Hegel's Contradictions[1]

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Perhaps one of the most difficult passages in Hegel's *Science of Logic* is his treatment of contradiction.[2] If each moment of Hegel's logic is understood to constitute a sort of proof and since contradiction itself is presented as a moment of the logic, then in what sense can one comprehend a proof of contradiction as such? It is difficult to formulate this in any way that does not sound fundamentally incoherent, since it is not just at odds with our ordinary way of thinking but also with the overwhelming majority of the Western philosophical tradition.[3] The basic problem, essentially, is this: if Hegel's logic includes contradiction as one of its moments, then how is Hegel's entire philosophical project not simply incoherent?

In the first part of this article, I will attempt to demonstrate one way in which Hegel's treatment of contradiction could in fact be considered coherent, through a close reading of the relevant passages.[4] In this reading, I will particularly focus on the function of Hegel's dialectical concept of sublation (*aufheben*), and attempt to show (by example) how analysing Hegel's nuanced use of sublation can help us to work through some of his logic's complexities. The overall purpose here will be to present a systematic (as opposed to historical) exposition of Hegel's concept of contradiction and to illustrate the important role that this concept (as *the contradiction of contradiction*) plays in Hegel's logical method. In the second part, I will examine one particular but significant instance of contradiction, found in the relationship between Hegel's use of sublation in the transitions of the *Science of Logic* and the structure of the system as a whole (as *the contradiction of sublation*). In effect, each of these two discussions of contradiction relative to sublation will function as a sort of mirror image of the other. In the end, I hope to show that while Hegel's treatment of contradiction is basically valid, it does not follow from this that the system he articulates there is therefore untroubled by it.

I. The Contradiction of Contradiction

A. The Problem of Contradiction

In order to explain why Hegel's discussion of contradiction seems so problematic, I will begin by presenting a brief summary of it. At the beginning of the section of the *Logic*

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which deals with contradiction directly, Hegel recapitulates what has led his readers up to this point:

> Difference as such contains its sides as moments; in diversity they fall indifferently apart; in opposition as such, they are sides of the difference, one being determined only by the other, and therefore only moments; but they are no less determined within themselves, mutually indifferent and mutually exclusive: the *self-subsistent* determinations of reflection. (SL 431, my emphasis)[5]

So, at the (immediately preceding) level of opposition, the determinations of reflection become self-subsistent (*selbständig*). They are no longer merely self-related or externally related, but internally related:

> As this whole, each is mediated with itself by its other and contains it. But further, it is mediated with itself by the non-being of its other; thus it is a unity existing on its own and it excludes the other from itself. (SL 431)[6]

That is to say, internally related terms both contain their other (as part of their definition) and at the same time exclude their other (as another part of their definition).

This internal relation, which up to this point Hegel has insisted upon, and the lack of which has been the basis of his claims on the inadequacy of the other, prior moments of identity and difference, now becomes problematic at the level of contradiction itself.

> The self-subsistent determination of reflection that contains the opposite determination, and is self-subsistent in virtue of this inclusion, at the same time also excludes it; in its self-subsistence, therefore, it excludes from itself its own self-subsistence. For this consists in containing within itself its opposite determinations — through which alone it is not a relation to something external — but no less immediately in the fact that it is itself, and also excludes from itself the determination that is negative to it. It is thus contradiction (SL 431).[7]

This is the apparent basis of a logical transition from the moment of opposition to contradiction. It is analogous in structure to the earlier transitions between the moments of difference (e.g., absolute difference, diversity and opposition) insofar as each of these transitions (e.g., absolute difference to diversity and diversity to opposition) involved an inadequate, weak articulation of their variance[8] That is, absolute difference was inadequate because it assumed there was no relation whatsoever to its other and diversity was inadequate because it assumed the relation to its other was merely external. In each of these cases, the variance is understood as inadequate because it is not completely

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articulated or determined. Each sort of difference is contrasted to some other but also remains to a certain extent separated or removed from its other. Hegel will ultimately reject the very idea of any such self-subsistent difference. As we shall see, for Hegel, difference as such is only fully articulated in contradiction.

Hegel explains the similarity among these transitions as follows:

> Difference as such is already *implicitly* contradiction; for it is the unity of sides which are, only in so far as they are not one — and it is the separation of sides which are, only as separated in the same relation (SL 431, my emphasis).[9]

In other words, contradiction is already implicitly present from the outset in the form of the transitions themselves. It should be noted, however, that this common aspect of the transitions should not be understood as indicating the formal identity of those transitions; their structure is similar, but not in every case the same.

The recognition of such a distinction here (between the similarity and identity of the transitions) is important for two reasons. First, a formal identity or uniformity across transitions would contradict Hegel's explicit rejections of formal method in his *Logic*.[10] If Hegel's logical method were simply a single form applied by rote, in the same manner in every transition (as a sort of 'dialectical assembly line'), then it would be difficult to distinguish Hegel's own approach from the formalism that he rejects.[11] Second, the attribution of a uniformity across all transitions is not consistent with Hegel's own articulation of those transitions; while similar, they do not all follow the precisely same pattern. For example, the first transition of the *Science of Logic* is notably not a move from being to nothing but from being *and* nothing to becoming. Since being and nothing are both described as 'pure indeterminateness' (*reine Unbestimmtheit*) (e.g., SL 82; HW 5/82), any prioritisation of these moments (i.e., any sort of temporal or logical sequence) would illegitimately introduce a determination into their stipulated indeterminacy; it is the implicit contradiction between being and nothing, not within either separately, that leads to the moment of becoming. Thus, the very first transition of Hegel's logic is in fact already an exception to the sort of uniform pattern that has often been ascribed to it.[12] As we will see shortly, Hegel's account of contradiction will involve another such 'idiosyncratic' transition.

While there is no strict uniformity among the transitions of Hegel's *Logic*, there is, as we have seen, a certain similarity. In addition, there is also of course a progression, from one transition to the next. The more closely related Hegel understands the two sides of a variance to be (either self-related, external or internal), the stronger he tends to understand that variance to be. One could think of this in terms of two magnets being pushed together; the closer they are, the stronger the force keeping them apart. For Hegel, as well as for ordinary thinking, contradiction is the strongest possible variance (i.e., difference) because dissimilar earlier transitions, which each involved their own

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particular contradiction, the transition from opposition involves not just *a* contradiction, but the transition to contradiction *as such*.[13] The implicit contradictions of the earlier transitions at this point become explicit, no longer simply elements of this or that particular logical operation but now presented as a moment of the system as a whole.

The key difference between the previous, particular contradictions of the specific transitions and contradiction presented as a moment of Hegel's logic in general comes to the fore in the process of its resolution. Whereas the earlier contradictions were resolved as later moments, Hegel claims (at least initially) that contradiction as such, as a moment rather than simply as an element of a transition, must resolve *itself* ('*Der Widerspruch löst sich auf*') (SL 433; HW 6/67). This, I think, is where the main difficulty for ordinary thinking first arises.[14] That an argument could *result* in a contradiction is easily conceivable. An argument that results in a contradiction is simply false. That a particular contradiction could be *resolved* is also not problematic. In any argument, a particular contradiction can be resolved either insofar as at least one of its constituent terms is itself determined to be false or through the reformulation of its terms in such a way that they are no longer mutually exclusive. It is in this way that a claim can be determined to be (at least possibly) true. This latter, utterly commonplace approach is essentially similar to Hegel's own; generally speaking, the contradiction of the earlier moment is resolved in the transition to a later one, by reformulating its terms. Hegel's apparent claim, however, that contradiction *as such* could be resolved, and moreover that it could resolve itself, is, from an ordinary point of view, utterly baffling. This remarkable claim is perhaps the primary reason why his discussion of contradiction is often considered to be so problematic, and why there has been such a widely divergent range of interpretations of Hegel's words on this point. In order to clarify the issue, we shall now examine in more detail how exactly Hegel formulates this resolution.

B. The Two Resolutions of Contradiction

To start with, Hegel in fact presents not one but two possible resolutions for contradiction. The first is, in effect, an ordinary one:

> In the self-excluding reflection we have just considered, positive and negative, each in its self-subsistence, sublates itself; each is simply the transition or rather the self-transposition of itself into its opposite. This ceaseless vanishing of the opposites into themselves is the first unity resulting from contradiction; it is the null. (SL 433)[15]

So the 'first unity' of contradiction is the one ordinary thinking would expect: nothing. Here, the terms of opposition (the positive and negative) sublate themselves, and are thereby reduced from what they are on their own terms to what they are in the transition to their opposites and the result of a contradiction 'cancels out', or is reduced to nothing

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(i.e., the 'null'). In other words, what is contradictory is demonstrated to be false. So far, so good.

But what exactly does Hegel mean here when he says that the two terms 'sublate themselves'? It would seem that Hegel is using the term 'sublation' (*aufheben*) here as a synonym for simple negation (e.g., 'ceaseless vanishing'); that is, in a conventional German sense.[16] Hegel, however, makes an explicit distinction between this conventional sense and a technical, speculative sense where sublation means both negation (*negieren*) and preservation (*erhalten*) simultaneously.[17] A recognition of the difference between these two senses of the term 'sublation' (i.e., conventional and technical) is essential if we are to understand the more complex aspects of the transition here.

Hegel immediately follows the first (ordinary) resolution with a second (speculative) one:

> But contradiction contains not merely the negative, but also the positive; or, the self-excluding reflection is at the same time positing reflection; *the result of contradiction is not merely a nullity*. The positive and negative constitute the positedness of the self-subsistence. Their own negation of themselves sublates the positedness of the self-subsistence. It is this which in truth perishes [*zugrunde geht*] in contradiction. (SL 433, my emphasis)[18]

Since the positive and negative (in the moment of opposition) also each constitute a positedness, in the second resolution their sublation is no longer a sublation of the terms themselves but now, more specifically, of their positedness.[19] Here, it is notably the difference in the 'grammatical object' of sublation, or what specifically is being sublated, (the terms themselves or their positedness) that is the key distinction between the first and second resolutions of contradiction. By attending to this distinction, one can see here how Hegel uses the two senses of the word 'sublation' to distinguish two ways of thinking. When treating an issue in terms of ordinary thinking, sublation is used in a conventional, one-sided, merely negative sense. By contrast, when treating an issue in speculative terms, sublation is used in a technical sense that has both its negative and positive meanings. Thus, by examining Hegel's use of the concept of sublation here, one can see how ordinary thinking is not simply external to speculative thinking but is also a part of it. These two ways of thinking are, in effect, opposites, but opposites in the speculative sense; that is, united as much as they are divided.[20]

The key to understanding the precise relationship between opposition and contradiction (in their speculative senses) lies with two concepts: self-subsistence (*Selbständigkeit*) and positedness (*Gesetztsein*). In opposition, self-subsistence is the result of the internal relation of the two terms.[21] In the initial transition from opposition to contradiction, it is this self-subsistence that is sublated and the opposition collapses. This is the first, negative resolution of contradiction. Hegel, however, immediately qualifies this by adding that it is more specifically the *positedness* of the self-subsistence that is

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sublated. So, if their positedness is negated but their self-subsistence is preserved, then, according to Hegel, this means that the terms acquire a new, stronger form of unity.

This latter unity is the second, positive resolution of contradiction. Thus:

> the sublating of this positedness is not again a positedness as the negative of an other, but is a uniting with itself, the positive unity with itself. Self-subsistence is thus through its own negation a unity returned into itself, since it returns into itself through the negation of its own positedness. It is the unity of essence, being identical with itself through the negation, not of an other, but of itself. (SL 434)[22]

As with other transitions of the *Science of Logic*, the progression here entails the further determination of a prior moment, and as with other transitions, this determination is a self-determination. Since determination is negation, self-determination is self-negation,[23] and this negation is not simply a negation but also a sublation. In this sublation, what is negated is the isolation of the prior moment and what is preserved becomes an element of the subsequent moment, thus forming a new, second unity.

In this transition, however, what is being sublated is *contradiction itself*. Contradiction, not as an element of the individual transitions, but contradiction as such, now contradicts *itself*. When expressed in these reflexive terms, the outlandishness of Hegel's claims (relative to our ordinary way of thinking) is placed in sharp relief. What could Hegel possibly mean by this? Perhaps the best way to approach this issue is to look at what Hegel wants to achieve, and work backwards to see how it might be accomplished. In this way, we can examine not simply the presence but the function of contradiction in Hegel's logic, not simply the process but its purpose.

C. The Use and Abuse of Contradiction

In effect, what Hegel is after in each transition of his logic is a proof via negation, or a double negation.[24] If one thinks of contradiction as the strongest possible sort of negation, then a contradiction of a contradiction would be a type of double negation (indeed, of the strongest sort). In this sense, if a self-contradictory claim is necessarily false, then a claim where a contradiction is itself contradicted would be necessarily true. The point here is of course not that *non-contradictory* claims are necessarily true; as such, these claims are of course only possibly true. Hegel's point is rather that claims established via double negation, in the form of a *contradiction of a contradiction*, are necessarily true. There is an important difference between *non-contradiction* and the *contradiction of contradiction*; the first is a mere absence of contradiction, while the second is a determinate negation (or sublation) of contradiction. This distinction remains clear enough from the perspective of ordinary formal logic; Hegel just expresses the point in his own (albeit idiosyncratic) way. Over the course of an argument, the contradiction of

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the earlier moment is made explicit, or (in Hegel's way of speaking) 'contradicts itself', thus establishing the later moment on that basis.

Now if a claim is posited, then it is merely asserted or presupposed to be true. On the other hand, if a claim is arrived at via a double negation, then it is not simply asserted, but rather proven to be true. In the case of the transition at hand, the positedness of the moment is negated while the moment itself is preserved. Thus, via sublation, a claim that was initially *presupposed* is subsequently *proved*. It is in this way that the concept of sublation in its doubled, technical sense is essential to Hegel's conception of proof.

This process of sublation is not peculiar to this particular transition but occurs repeatedly throughout Hegel's logic. The moments of the *Science of Logic* are not simply presented in series, one after the other, with each one simply distinct from all the others. Rather, each one is also defined in opposition to those moments that come before and after it. Furthermore, these moments are not only defined in opposition to one another; they are each in turn revealed to be (according to Hegel) self-contradictory. Indeed, these contradictions are what drive each progression, and their resolution is the movement from one moment to the next. The actual movement forward occurs in and through the sublation of these contradictions.[25] To employ a watchmaking analogy: if sublation is like the mainspring that drives the clockwork forward, then contradiction is the tension in the spring.[26] As the logic progresses through its series of contradictions, these contradictions are themselves negated and a series of double negations is thereby established. The hands of the watch turn.

Thus, from Hegel's perspective, he has not presupposed the formal rules of logic (e.g., the laws of identity, non-contradiction and so on). Instead, he has presented arguments for them via a specific form of double negation, albeit one expressed in speculative terms. It is in this sense that Hegel can claim that the determination of a moment, both in terms of its opposition to other moments and its own self-contradiction, constitutes a proof.

As an aside, I should mention that this also explains why Hegel considered synthesis to be an inadequate way to understand the transitions of the *Logic*. Synthesis is also a sort of unity of identity and difference. The two terms of a synthesis are brought together in a unity, as a third term. For Hegel, however, this relationship between the two terms is only an external relation. Hegel rejects the use of the term 'synthesis' in, for example, the following passage:

> Becoming is the immanent synthesis of being and nothing; but because synthesis suggests more than anything else the sense of an external bringing together of mutually external things already there, the name synthesis, synthetic unity, has rightly been dropped. (SL 96, translation modified)[27]

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The term has been dropped as a result of the fact that, because the two terms of a synthesis are not opposed to one another, their relationship does not entail any double negation. Lacking such a double negation, a synthesis of moments could not produce a proof in the Hegelian sense. It is thus sublation, not synthesis, that is the mechanism through which Hegel establishes proof.

Hegel refers to the result of this proof as a ground (*Grund*). Ground, as a moment of essence, is the second, positive resolution of contradiction as such. Somewhat frustratingly for his readers, Hegel articulates this transition with a pun:

> According to this positive side, in which the self-subsistence in opposition, as the excluding reflection, converts itself into a positedness which it no less sublates, opposition is not only destroyed [*zugrunde zurückgegangen*] but has withdrawn into its ground [*in seinen Grund zurückgegangen*] (SL 434).[28]

What Hegel expresses with his pun on *zugrunde gegangen* (more literally, 'to fall to the ground') and *Grund* is just the double negation discussed above. In this second, speculative resolution, contradiction is itself 'destroyed' (or negated) and through this negation the moment of ground is established as a positive unity.

Hegel expresses this point more directly toward the end of the section:

> The resolved contradiction is therefore ground, essence as the unity of the positive and negative. In opposition, the determination has attained to self-subsistence; but ground is this completed self-subsistence; in it, the negative is self-subsistent essence, but as negative; as self-identical in this negativity, ground is just as much positive. Opposition and its contradiction is, therefore, in ground as much abolished [*aufgehoben*] as preserved. (SL 435)[29]

Thus, we arrive on the far side of this peculiar passage of the *Science of Logic* via a transition with an unusual structure. Rather than the more linear transitions found elsewhere, here we see a pair of branching paths winding their way from opposition to ground. Along the first path, we have the transition from opposition to contradiction, where the particular contradiction within opposition results in the *negative unity* of contradiction as such (i.e., the 'null'). Following the second path, we find the transition from opposition to ground, which is the *positive unity* of contradiction as such (i.e., ground). This fork in the road presents another complexity in the role of contradiction in Hegel's logic. The first transition is, in effect, a non-speculative dead end, where the result is not a positive one (i.e., another moment) but rather nothing. However, this dead end (contradiction as such) is itself *also* the particular contradiction that forms the basis of the transition to the next positive moment, ground. As one can see from the passage just cited, this is presented not as a transition between contradiction and ground but between

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opposition and ground. It is in ground, not contradiction, that opposition is negated and preserved, and thus determined. Unlike other moments, there is no point at which contradiction as such is presented as a positive moment itself, as something (even provisionally) coherent on its own terms prior to the subsequent transition. The positive unity of contradiction is not contradiction itself but ground.

Contradiction is thus something of a strange moment in Hegel's logic. In fact, I would argue, given the structures outlined here, it is not really a moment at all, but just the location of the transition from opposition to ground. It is as if, in working one's way through the *Science of Logic*, one were going up a skyscraper by climbing flights of stairs (i.e., each transition), stopping at each floor (i.e., each moment), but then coming across one floor that was nothing but another flight of stairs (i.e., contradiction). Since contradiction is never a positive moment of the *Science of Logic*, any criticism of Hegel's system as some sort of self-contradictory, quasi-mystical absurdity is, on that basis, unfounded. Contradiction as such is never itself preserved. Of course, this is not to say that contradiction is unimportant. Quite the opposite is the case. Hegel utilises contradiction as a vital part of his method of establishing the truth of the system, as the contradiction of contradiction. The point of the distinction I am making is only that from this use of contradiction, it does not follow that the system itself is self-contradictory, any more than an argument which points out a contradiction in another argument renders the former argument self-contradictory. It is not the reference to a contradiction that makes an argument self-contradictory but the assertion of one.[30] As we have seen, a close reading of Hegel's account of contradiction demonstrates that such an assertion is absent. In other words, one might say, Hegel uses contradiction, but does not (thereby) abuse it.

D. The Significance of Contradiction

The recognition that Hegel uses but does not abuse contradiction in the structure of his logic is significant for at least four reasons. First, this distinction enables one to understand properly the relationship between ordinary and speculative thinking. It is not the case that contradiction is absent from ordinary thinking and present in speculative thinking, but that contradictions are in a way present in both. The difference between the two is that for ordinary thinking these contradictions remain only implicit (i.e., we are unaware of them or ignore them) and in speculative thinking they are taken up explicitly, and thus resolved. It is the resolution of contradiction, not its presence, which is specifically characteristic of speculative thinking. Along these lines, I would interpret Hegel's admonition that we 'think contradiction'[31] not to mean that we must 'think contradictorily' but that we must 'think about contradiction'; in other words, that we should be aware of the (specific, complex, negative) role that contradiction plays in the most fundamental aspects of our thinking. Considered in this way, speculative thinking is not some mystical mode of thought beyond and irreconcilable with ordinary thinking.

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Rather, it is a different approach to and focus on the same content. Speculative thinking simply attempts to prove what ordinary thinking only presupposes.

Second, given the role of contradiction in his logical method, the nature of this distinction helps explain why Hegel cannot coherently be said either to reject the law of non-contradiction or even to articulate a weaker version of it. If Hegel deliberately rejected the law of non-contradiction, then there could be no contradiction of contradiction and thus no logical necessity to his claims. If Hegel had only maintained some weaker conception of contradiction,[32] then there would be only a contradiction of this weaker conflict, which would also lack necessity. Without a demonstration of such necessity, the claims of his *Science of Logic* would be only presuppositions or dogmatic assertions, not proofs.[33]

Third, historically speaking, the technical absence of contradiction as a moment in the *Science of Logic,* for which I have argued here, as well as the density of the transition between opposition and ground might help explain why it is the case that Hegel subsequently drops the elaborate treatment of contradiction from his later discussion of the same issues in the *Encyclopaedia*.[34] This is, of course, only a historical supposition, but it would account for the difference between the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia* on this point. It is as if Hegel realised that there was an incongruity between the organisation of his account of the system and his actual argument, and later corrected this disparity.

Lastly, it should also be noted that the strangeness of Hegel's explicit treatment of contradiction in the *Science of Logic*, relative to the other moments, is in large part due to the complex, twofold role that sublation plays in its resolutions. The first transition (from opposition to contradiction) contains a sublation, but only in an ordinary, one-sided sense (*qua* negation). The second transition (from opposition to ground) contains a sublation in its full, speculative sense. It is only once we arrive at the moment of ground that the moment of opposition has been both negated and preserved. In addition to its relevance to a proper understanding of Hegel's concept of contradiction, this second transition has important implications for the interpretation of the concept of sublation itself. In the second part of this article, I shall examine one such implication, in order to show that while the explicit treatment of contradiction as such is ultimately not a problem for the coherence of Hegel's *Logic*, there remains a potentially far more problematic contradiction within the very means by which Hegel resolves contradictions in the first place — a problem with the role that sublation plays in the system.

II. The Contradiction of Sublation

A. The Problem of Sublation and Complete Self-Determination

The systematic problem with sublation I have in mind here can be articulated as follows:[35] On the one hand, sublation entails an opposition, insofar as the positive and negative meanings of sublation are instances of the positive and negative poles of an

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opposition.[36] On the other hand, opposition has been shown to be self-contradictory and is sublated in ground. But if sublation involves an opposition, then it would seem that (by transposition) sublation must also *sublate itself*. Of course, if one were to interpret sublation as sublating itself, this would not mean that sublation simply negates itself, because a transposition between sublation and opposition would be contingent upon the speculative, doubled sense of sublation. (Sublation in its ordinary, purely negative sense would not be an opposition). The processes we have outlined so far would suggest that sublation could be proven in a way similar to the way the moment of opposition is proven, if one were to interpret the contradiction between preservation and negation as negated and the unity of the two senses as preserved. Importantly, however, Hegel himself makes no reference to such a 'meta-sublation'.[37] He makes no attempt to prove sublation itself, insofar as it is not presented as a moment of his system.[38] In this way, Hegel's use of the concept of sublation in his proofs (without proving it) poses a serious problem for his claims about the nature and purpose of the *Science of Logic*. This problem is, I will argue, a contradiction, moreover one that is not resolved in the system; I will refer to this as the 'contradiction of sublation'.

In order to explain the nature of this problem, we can begin by describing Hegel's account of the system as having two basic criteria: determination and completeness.[39] According to such a description, the criterion of determination requires that *any particular* determining element of logic must also itself be determined. Otherwise, the resultant system would remain abstract, unfree and unproven. Similarly, the criterion of completeness requires that *every* logically determining element must also itself be determined. Otherwise, the resultant system would not reconcile its concept with its objectivity, and thus would not be, according to Hegel, true.

Hegel ultimately defines the completely determined system as the absolute idea:

> It [the absolute idea] is itself the pure concept that has itself for its subject matter [*Gegenstande*] and which, as subject matter, passes through the totality of its determinations, develops itself into the whole of its reality, into the system of the science. (SL 843, translation modified)[40]

Without containing all of these determinations within it (SL 824; HW 6/549), Hegel's system as absolute idea would not be self-determinate and therefore a failure, by his own standards.

Hegel himself was clear on the importance of this complete self-determination. For example, in response to some objections regarding the nature of the beginning of the *Science of Logic*, he writes:

> Whatever objections to it might be raised — say, the limitations of human knowledge, the need to examine critically the instrument of cognition before starting to deal with the subject matter — are themselves

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> presuppositions, which as concrete determinations involve the demand for their mediation and proof. Since therefore they possess no formal advantage over the beginning with the subject matter against which they protest, but on the contrary *themselves require deduction* on account of their more concrete content, their claim to prior consideration must be treated as an empty presumption. (SL 841, my emphasis)[41]

In other words, any concrete content requires proof. That which determines our cognition must itself be determined. Otherwise, such a determining would remain a merely empty, indeterminate presupposition. This insistence on complete determination is not some absurd, artificial requirement that everything which could potentially be determined *by* the logic be determined, but that every determination be determined that would determine the logic *itself*. Of course, the logic also determines the form of thinking in the other philosophical sciences (of nature and spirit). From this, however, it does not follow that the content of these other sciences would therefore be reducible to logic and thereby also be required to be completely determined in this way. The criterion of completeness does not mean that the logic must somehow 'determine everything', but only that it must be self-determinate.

Yet there remains at least one determining element of Hegel's logic that is not itself determined by it: Hegel's concept of sublation. Sublation plays a key role in both of these two aspects of complete self-determination. The determination of any particular moment is its sublation relative to the next, in the transition to the next moment. The completion of the system is the sublation of these moments into the whole. Relative to these two criteria, however, Hegel's concept of sublation also poses a certain difficulty for the system. If sublation is required for determination, then a determination of sublation is itself required for completeness. Sublation, however, is not a moment of the system. No logical transition is ever presented for it and it is never established as a result.[42] At the same time, however, Hegel refers to sublation from the outset as a 'fundamental determination' (*Grundbestimmung*) (SL 106; HW 5/113). As a concrete determination, sublation demands mediation and proof, and without such a deduction, it must itself be treated as an empty presupposition. Thus, according to Hegel's own criteria, it would seem that the operant element of Hegel's method of proof is not itself proven and that the means by which he resolves contradictions itself entails one. The contradiction here is a systematic one, between what Hegel requires of the system (i.e., a complete self-determination, carried out via sublation) and what he actually carries out (i.e., an incomplete determination, due to the lack of any determination of sublation itself). This is the 'contradiction of sublation.'

Moreover, Hegel himself seemed to have been at least aware of this problem. In the context of a discussion of dialectic, he writes:

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> To hold fast to the positive in its negative, in the content of the presupposition, in the result, this is the most important feature in rational cognition; at the same time only the simplest reflection is needed to convince one of the absolute truth and necessity of this requirement and so far as examples of the proof of this are concerned, the whole logic consists of such. (SL 834)[43]

So, while Hegel explicitly addresses the problem, the defence offered here seems wholly insufficient. 'To hold fast to the positive in its negative' is said to be both 'the most important feature in rational cognition' and yet, at the same time, require 'only the simplest reflection'. Of course, simplicity is, for Hegel, no grounds at all and he manages to avoid appealing to it directly.[44] Instead, he claims that the 'examples of the proof' are said to be found throughout 'the whole logic'. In other words, Hegel claims here that proofs for the concept of sublation are found in the individual transitions themselves, where it functions as the 'holding fast to the positive in its negative'; that is, as negation and preservation. An example, however, is not a proof. An instance of sublation does not mean that sublation itself is taken up as the content that is being determined. Sublation is what is determin*ing* the transitions but is not itself that which is being determin*ed* by them. In other words, sublation is an aspect of the form of these transitions but not their content. In order, though, for the logic to be completely self-determinate, its form must be taken up as its own content. The absence of a logical determination of sublation means that the ground of the system contains (at least) one element that is not itself grounded. Thus, the task of reconciliation fundamental to the *Science of Logic* would seem, in this instance, to be deferred but not resolved.

B. Responses to Five Objections

1. Terminological Argument

In order to present this criticism in more detail, I will conclude this article by responding to a series of potential objections to it. As a first possible objection, one might argue that the word 'sublation' does not occur in the cited passage explicitly and therefore sublation might not be the concept to which Hegel refers here. While it is of course correct to say that Hegel does not specifically use the term 'sublation' here, the presence of the *concept* is clear from the broader context. Immediately preceding the cited passage, Hegel writes:

> The immediate, from this negative side, has been extinguished in the other, but the other is essentially not the empty negative, the nothing, that is taken as the usual result of dialectic; rather it is the other of the first, the negative of the immediate; it is therefore determined as the mediated — contains in general the determination of the first within itself.

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> Consequently the first is essentially preserved and retained even in the other. (SL 834)[45]

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that the element Hegel is discussing here is unknown. From the context of this second passage and its relation to the first, we can see that the element in question 1) is described as 'the most important feature in rational cognition', 2) results in a negation that is distinct from nothing, 3) occurs throughout the whole logic and 4) includes both negation and preservation. Sublation in fact shares all four of these features. We can compare the concept described in the previous two passages with what Hegel writes on sublation:

> Sublation and the sublated is [1] *one of the most important concepts in philosophy*. It is a fundamental determination [2] *which repeatedly occurs throughout the whole of philosophy*, the meaning of which is to be clearly grasped and [3] *distinguished from nothing*. (SL 106-107, translation modified, my emphasis)[46]

And of course [4], sublation has its 'twofold meaning' (*gedoppelten Sinn*) of negation and preservation (SL 107; HW 5/114). Given these four points of commonality between the concept referred to in these two passages and sublation, arguing that this concept is not sublation because the term is absent would be a bit like seeing a certain horse-like black-and-white striped mammalian quadruped running across a plain in Africa and refusing to call it a zebra. Furthermore, even if one were to continue to insist that a concept cannot be present without its term, then such insistence would beg the question: what then is present? What is this mysterious element that Hegel claims is both 'the most important feature in rational cognition' and at the same time so simple that it requires no proof?

If we, again for the sake of argument, grant the possibility that the element in question is not sublation, then what other possible elements could fit this description? Could Hegel be referring to opposition, contradiction, negativity, dialectic or some other concept?[47] Without addressing every conceivable alternative individually, one can categorise these possibilities into two basic groups: those concepts that are taken up as moments of the system (e.g., opposition) and those that are not (e.g., dialectic). The former are excluded as possibilities because, if Hegel were here referring to some (logically determined) moment of his system, then he would not need to argue that no proof is required. The proof would already be present in the transition of the given moment. On the other hand, if one were to argue that one of the latter 'non-moments' was a legitimate alternative, then the problem would once again be simply deferred and not resolved. If Hegel is referring here to some other determining element that is not itself determined, then that element would be just as problematic, for precisely the same reasons. Substituting another term for 'sublation' would thus not alter the conclusion here, nor solve the problem.

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2. Completeness Argument

A second possible objection relates to Hegel's requirement for the completeness of the system. As previously mentioned, that the system must be complete does not mean that it must somehow determine everything. 'The truth is the whole' does not mean that every single word of the system has to be proven in order for it to be true. Rather, what Hegel requires is not the determination of everything that could be determined by the logic, but everything that determines the logic itself, not 'total determination' but self-determination. One might argue that this requires only that every moment of the system need be proven. Since sublation is not itself a moment of the system, it might not seem necessary that it be determined in this way.

This second objection, while somewhat more substantive, is still flawed. That sublation is not a moment of the system is precisely the problem. If one were to assume that Hegel fully and unproblematically determines every moment of the system, that as a moment each is logically determinate, relative to both its subsequent moment and the whole, and that these determinations completely exhaust what is required make up the self-determination of the system, then one is left with a viciously circular argument. If only moments need to be determined and all moments are, as moments, already determined, then the very possibility that there even could be an undetermined-but-determining element of the system is excluded from the outset. Under such conditions, one might say, sublation (or any other determination) would only need to join the club if it were already a member. In this case, one ends up trapped in a self-enclosed, dogmatic absurdity.

3. Limit Argument

Alternatively, as a third possible objection, one could also try to work around the problem by way of an appeal to Hegel's concept of limit (*Grenze*).[48] In this case, one might argue that any such 'determining-but-undetermined' element could easily be incorporated into the system, because the very act of determining such a boundary ('outside' the system) would render the element in question determined ('inside' the system). This is, however, only a potential solution, not an actual one. While it may be possible to argue this, my point is that Hegel himself does not. My criticism here is limited to Hegel and deliberately does not address the possibility of complete systematic philosophy as such, which would require a very different argument. I make no claim against the possibility of some other person formulating a complete system, only that, in this one respect, Hegel himself does not actually offer one.

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4. Framework Argument

Along similar lines, one could present a fourth possible objection, arguing that Hegel did not intend to establish every necessary logical determination but only to establish the framework within which later thinkers could do so, thus leaving room for others to 'fill in the gaps', so to speak. Such 'gaps', it could be argued, would not be a problem for the system because they are still contained within the overall framework of a complete system. To return to an earlier analogy, a watchmaker could be said to have finished a watch even if it lacked something like a chain or a strap or if it was later repaired or engraved and so on. In other words, the presence of later additions or modifications would not necessarily indicate the absence of an earlier completeness.

The problem with this 'framework argument' is similar to the problem with the previously mentioned 'limit argument'. According to the requirement of completeness, it is still possible for later philosophical determinations to be made; there is no need for anything like 'the end of philosophy' for the system to have achieved truth. Yet, in order for the system to be self-determinate, what cannot be left for later is anything *essential* to the system; that is, any feature without which it would not be a system at all. More specifically, this means that later philosophers might make further determinations through the system or within the system, but never *of* the system. If Hegel had deliberately left room for others to determine something essential to the self-determination of the system itself, then he could not have legitimately claimed to have completed it. Leaving room for infinite later progress of this type would involve a 'bad infinite', which would, of course, be unacceptable to Hegel. While a watchmaker could be said to have completed a watch even if it lacked some 'finishing touches', he could not be said to have completed the watch if he left out the mainspring. Such a watch would not tell the time and thus would not (essentially) be a watch at all. It is my position in the internal critique I have presented here that Hegel's system lacks such a 'mainspring', and that this is a fundamental flaw in its very design.

5. Significance Argument

As a fifth and final objection, one might ask, 'Is sublation really so important? Isn't *aufheben* just an ordinary German word that Hegel happens to use?' Setting aside, again for the sake of argument, the fact that Hegel himself insists upon sublation's importance and determining character, this objection does raise the helpful point that it is of course not necessary for Hegel to define logically every term he uses. It would not make any sense, for example, to require Hegel to define every word, down to each *der*, *die* and *das*. That such terms are not determined as moments is not problematic because they are not

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logically determinative; ordinary language alone is not essential to proof. The concept of sublation, however, is essential. Without sublation, the contradictions that drive each transition could not be resolved with any necessity and no proof would be established. The point of my criticism is that while the determination of each moment determines the content of each transition, in failing to determine sublation, Hegel fails to take into account the full form of those transitions. The reconciliation of form and content in the logic occurs (at best) only at the 'macro-level' of the absolute idea. At the 'micro-level', the operational level of the very mechanism that makes each individual transition possible and through which it functions, no such reconciliation ever occurs and the form of the transitions — sublation — is never itself a content.

Indeed, it could even be argued that such a micro-level resolution not only happens to be absent from Hegel's account but would even be impossible for Hegel to accept. If such a resolution occurred, and sublation were ever itself determined as a moment, then there would be one of two results. Either sublation would function just like any other moment and would collapse under its own internal contradictions, thus establishing that Hegel's transitions are in a certain sense false, or sublation would be resolved as true, as the full reconciliation of the concept with its objectivity, in which case sublation would be just as true as the absolute idea. In the latter case, however, sublation would either actually be the absolute idea[49] or there would be a truth prior to the absolute idea, in which case the absolute idea would itself be unnecessary. In other words, either the absolute idea is true or sublation is true, but if either is false, concept and objectivity are not reconciled and the system is false.[50] Thus, it is Hegel's univocal conception of truth that ultimately precludes his system, by his own definition, from actually being true.

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This contradiction of sublation is a contradiction in the system that is not resolved by it. As we have seen, the system can contain contradictions but cannot itself be contradictory. The contradictions it contains must at some point be resolved in order for the system itself to be true. One might say that Hegel's logic is, in this sense, ultimately falsifiable. The fundamental contradiction of the system, however, lies not in Hegel's treatment of contradiction as such but in the means through which Hegel resolves the individual contradictions that make up its structure; that is, in his use of the concept of sublation. In the final analysis, this is a problem not simply in the mechanism of the *Science of Logic* but at its very heart.[51]

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Notes

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[1] Abbreviation:
SL: Hegel (1999).
HW: Hegel (1970); page numbers follow volume number.

[2] Hegel's primary treatment of contradiction can be found in Book 2, Section 1, Chapter 2, Subsection C of the *Science of Logic* (SL 431-443; HW 6/64-80). For a good, recent survey of the problems Hegel's concept of contradiction has caused for Hegel scholars in particular, see Hahn (2007: 54-59).

[3] In this article, I will try to focus on Hegel's own account of contradiction and whether it is internally coherent or how we might make sense of it in general, rather than whether it conforms to other, more specific definitions of contradiction. Since I want to focus on its internal coherence for Hegel, I will not consider here questions such as whether contradiction ought to apply only to propositions and so forth. For a brief account of the relation between Hegel's approach to contradiction and that of thinkers such as Aristotle, Kant, and Wittgenstein, see Wolff (1999: 1-6).

[4] For alternative analyses of Hegel's concept of contradiction, see, for example, Pippin (1978) and de Boer (2010). While Pippin and de Boer both address the role of contradiction in the broader context of Hegel's doctrine of essence, I will focus here more narrowly on a close reading of the relevant subsection of the *Science of Logic*. I do not address the broader context of this subsection since this has already been done elsewhere, and my aim here is to build on rather than simply repeat such work.

[5] '*Der Unterschied überhaupt enthält seine beiden Seiten als Momente; in der Verschiedenheit fallen sie gleichgültig auseinander; im Gegensatze als solchem sind sie Seiten des Unterschiedes, eines nur durchs andere bestimmt, somit nur Momente; aber sie sind ebensosehr bestimmt an ihnen selbst, gleichgültig gegeneinander und sich gegenseitig ausschließend: die selbständigen Reflexionsbestimmungen*' (HW 6/64).

[6] '*Als dieses Ganze ist jedes vermittelt durch sein Anderes mit sich und enthält dasselbe. Aber es ist ferner durch das Nichtsein seines Anderen mit sich vermittelt; so ist es für sich seiende Einheit und schließt das Andere aus sich aus*' (HW 6/64-65).

[7] '*Indem die selbständige Reflexionsbestimmung in derselben Rücksicht, als sie die andere enthält und dadurch selbständig ist, die andere ausschließt, so schließt sie in ihrer Selbständigkeit ihre eigene Selbständigkeit aus sich aus, denn diese besteht darin, die ihr andere Bestimmung in sich zu enthalten und dadurch allein nicht Beziehung auf ein Äußerliches zu sein, — aber ebensosehr unmittelbar darin, sie selbst zu sein und die ihr negative Bestimmung von sich auszuschließen. Sie ist so der Widerspruch*' (HW 6/65).

[8] I use the word 'variance' here as a generic term for the various sorts of differences internal to the moments and transitions mentioned. Hegel himself would simply use 'difference' (*Unterschied*), but this term, while more precise historically, would introduce an ambiguity into my account (between difference in general, including diversity and opposition, and difference as a particular moment, or absolute difference alone) and thus be of little or no explanatory value.

[9] '*Der Unterschied überhaupt ist schon der Widerspruch an sich; denn er ist die Einheit von solchen, die nur sind, insofern sie nicht eins sind, — und die Trennung solcher, die nur sind als in derselben Beziehung getrennte*' (HW 6/65).

[10] For Hegel's argument on this point, see the beginning of the Introduction to the *Science of Logic* (SL 43-45; HW 5/35-37).

[11] That Hegel's transitions do not in fact follow such a pattern with complete uniformity

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suggests that this is a problem for certain interpretations of the text rather than for the text itself. For example, J. N. Findlay (in his long-influential account) simultaneously attributes a 'triadic' pattern to Hegel while at the same time claiming that Hegel is not always consistent in following it. See Findlay (1958: 71-76). By contrast, I would argue that this 'inconsistency' is an asset, not a defect, of Hegel's account of the system. The lack of uniformity across transitions conforms to Hegel's rejection of formalism and his (closely related) claim that the *Logic* unifies form with content, rather than simply imposing an external form on that content. If Hegel had been 'consistent' in applying something like the triadic form Findlay describes, then this execution would have conflicted with Hegel's professed purpose in writing the *Science of Logic* in the first place, insofar as such an externally formal approach would not unify form and content.

[12] One example of such a uniform pattern would be the old 'thesis-antithesis-synthesis' schema. For the classic refutation of the attribution of this formula to Hegel, see Mueller (1958).

[13] This distinction is particularly problematic in the transition from opposition to contradiction. In this case, the two overlap. There is the particular contradiction of the logical transition, which results in the next moment, but in the case of opposition, this particular contradiction results in contradiction as such. This complexity is treated in more detail in what follows.

[14] Hegel's own term for this 'ordinary thinking' is 'common human understanding' (*gemeinen Menschenverstande*) (SL 84; HW 5/86) or, in other words, what one might also call simply 'common sense'. For a detailed discussion of Hegel's contrast between philosophy and this 'common sense', see Hegel (1965: 113-118). Kaufmann's commentary is also of interest here.

[15] '*In der sich selbst ausschließenden Reflexion, die betrachtet wurde, hebt das Positive und das Negative jedes in seiner Selbständigkeit sich selbst auf; jedes ist schlechthin das Übergehen oder vielmehr das sich Übersetzen seiner in sein Gegenteil. Dies rastlose Verschwinden der Entgegengesetzten in ihnen selbst ist die nächste Einheit, welche durch den Widerspruch zustande kommt; sie ist die Null*' (HW 6/67).

[16] It should be noted that the 'preservative' connotation of *aufheben* is also present in the ordinary German meaning of the term. In assigning sublation its technical meaning, Hegel emphasises this second sense; he does not simply invent or impose it. On Hegel's adaptation of ordinary language to his philosophical purposes, see Inwood (1992: 11-16). I have here stated the contrast between the conventional and technical senses quite strongly for the sake of clarity. The actual relationship between these two senses is more nuanced than this dichotomy would suggest. The consequences, however, of conflating the two senses are so pronounced that I think it is better to overstate the contrast than to understate it. If one were simply to ignore the distinction, then the entire progressive structure of Hegel's *Logic* would become incoherent.

[17] For Hegel's explicit discussion of this technical sense of sublation, see SL 106-108; HW 5/112-114.

[18] '*Der Widerspruch enthält aber nicht bloß das Negative, sondern auch das Positive; oder die sich selbst ausschließende Reflexion ist zugleich setzende Reflexion; das Resultat des Widerspruchs ist nicht nur Null. — Das Positive und Negative machen das Gesetztsein der Selbständigkeit aus; die Negation ihrer durch sie selbst hebt das Gesetztsein der Selbständigkeit auf. Dies ist es, was in Wahrheit im Widerspruche zugrunde geht*' (HW 6/67).

[19] For the sake of clarity, one can understand 'positedness' (*Gesetztsein*) here simply as the

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character of being put forward or asserted.

[20] For an illustration of how opposition simultaneously unites and divides, one can think of such an ordinary dichotomy as 'right and left'; each is separate, but also only definable in relation to the other.

[21] It may seem counterintuitive that self-subsistence requires a relationship to an other. In order to grasp this, it is important to keep in mind Hegel's speculative sense of opposition, in which (unlike earlier types of difference) each term entails an internal relation to its other. Such a self-subsistence is further distinct from the weaker forms of self-relation (e.g., as found in identity and absolute difference). While the merely *self-related* moments are imagined in isolation from each other, *self-subsistent* moments incorporate their other into *their own* self-definition. So, while both self-relation and self-subsistence entail a reflexivity, self-subsistence is stronger or more fully determined insofar as it includes its other rather than remaining indifferent to it.

[22] '[*D*]*as Aufheben dieses Gesetztseins ist daher nicht wieder Gesetztsein als das Negative eines Anderen, sondern ist das Zusammengehen mit sich selbst, das positive Einheit mit sich ist. Die Selbständigkeit ist so durch ihre eigene Negation in sich zurückkehrende Einheit, indem sie durch die Negation ihres Gesetztseins in sich zurückkehrt. Sie ist die Einheit des Wesens, durch die Negation nicht eines Anderen, sondern ihrer selbst identisch mit sich zu sein*' (HW 6/68).

[23] On this point, Richard Dien Winfield writes that, '[s]ince each successive category leading to the final totality of self-thinking thought undergoes this dual negation and incorporation by what follows it, logical development can thus be described as being ordered by determinate negation' (Winfield 1990: 50). It is in this sense that sublation is identifiable with determinate negation.

[24] I have taken up this interpretation of Hegel's logic in terms of the negation of negation from Dieter Henrich. See Henrich (2003: 316-331).

[25] In this regard, I would agree with thinkers like Thomas Bole and Robert Brandom that it is the need to avoid contradiction that motivates the progression of Hegelian dialectic (e.g., Bole 1987: 530; Brandom 2002: 202-208). By contrast, in the context of a discussion with Brandom on his interpretation of the *Phenomenology*, Stephen Houlgate writes: 'It should be noted that experience, for Brandom, involves altering one's commitments in order to *avoid contradiction*. This conception of experience is, however, hard to square with Hegel's view that "contradiction is the root of all movement and vitality"' (Houlgate 2009: 45). I would disagree with Houlgate here insofar as these two points do not seem to me to be mutually exclusive. For example, if a horse-drawn carriage moves forward because the driver whips the horse, then I see nothing 'hard to square' in considering the horse's desire to avoid the whip as a source of movement for the carriage. In fact, in terms of Hegel's logic, the notion that contradiction is something which needs to be avoided (or resolved) is essential to its progressive structure. If the particular contradiction of a given moment were not a problem to be avoided, then there would be no reason to move on to the next one through its resolution.

[26] It should be noted that while the noun 'mainspring' can be found in Miller's translation of the *Science of Logic* — and I am alluding to that here — Hegel himself uses the verb '*fortbewegen*' (in context, 'to move on' or 'to move forward') (SL 54; HW 5/50). Strictly speaking, sublation is less the 'mainspring' of dialectic than 'that which drives it forward'. Thus, while I think the analogy remains apt, readers should be aware that the allusion to watchmaking is an artefact of translation, not an element found in the original text.

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[27] '*Werden ist diese immanente Synthesis des Seins und Nichts; aber weil der Synthesis der Sinn von einem äußerlichen Zusammenbringen äußerlich gegeneinander Vorhandener am nächsten liegt, ist mit Recht der Name Synthesis, synthetische Einheit außer Gebrauch gesetzt worden*' (HW 5/100). Hegel's more detailed argument for favouring sublation over synthesis can be found in his account of the inadequacy of the synthesis present in subjective cognition in the section of the *Science of Logic* on the 'Idea of the True' (SL 783-818; HW 6/498-541).

[28] '*Nach dieser positiven Seite, daß die Selbständigkeit im Gegensatze als ausschließende Reflexion sich zum Gesetztsein macht und es ebensosehr aufhebt, Gesetztsein zu sein, ist der Gegensatz nicht nur zugrunde, sondern in seinen Grund zurückgegangen*' (HW 6/68).

[29] '*Der aufgelöste Widerspruch ist also der Grund, das Wesen als Einheit des Positiven und Negativen. Im Gegensatze ist die Bestimmung zur Selbständigkeit gediehen; der Grund aber ist diese vollendete Selbständigkeit; das Negative ist in ihm selbständiges Wesen, aber als Negatives; so ist er ebensosehr das Positive als das in dieser Negativität mit sich Identische. Der Gegensatz und sein Widerspruch ist daher im Grunde sosehr aufgehoben als erhalten*' (HW 6/69). Here of course, *aufgehoben* is used in a non-speculative sense, as a synonym for negation. This is clear from its use in contrast to *erhalten*. It is the conjunction of these two terms in context that expresses the concept of sublation in its technical, speculative sense, not the term alone.

[30] Katharina Dulckeit expresses this distinction in slightly different terms: 'The philosophical error does not consist in *self-contradiction per se* but rather in the *persistence in such contradiction*' (Dulckeit 1989: 122, my emphasis).

[31] The full passage reads: 'It is pure change, or antithesis within itself, or contradiction, that we must think' (*Es ist der reine Wechsel oder die Entgegensetzung in sich selbst, der Widerspruch zu denken*) (Hegel 1977: 99; HW 3/130, translation modified). This passage is quoted in the abbreviated form used above in Houlgate (2009: 45).

[32] Such as Charles Taylor's suggestion of 'ontological conflict' (Taylor 1975: 106). For a criticism of this sort of 'weak' reading, see Hahn (2007: 57-59).

[33] I should add that the notion that Hegel deliberately rejects the law of non-contradiction begs several textual questions as well. To give but one example: if Hegel deliberately asserts contradiction, then why is scepticism a problem for him? For an account of the relationship between Hegel, scepticism, and contradiction, see Forster (1989: 36-43).

[34] As noted in de Boer (2010: 349n12). The relevant passages in the *Encyclopaedia* can be found at §119-120, in Hegel (1991: 184-188; HW 8/243-247).

[35] The following systematic argument addresses the apparent contradiction within sublation's role in the *Science of Logic* as whole. This is something of a technical problem. There is also of course the more immediate, intuitive problem of how a term that means both 'negation' and 'preservation' is not self-contradictory in the first place. Walter Kaufmann resolved this difficulty quite efficiently, writing that sublation 'is what you do when something has fallen on the floor [...]. Something may be picked up in order that it will no longer be there; on the other hand, I may also pick it up to keep it' (Kaufmann 1965: 144). I would also like to add that while Kaufmann's concerns may seem somewhat dated (relative to contemporary Hegel scholarship), I have found that his ability to render the nuances of German philosophical terminology in English remains invaluable.

[36] For Hegel's account of the role of the positive and the negative in opposition, see SL 424-427; HW 654-659.

[37] Jean-Luc Nancy claims that, '[t]he concept of sublation is the concept of that which is

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its own upheaval and which, because it suppresses itself, itself succeeds itself, takes up where it itself leaves off' (Nancy 2002: 51). Nancy's interpretation, however, is an interpolation into the text. Nowhere does Hegel himself argue, either implicitly or explicitly, that sublation in fact sublates itself.

[38] The proof of the moment of opposition does not qualify as a proof of sublation because even though sublation involves opposition, it is not identical to it. The proof of opposition as such cannot be substituted for the particular opposition found in sublation any more than it could replace the proof of every other opposition in the *Science of Logic*. If such a substitution were possible, it would make the individual proofs of the other moments of the logic redundant, and replace Hegel's concrete proofs with merely abstract determinations, thereby rendering Hegel's entire articulation of the system moot.

[39] These two criteria are of course not the only two. I focus here on determination and completeness only for the purposes of illustration, not as an attempt to offer an exhaustive account.

[40] *'Sie ist selbst der reine Begriff, der sich zum Gegenstande hat und der, indem er sich als Gegenstand [habend] die Totalität seiner Bestimmungen durchläuft, sich zum Ganzen seiner Realität, zum Systeme der Wissenschaft ausbildet'* (HW 6/572).

[41] '*Was man gegen ihn vorbringen möchte — etwa von den Schranken der menschlichen Erkenntnis, von dem Erfordernis, ehe man an die Sache gehe, das Instrument des Erkennens kritisch zu untersuchen —, sind selbst Voraussetzungen, die als konkrete Bestimmungen die Forderung ihrer Vermittlung und Begründung mit sich führen. Da sie hiermit formell nichts vor dem Anfange mit der Sache, gegen den sie protestieren, voraushaben und vielmehr wegen des konkreteren Inhalts einer Ableitung bedürftig sind, so sind sie nur für eitle Anmaßungen zu nehmen, daß auf sie viel mehr als [auf] etwas anderes zu achten sei*' (HW 6/569).

[42] Hegel's explicit description of sublation occurs in a remark, not in the main text. See (again) SL 106-108; HW 5/113-115. Given its location, Hegel's definition of sublation is thus part of his (secondary) exposition of the logic, not itself part of the (primary) logical sequence *per se*. In other words, one could say that the main text contains the transitions, while the remarks explain them. I would largely agree with Karin de Boer that, 'the Remarks that complement the main text of the *Logic* do not deal with a different content than the main text, but treat the same content from a more concrete angle' (de Boer 2010: 348). I would add that I think examining the remarks can be a productive way of approaching what is at stake in the *Logic* historically, conceptually or thematically. I also think it is important to bear in mind, however, that while the remarks treat the same content, the main text treats this content in a very different form. The remarks' lack of logical transitions from one moment to the next means that they do not contain proofs, but rather explanations of proofs. Thus, when one examines Hegel's *Logic* structurally (as I attempt to do here), maintaining the distinction is essential, insofar as one can neither accept nor reject a proof on the basis of an explanation alone.

[43] '*Das Positive in seinem Negativen, dem Inhalt der Voraussetzung, im Resultate festzuhalten, dies ist das Wichtigste im vernünftigen Erkennen; es gehört zugleich nur die einfachste Reflexion dazu, um sich von der absoluten Wahrheit und Notwendigkeit dieses Erfordernisses zu überzeugen, und was die Beispiele von Beweisen hierzu betrifft, so besteht die ganze Logik darin*' (HW 6/560).

[44] What is 'simple' in this sense is not a ground because it is not mediated or determined. In other words, something simple is an assumption, not an argument. See, for example, Hegel's rejection of immediate knowledge in thinkers like Jacobi, in Hegel (1995: 417-

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418; HW 20/323).

[45] '*Das Unmittelbare ist nach dieser negativen Seite in dem Anderen untergegangen, aber das Andere ist wesentlich nicht das leere Negative, das Nichts, das als das gewöhnliche Resultat der Dialektik genommen wird, sondern es ist das Andere des Ersten, das Negative des Unmittelbaren; also ist es bestimmt als das Vermittelte, — enthält überhaupt die Bestimmung des Ersten in sich. Das Erste ist somit wesentlich auch im Anderen aufbewahrt und erhalten*' (HW 6/561).

[46] '*Aufheben und das Aufgehobene ist einer der wichtigsten Begriffe der Philosophie, eine Grundbestimmung, die schlechthin allenthalben wiederkehrt, deren Sinn bestimmt aufzufassen und besonders vom Nichts zu unterscheiden ist*' (HW 5/113). I have here quoted the version of this passage from the first edition of the *Science of Logic* (1812). In the second edition (1831), Hegel adds '*das Idelle*' in parentheses after '*das Aufgehobene*'. This is the only difference between the first and second editions of the paragraph from which this sentence is excerpted.

[47] The case of negativity may require additional explanation. Twice in public presentations on this issue, I have been asked whether, when I speak of 'sublation', I really ought to be talking about 'negativity'. There are two reasons why I consider sublation preferable, one textual and one expository. First, sublation is the term that Hegel himself uses to describe the conjunction of negation and preservation. Hegel explicitly discusses its importance (SL 106-108; HW 5/113-115) and uses the term ubiquitously throughout the *Science of Logic*. Not even the term 'dialectic' is discussed or used in this manner or to such a degree. Thus, I consider the discussion of these issues in terms of sublation to be closer to the text, as well as having the further advantage of facilitating the sort of close, syntactical reading employed in the first part of this article. The second reason sublation is preferable to negativity is simply a matter of clarity. A discussion in terms of 'negativity' must constantly maintain the distinction between cases where Hegel means negation *simpliciter* and those where he means the more complex sort of negation that also includes preservation, otherwise it risks obscuring what is at stake. Therefore, while discussion of these issues in terms of negativity is certainly possible, I would argue that using sublation in this context allows for somewhat greater precision and clarity.

[48] For Hegel's discussion of his concept of 'limit', see SL 132; HW 5/143. For a critical explanation of this concept, see Inwood (1992: 177-180).

[49] It may seem odd to equate sublation with the absolute idea, even provisionally, but it is necessary to refute it as a (remote) possibility. Sublation and the absolute idea are of course distinct. Hegel claims that the 'examples of proof' of sublation occur throughout the logic. The truth of the absolute idea, by contrast, requires the complete system. The latter is not a proof repeated in every transition but only at the level of the system as a whole. In other words, unlike Hegel's problematic characterisation of sublation here, the proof of the absolute idea is not plural — there is said to be only one.

[50] By 'false' here, I simply mean that the system would fail to meet Hegel's own standard for truth.

[51] This article is an adaptation of portions of my doctoral dissertation, *Hegel's Concept of Sublation: A Critical Interpretation* (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2009). For those interested in a more elaborate treatment of the issues discussed here, this text can be found online at: https://lirias.kuleuven.be/handle/123456789/234670. An earlier draft of this paper was also presented at the joint UK Kant Society and Hegel Society of Great Britain conference held at St. Edmund Hall, Oxford, 1st-3rd September 2010. I am

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