CHAPTER 4

Hegel in Jena

In the following I will focus on Hegel's positioning of himself between Fichte and Schelling, his thoughts on logic and metaphysics as they are expressed in one of the system-drafts in Jena, and the determinate negation in PhG. Of the shorter well-known writings of Hegel in Jena, I am only going to treat the so-called Differenzschrift, leaving out both Verhältnis des Skeptizismus zur Philosophie and Glauben und Wissen. The Differenzschrift is important, because it shows the distinctiveness of Hegel's conception of the relation between unity and differentiation. What needs to be said of Hegel's approach to skepticism, including his approach to it in Verhältnis des Skeptizismus zur Philosophie, will be said in connection with the treatment of the determinate negation in PhG. In Glauben und Wissen Hegel positions himself against Jacobi's anti-philosophy, claiming that philosophy passes through the nothing that Jacobi warns against, but it does not present a clear idea of actually what this consists of. In the Differenzschrift, Verhältnis des Skeptizismus zur Philosophie and Glauben und Wissen, one can indeed find a notion of the task of philosophy as Hegel sees it, but he still has do develop a method. The task of philosophy is to find unity, and the true unity can only be found with a methodical procedure that provides an immanent connection of unity and differentiation. What I will argue, is that the structure of the particularly Hegelian procedure of such an immanent connection is evident in the Jena system-drafts, but that it is only in PhG that the determinate negation is placed at the center of it.

4.1 Hegel between Fichte and Schelling: Beyond Indifference

Hegel's philosophical debut was entitled Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie (1801). The topic was, as the title makes clear, Fichte's and Schelling's philosophies. At the time, the public knew of no real difference between Fichte and Schelling. Schelling was known as a follower of Fichte, not as someone who had developed a philosophy of his own. Hegel set out to show exactly what the difference between the two was. In doing this, he defines what the proper aim of philosophy is, but does not fully develop a method of how to realize this aim. Implicitly, he gives a characterization of his own philosophical position: Reflection and intellectual intuition (reason) can be combined to develop a comprehensive philosophical system.
This builds on methodical insights from Fichte’s and Schelling’s idea of a system of philosophy.

The disagreement between Fichte and Schelling led Schelling to posit an absolute beyond subject and object, i.e. the point of indifference. The origin of this development was Fichte’s inability of providing a final unity to his system, which ended with infinite striving. Schelling responded with a philosophy of identity that provides a final unity between two complementary systems, transcendental philosophy and the philosophy of nature. Schelling had, however, not solved the problem of how to relate the absolute to reflective human cognition, which remained stuck in opposites. The absolute remained separate from thinking, resulting in a philosophy unable of conveying truth. As Hegel claims, the task of philosophy is to unify that which is separate (“die Entzweierung aufzuheben”219). His answer to the problem of the relation of knowledge to the absolute is to understand the absolute as something that can be produced for consciousness through reflection.220

Since reflection limits the absolute, one is faced with contradiction.221 Reflection proceeds by asking and identifying what something is. When reflection states that something is like this, it is implied that it is not like that (determinare est ponere praedicatum cum exclusione oppositi). Thus reflection presents limitations. It also presupposes a difference between subject and object. Through being an activity of limitation, reflection is fundamentally opposed to the nature of the absolute, which, traditionally, is beyond any form of relation.222 Hegel suggests, however, that the absolute is “die Identität der Identität und der Nichtidentität; Entgegensetzen und Einssein ist zugleich in ihm.”223 This is inconceivable according to the strict standards of traditional logic. Hegel now connects this to Kant’s doctrine of the antinomies as contradictions that necessarily arise when thinking seeks to know the unconditioned: “Wenn man bloß auf das Formelle der Spekulation reflektiert und die Synthese

219 TWA 2:96.
221 TWA 2:25: “Das Absolute soll fürs Bewußtsein konstruiert werden, [das] ist die Aufgabe der Philosophie; da aber das Produzieren sowie die Produkte der Reflexion nur Beschränkungen sind, so ist dies ein Widerspruch.”
222 Although Kant does not speak of the absolute, he comments on the meaning usually attached to it (in the form of the adjective “absolute”) in KpV, B 386f.
223 TWA 2:96.