with the beginning of the *Logic*. I note though, that this result turns on the validity of the argument of the *Phenomenology*, which I cannot assess here.

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At this point we have a suggestion as to how the conclusion of the *Phenomenology* and the beginning of the *Logic* might be thought to coincide successfully. I think that this allows us in turn to make sense of Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning. The problem, we can recall, was that beginning merely with something immediate, or presuppositionless, looked unjustified because it was to begin simply by asserting something, without supporting it in any way, while beginning with something mediated, or on the basis of something presupposed, looked unjustified because, from the perspective of the beginning, what was presupposed appeared merely to have been taken for granted, and therefore offered no true support.

As well as avoiding the problems which attended either side of the dilemma as it was expressed in the statement of the problem, Hegel's solution must also satisfy the criteria for a solution to the problem of beginning which I set out earlier. Accordingly, I suggest that Hegel's solution should be understood according to the model of the coincidence of the conclusion of the *Phenomenology* and the beginning of the *Logic* outlined above. The mediation in question is the argument of the *Phenomenology*, which, setting out from the presuppositions of natural consciousness and concluding in the total absence of any presuppositions, necessitates the empty thinking, identified as the immediacy in question, of the beginning of the *Logic*. In this sense the beginning is both mediated and immediate.

On this basis, we can describe the beginning of the *Logic* as mediated, or as a beginning the necessity of which has been demonstrated by what it presupposes, because this demonstration is the argument of the *Phenomenology*. This renders the beginning immune to the sceptical charge Hegel levelled at beginning with something merely immediate or presuppositionless, as this beginning is not just an arbitrary assertion: it is supported by the argument that demonstrates its necessity and thus does not straight away run into a rebuttal. And if that argument concludes negatively, in the collapse of the dogmatically held presuppositions of natural consciousness and thus in the coincidence, rather than the clash, of the conclusion of the *Phenomenology* with the beginning of the *Logic*, then the mediated status of the beginning does not undermine the immediate status of the beginning.

At the same time, we can describe the beginning of the *Logic* as immediate, or presuppositionless, because the empty thinking characteristic of the beginning does not refer to the argument which it presupposes. This renders the beginning immune to the charge Hegel levelled at beginning merely with something mediated, or on the basis of something presupposed, as this beginning cannot be said to be taking for granted some substantive result of the prior investigation: because it is merely empty thinking it is taking nothing for granted. Thus it again does not run into a rebuttal. And again because of the coincidence, rather than clash, of the conclusion of the *Phenomenology* and the beginning of the *Logic*, this presuppositionlessness, or the immediate status of the beginning, does not

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undermine the mediated status of the beginning. It should be clear that this satisfies the criteria for a solution to the problem of beginning set out earlier.

In fact, we can notice that this solution, set out at length above, has the following character: it replaces an opposition between two exclusive determinations which appeared to prevent Hegel's logical project from going anywhere. Instead, one determination—mediation—negates itself and results in its opposite—immediacy. The unity of these two determinations, the concept of pure being, solves the problem of their opposition. This solution conforms to Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* characterization of the '*moments of every properly logical content*' (*EL*: §79).[20] Although Hegel's dialectical or speculative model of demonstration has not been the object of the investigation here, this conformity on behalf of the solution developed above to Hegel's account of demonstration suggests that, by his lights, the solution of the problem of beginning represents an instance where '*an immanent connection and necessity* enters into the content of science' (*EL*: §81). This reiterates that its role is one of contributing to securing the scientific status of Hegel's logic.

Having spent some time setting out Hegel's problem of beginning and its solution, I shall now make some remarks concerning alternative characterizations of this material, and attempt to anticipate criticisms that might be made of the interpretation I have provided above.

IV. Alternatives criticized, objections anticipated

It would be a mistake to insist that Hegel attaches no weight to the claim that the beginning of the *Logic* must be immediate, or presuppositionless, and indeed, it is hard to find a contemporary reader of Hegel who would commit to such a view, however they might seek to interpret Hegel's insistence on this matter.[21] In light of the presentation of the problem of beginning above, however, it should also be apparent that it is unsatisfactory to focus *only* upon the immediate or presuppositionless status of the beginning of Hegel's *Logic*.

It seems to me that Houlgate makes the mistake of taking the central challenge of the beginning of the *Logic* to be only the problem of what constitutes a presuppositionless beginning. As he phrases the challenge:

> If we are to examine thought without presupposing that it has any particular structure, operates with any particular concepts, or is governed by any particular rules, what are we to understand thought to be? (Houlgate 2006: 31)

Houlgate's position is that answering this question with the concept of pure being is enough to provide an adequate beginning for Hegel's logical project. While he is happy to acknowledge that the argument of the *Phenomenology* might help one

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in attaining the position whereby one engages in the kind of empty thinking characteristic of the beginning of the *Logic*, he does not think that this argument is necessary to the validity of the beginning of the *Logic*, or that without its support the *Logic* is problematically arbitrary. Instead, he emphasizes that,

> Hegel points out that there is a direct route into speculative logic. All one needs to do is freely suspend and abstract from all determinate presuppositions about thought and being and render explicit whatever is entailed by the indeterminate thought (of indeterminate being) that results from this act of abstraction. (Houlgate 2005: 49–50)

This position is difficult to square with the one I have attributed to Hegel. As I have presented it, the problem of beginning takes the form of a dilemma between two problematic alternatives: beginning with something immediate or beginning with something mediated. Neither option appears satisfactory. Hegel's solution relies upon locating a beginning which is both immediate and mediated, and is not vulnerable to sceptical opposition or rebuttal in the way that either of the two alternatives taken alone is. Houlgate, it seems to me, effectively disregards the concern Hegel has expressed about a simply immediate beginning. He takes Hegel to have alighted on one horn of the dilemma—immediacy—and to be defending its adequacy.

Houlgate's defence of a simply immediate or presuppositionless beginning turns on the idea that this is superior to beginning elsewhere precisely because it presupposes less, and is therefore not open to the charge of uncritical dogmatism in the way that any other beginning would be.[22] But this seems to me simply not to answer the challenge posed to the value of presuppositionlessness in Hegel's problem of beginning: that *mere* presuppositionlessness is indistinguishable from an unsupported, arbitrary position. To overcome this objection the presuppositionlessness in question must be necessitated by something which it presupposes, not simply be the result of an arbitrary decision, as Houlgate would have it.[23]

There is another approach which has been taken towards the problematic status of the beginning of Hegel's *Logic*, and which might be thought to lay claim to making just as good sense of Hegel's remarks to the effect that the beginning must be both mediated and immediate as the account I have developed here. This approach appeals to the idea that the project of the *Logic* is in some sense a *circular* one. Shortly after the passages on the problem of the beginning, Hegel writes that 'Essential to science is not so much that a pure immediacy should be the beginning, but that the whole of the science is in itself a circle in which the first becomes also the last, and the last also the first' (*WL*: 49/21:57).

Some have taken this to mean that what secures the beginning of the *Logic* is the fact that Hegel connects its conclusion to its beginning, claiming as he does that 'the

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logic […] has returned in the absolute idea, to this simple unity which is its beginning; the pure immediacy of being' (*WL*: 752/12:252). Carlson, for example, understands the passage in which Hegel sets out what I have identified as the problem of beginning as Hegel insisting upon a *choice* between mediation and immediacy. As he puts it, Hegel 'chooses immediacy' and then 'justifies the choice because what is here presupposed is (much later) proven […]. His philosophy will take us in a circle. If the beginning is also the end, then the beginning is justified' (Carlson 2007: 26–27). Variants of this kind of claim are given in Rosen (1992: 39–49) and Kreines (2015: 241–45).

There are two ways that one might interpret the idea that Hegel relies upon the circular nature of the *Logic* to secure the beginning. The better one is that Hegel asks us to read the *Logic* in a provisional manner, putting aside our qualms about the beginning only to have them eventually soothed by the way in which the end of the project secures the beginning and renders it no longer questionable. Unfortunately for this interpretation, the text of the *Logic* makes it clear that Hegel judges such a procedure to be unacceptable, for he states,

> Nor is the said beginning an arbitrary and only temporary assumption, or something which seems to be an arbitrary and tentative presupposition but of which it is subsequently shown that to make it the starting point was indeed the right thing to do. (*WL* 50/21:58)

This then cannot be the right way to think about Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning. I cannot discuss his wariness of this procedure at length here, but it seems to relate to his demand for scientific rigour and certainty. Even if he is open to the idea that the derivation of logical categories might be justified by their circularity, he seems to want to avoid opening himself to the possibility that any step in the construction of that circle might be open to sceptical objection. This points us again towards the importance, for Hegel, of the beginning.

The other, worse, way to understand the claim about circularity as it relates to the problem of beginning would be to suppose that Hegel genuinely thinks that it is legitimate to have the beginning depend for its justification upon that which it itself is to play a key role in justifying. This would be to make the *Logic* viciously circular. We must therefore reject accounts of the beginning of Hegel's *Logic* which appeal to the circular nature of the work to solve the problem of beginning.

Still, this line of thought is undoubtedly capturing something essential about the procedure of the *Logic*. Hegel might be taken to suggest, at the end of the work, in claiming that we have once again reached pure immediacy 'through mediation' (*WL*: 752/12:252), although this time the mediation of the project of the *Logic* itself rather than that of the *Phenomenology*, that this constitutes an additional demonstration that the beginning must be both mediated and immediate. I must emphasize that while this may be the case (I do not propose to examine this possibility here, as

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I take it to be unnecessary to the task of presenting Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning), it could *only* be an additional or supplementary demonstration. It certainly cannot replace the solution set out in section III. There the beginning was mediated by the argument of the *Phenomenology*, and did not rely upon the material developed over the course of the *Logic*. But if the rigorous nature of that development, or its scientific status, depends upon the solution to the problem of beginning, as I have suggested that it does, then to have that solution depend in turn upon the development of the *Logic* can only lead to the kind of problems with circular justification which I have set out above.

The mistake I believe that Carlson and the others are making is to confuse two different points of Hegel's. They are focusing on the fact that Hegel, as we have seen, thinks that the circular structure of the work is 'essential' to logic, and supposing that this indicates that it is his solution to the problem of beginning. However, Hegel does not claim that circularity is essential to the *beginning* of logic. His claim is that it is essential to the science of logic as a whole (presumably to the project of the justification of the set of fundamental categories presented in that work).[24] Admittedly, Hegel himself does not clearly separate these two issues. Still, while it may very well be that the full import of the *Logic* can only be understood in a re-reading which takes place from the perspective of its end, and the coincidence of that end with the beginning, this reading only has any force if the first reading can reach that end with certainty.[25]

By way of conclusion I would like to attempt to anticipate potential objections to my presentation of Hegel's engagement with the problem of beginning. The first objection would be to dispute the claim that the concept of pure being occurs as the coincidence of the elements of mediation and immediacy, because Hegel states that pure being is not mediated. So, for example, he writes, in the context of the account of pure being that, 'the first beginning cannot be anything mediated' (*EL*: §86). It is also true that the account of pure being which follows 'With what must the beginning of science be made?' makes mention only of the immediacy of pure being. This does not, however, detract from the fact that, in that essay, Hegel has described pure being 'as originating through mediation' (*WL*: 47/21:56).

The way to understand Hegel's emphasis only on the immediacy of pure being, then, is to accept that this concept is both mediated and immediate, but to remember that once this has been accepted, in considering the concept of pure being on its own terms, we attend only to its simple immediacy. Hegel makes this clear when he writes that

> *pure being*, this absolute immediate, is just as absolutely mediated. However, *just because* it is here as the beginning, it is just as essential that it should be taken in the one-sidedness of being purely immediate. (*WL*: 50/21:59)

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This fits my presentation of Hegel's solution of the problem of beginning. The beginning must be presuppositionless in such a way that, although it requires some presupposition to render it non-arbitrary, its presuppositionless status undoes the problematic nature of a reliance upon presuppositions. Thus, when considering pure being, we should expect it no longer to refer back to the mediation which it presupposes, and to be considered as a simple immediacy.

A further objection to the idea that the concept of pure being solves the problem of beginning in so far as it is both mediated and immediate might be made by claiming that Hegel disallows such a possibility when he rejects the idea that the beginning could consist 'in a connection of distinct elements […] [whereby it] therefore contains *mediation* within itself' (*WL*: 52/21:61). He adds,

> that with which the beginning is to be made cannot be […] anything containing a connection *within its self*. It is because, as such, it would presuppose within itself a process of mediation and the transition of a first to an other […]. But the beginning ought not itself to be already a first *and* an other, for anything which is in itself a first *and* an other implies that an advance has already been made. (*WL*: 52/21:62)

It might be thought that here Hegel is ruling out the idea that pure being could be the coincidence of mediation and immediacy, especially if, as I have suggested, that coincidence consists in the *result* of the mediation being identified with the element of immediacy. But as we have seen, this procedure is precisely what he has suggested in his presentation of the solution to the problem of beginning only a few pages earlier in the text.

This passage should be put in context. Here Hegel is explicitly entertaining the notion of beginning *not* with pure being, but with the analysis of a presupposed '*representation*' (*WL*: 51/21:60) of the notion of beginning itself. Hegel rejects this possibility, of a beginning which 'presupposes that the representation of beginning is known' (*WL*: 52/21:61) precisely for the reasons he gives above: that such a representation will always be to some extent complex, or contain connected elements within itself. This then clearly falls short of the simple immediacy Hegel demands for the beginning.

How is it then that the characterization of pure being as both mediated and immediate does not also imply that the concept has a connection within itself, that it is 'first and other'? The answer to this question must lie in the nature of the *genuine coincidence* of the elements of mediation and immediacy in the concept of pure being, facilitated by the fact that the conclusion of the mediation is a negative or empty one. The concept of pure being is to be thought of as an immediacy which no longer exhibits any relation to the mediation which gave rise to it. If it is thought that the concept of pure being still cannot admit of such a description,

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given its 'purity', we should remember that Hegel will later claim of the concepts examined in the *Logic* that '*every* concept is a unity of opposed moments' (*WL*: 158/21:180). On pain of contradiction, this must also be true of the concept of pure being.[26]

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Notes

[1] Abbreviations used:

EL = Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline Part I: Science of Logic*, trans. K. Brinkmann and D. O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

PhG = Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. T. Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

WL = Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. G. di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)/Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, in *Gesammelte Werke* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1968–).

[2] See Kant (1998: A81/B107). While it is clear here that Kant considers Aristotle's inclusion of empirical categories to be problematic, this is not the whole story. The criticism with which Kant opens this passage concerns what he takes to be Aristotle's lack of a unifying principle according to which the categories are to be assembled. It is presumably this lack which prompts Aristotle's collection of categories 'as he stumbled on them'.

[3] Hegel says of this procedure of Kant's that it ultimately reduces to the idea that the categories are 'assumed empirically' (*WL*: 541/12:44). It seems that although Hegel acknowledges and affirms Kant's claim that, as Hegel characterizes it, the conceptual 'does not issue from the empirical as such, it belongs to the spontaneity of *thinking* or the a priori' (*EL*: §40), he believes that, in his execution of the metaphysical deduction, Kant failed to live up to this ideal.

[4] I take this claim concerning the demonstration of the necessity of the content of a science to mean that the case which establishes that content does so in such a manner that it is rationally necessary to accept its findings, so that one could not, in the face of the demonstration, rationally hold to some contrary alternative.

[5] This might be thought to be in tension with Hegel's comments warning against a '"thoroughness" which is so satisfied with itself' which obsesses over the beginning of the *Logic* and refuses to engage any further until the 'solidity [of the beginning] has been demonstrated' (*WL*: 21/21:19). A closer look at the context of this passage relieves this worry. Firstly, it is clear that

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Hegel has in mind critics of his who obsess over the validity of the dialectical opposition between the concepts of being and nothing. But this opposition is not the topic of 'With what must the beginning of the science be made?' so this warning does not apply here. Secondly, Hegel is taking issue with critics who criticize the beginning of the *Logic* on the basis of principles which themselves are simply taken for granted. This objection, on Hegel's part, actually *lends* support to the idea that the issue of the beginning is of vital importance, since it is here that Hegel is attempting not to make the same mistake as these critics.

This criticism of his critics, on Hegel's part, is partly straightforwardly a charge of uncritical dogmatism, but it is also informed by the fact that, unlike Reinhold or Fichte before him, for Hegel the problem of beginning is not the same as the problem of providing a first principle or fundamental ground. Although I cannot recreate the history of this issue here, it is certainly relevant to this topic of this essay (See Franks: 2005 for one interesting account). As di Giovanni points out in a note to his translation of the passage which expresses the problem of beginning, it looks as though Hegel's account follows Fichte's presentation of the problem of the first principle in the *Wissenschaftslehre* (Fichte 1970: 93). The important difference is that, as, for example, Franks has pointed out (Franks 2005: 375–77), for Hegel the fundamental principle, or the 'concept,' is not something which is set out at the beginning, but attained on the basis of a different model of demonstration than that which moves only from secure first principles to conclusions on the basis of traditional logical proof. That different model is a model of dialectical or determinately negative demonstration (although I cannot enter into a discussion of the nature of dialectical demonstration here, see Bowman 2013: 43–61 for an excellent account of Hegel's innovation). This means that the question of the fundamental principle has suddenly been separated from the question of beginning, but not that the question of beginning has disappeared. It is this latter question which is under investigation here.

[6] Di Giovanni renders *Widerlegung* as 'contradiction'. 'Rebuttal' is perhaps a better translation of the term, especially in this context, as it helps to clarify that Hegel's claim is not that either way of beginning has generated a logical contradiction, but that each is vulnerable to rebuttal, because, as I shall argue, faced with some alternative candidate for a beginning, neither has recourse to anything with which it can support its claim to be the place where philosophy ought to begin.

[7] I am following Bowman, who understands Hegel's emphasis on 'science' as a commitment to a Wolffian ideal of demonstrating with certainty, or irrefutable reasoning, the truth of one's claims (see Bowman 2013: 71).

[8] Pippin in fact explicitly takes the passage which I take to express the problem of beginning to be an anticipatory statement of the inadequacy of the concept of 'pure being' and to indicate the move to the concept of 'becoming' (see Pippin 2019: 197). I am confident that the account I provide here of the meaning of this specific passage makes better sense of it, but that is not necessarily to disagree with Pippin's account of the move from pure being to becoming. It is merely to say that this specific passage does not support his account in the way that he takes it to.

[9] See also Wolff (1996: 240–41), for a similar rephrasing of this argument. Wolff thinks that this 'negative dilemma', as he calls it, is 'transformed' into a 'positive dilemma' which guarantees that

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the *Logic* must begin with the concept of pure being, with the latter dilemma functioning as a proof by cases. I believe that the account of Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning that I give in section III makes better sense of the text than this account.

[10] This interpretation of what is wrong with beginning with something mediated seems to me to be better than that proposed by those like Menahem Rosen, who think that the issue with beginning with something mediated is that it is therefore not in fact the beginning (see Rosen 1992: 40. See also Rosen 2014: 82 and Wolff 1996: 241). Hegel seems quite alert to the possibility that one might genuinely *begin* with something mediated. His claim is not that this would then not be a beginning, but that such a beginning is bound to run into a rebuttal, presumably because its support in fact offers no real support at all.

[11] The emphasis on the presuppositionless character of the beginning is at the heart of Houlgate's influential (2006) account of the beginning of the *Logic*. So much so that he seems to take the problem of how the beginning can be presuppositionless to be the central problem when considering the beginning of Hegel's *Logic* (see Houlgate 2006: 31). Houlgate is of course right to notice that the presuppositionless character of the beginning of the *Logic* is of importance to Hegel. It should already be clear, however, that the emphasis on presuppositionlessness cannot be the whole story. If presuppositionlessness is identified with the idea of an immediate beginning, then Hegel's statement of the problem of beginning looks as though it is calling into question the value of a presuppositionless beginning just as much as it is calling into question the value of a beginning made on the basis of something presupposed. I make some critical remarks concerning Houlgate's account along these lines in section IV.

[12] This element seems to me to be what Wolff, in his construction of Hegel's 'positive dilemma', underplays. In reading Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning as a proof by cases ('immediacy or mediation; if immediacy then pure being; if mediation then pure being; therefore pure being'), he seems to pay insufficient attention to the claim about giving up the exclusive opposition between immediacy and mediation (See Wolff 1996: 240–42).

[13] As I read it, *EL*: §78 is another presentation of the manner in which the elements of mediation and immediacy can coincide, but with two important differences. Firstly, the role allocated here to the *Phenomenology* is replaced with an appeal to the 'negative science' of 'consummate scepticism', and secondly, Hegel appears to reject the necessity of the element of mediation for solving the problem of beginning. Both of these are important, but the extended discussion that they require cannot be accomplished here.

[14] This account is indebted to Houlgate (2006).

[15] Hegel earlier makes the same claim: that the 'absolute beginning' of the *Logic* presupposes the work carried out in the *Phenomenology,* and that this work thereby justifies that beginning (*WL*: 28–29/21:32–33).

[16] I attempt to provide such a critical investigation of exactly this topic in Dunphy (forthcoming).

[17] '[H]ere *thinking* would have to be made the object of thinking' (*EL*: §17).

[18] A detailed discussion of the immanent critical approach of the *Phenomenology* and the manner in which a given iteration of natural consciousness revises its criteria for knowing, and thus itself, is provided in Westphal (1988).

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[19] Maker's approach has received further support from Winfield. See for example Winfield (2013: 21 and 377–78). By contrast, see Houlgate (2006: 162), where he suggests that the conclusion to the *Phenomenology* is far more substantive, and that therefore between the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*, some 'act of abstraction' must occur, in which the majority of the conclusions of the *Phenomenology* are set aside. See Dunphy (forthcoming) for a critical analysis of Maker's position.

[20] See *EL*: §§79–81 for Hegel's account of these moments. It should be clear that the problem of beginning as I have presented it here corresponds to this account.

[21] See McGilvary (1897: 511–12) for an attempt to play down the importance of the presuppositionless status of the beginning of the *Logic*. As well as providing no adequate response to the problem of beginning, it also seems to risk rendering Hegel's account of the categories ultimately dependent upon empirical cognition.

[22] See, for example, Houlgate (2006: 30–32).

[23] It should be pointed out, to save confusion, that Houlgate does defend the possibility of certain 'presuppositions of presuppositionless thought' (Houlgate 2006: 54), such as the willingness of a philosopher to engage in the type of thinking present at the beginning of the *Logic*, or historical trends towards self-criticism in philosophy. I am entirely in agreement with him here, but this material is intended by Houlgate to defend the possibility of presuppositionless thought from Hegel's critics. It is *not* intended to justify the presuppositionlessness with which the *Logic* begins, where this justification is taken as necessary to the success of that beginning, or to amount to a defence of the kind of solution to the problem of beginning which I am attributing to Hegel here.

[24] I have not provided a discussion of the sense in which the *Logic* is circular here, nor of its importance to Hegel's logical project. To do so falls beyond the boundaries of this investigation. The point is that this circularity is not Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning.

[25] See Nuzzo (2011) for a suggestion along these lines.

[26] I am grateful for the comments of two anonymous reviewers for the *Hegel Bulletin* which helped significantly improve this essay.

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